We have come to our 9th and final week in our family tree series and over the past 8 weeks we have looked at the lives of a good number of the members of our spiritual family tree… people who are all our spiritual relatives… some from long, long ago like Abraham and Rachel and some from the early days of the church like Peter and Paul. And what we’ve seen throughout this series is that each of our spiritual relatives had a moment when they either faced new circumstances or they came to a sudden realization that led to great change in their lives… they had ‘transitional moments,’ moments when life made a radical turn towards serving and trusting God. And this week’s spiritual relative is no different; this week we will be looking at a transition that was no less radical than any of the other family members we’ve looked except for one thing: each week, as we’ve introduced the person we will be talking about, we’ve said something like, ‘There is so much in the Bible about this person that there is no way we can cover even a fraction of all that is said about them.’ But this week that isn’t the case! This week we will be looking at the transitional moment in the life of a New Testament character named Lydia and unlike Abraham or Paul, the Bible gives us almost nothing about her except that she had an important, overwhelming moment of change in her life… We find the short story of Lydia’s life change in Acts 16:11-15, and she is also mentioned in the last verse of chapter 16 in verse 40 as well. So, we get 6 verses where Lydia is a part of the story, but they are 6 verses that I believe are well worth looking into carefully because they tell us some very important things about one of the members of our spiritual heritage, important things that I believe can inspire us into a deeper walk with Jesus. So, let’s turn to Acts 16:11 Page 951 WELCOME

A bit of context… well actually, I want you to know that it will take more than a ‘bit’ of context to get to the root of things today because this is a very complicated passage. So, here we go… Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, at this point in his book is telling his readers about the various missionary journeys Paul the Apostle took to spread the good news about Jesus. Luke’s descriptions of Paul’s 3 missionary journeys start in Chapter 13 of Acts and run all the way to the end of the book, so that means more than half of Luke’s book about the beginning of the church is taken up by Paul’s 3 missionary journeys. And here in chapter 16 we are in the middle of missionary journey number 2. Paul has been traveling with a group of men but only two have been named: Silas and Timothy. But interestingly, in verse 11; Luke starts using the pronoun ‘we’ as he tells this story! So, from all that we can tell, Luke, the author of this book, was now traveling with Paul and the rest of his missionary team and so, this makes Luke, our author, an eyewitness to what happens next! Verse 11 says, ‘*We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis.****12****From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.* (Put up Map) Troas is on the coast of the Aegean Sea in Northwest Turkey; Samothrace is a rocky island in the Aegean Sea; Neapolis was a major seaport in what was then called Macedonia (Macedonia is now a part of modern-day Greece) and Philippi was about 10 miles to the west of Neapolis on the main east/west road that crossed Macedonia. Luke calls Philippi the first city, or the major city, of Macedonia, which meant it was the most important city of that region. And Luke tells us what made it the most important city of that region when he says it was a Roman colony (col-o-nee-a). This meant that besides being an urbane, bustling city it was also a place where Roman soldiers were encouraged to retire… that is, if they were lucky enough to survive until retirement… Roman soldiers could retire from the service with a house and a good pension if they lasted either 25 years or served in 16 separate out-of-country, military campaigns. Truth is, almost no one lived to retirement, but if they did, Rome had made sure that Philippi was a great place for crusty, old soldiers to spend their last years. Plus, everyone who lived in Philippi was granted Roman citizenship; if you were a resident of Philippi you were also a resident of Rome… and that was a huge plus in life then, let me tell you. So, as I’m sure you can guess, Philippi, a town full of retired Roman soldiers and Roman citizens was a very ‘Pro-Roman’ place… a town that didn’t take well to people that had allegiances to anything other than Rome and all things Roman.

***13****On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there.* Believe it or not, this verse tells us a lot about Philippi. It’s the Sabbath, a day that was important to Jews, but not to the gentile Philippians. And the reason this group was gathered on a riverbank outside of the city was that Jews always tried to find a quiet place near moving water for prayer if a town didn’t have a synagogue. The Jewish rule was that a town had to have 10 Jewish male residents over the age of 13 before they could form a synagogue. What this tells us that there were fewer than 10 Jewish men over 13 living in Philippi; and this verse also tells us that the few Jews that did live there who were interested in gathering for Sabbath morning prayers were all women. Then we read, ***14****One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God.* Ok, now we’ve met Lydia. A couple of things: Lydia was the name of the region in central Turkey where the city of Thyatira was located. Lydia, we’re almost 100% certain, was a Greek-speaking, gentile woman who was called Lydia, not because her real name was Lydia, but because she was a ‘Lady from Lydia.’ It would be like if my wife moved to Scotland and everyone called her, ‘Indiana.’ Now, in the Greek it simply says, ‘Lydia Par-phor-**Op**-olis,’ it doesn’t say ‘a merchant of expensive purple cloth’ as our house Bible says. But everyone in the ancient world knew that Par-phor-**Op**-olis was the title for ‘a merchant of expensive, purple cloth.’ The process for making purple cloth was incredibly complex, difficult, and expensive… just take my word for it. And Thyatira was a center for making the dye to create purple cloth. And purple cloth, because it was so expensive, was a color worn by only those with wealth and prestige. Lydia was a representative of purple cloth makers in this highly sophisticated, highly Roman city of Philippi, but somehow she had become a worshipper of the Jewish God. Philippi was a city where there was almost no Jewish presence, let alone Jewish influence, and the Philippians were known for being good Roman citizens who worshipped the gods of Rome and held the emperor to be a demigod. How Lydia came to set all that aside and believed it was important to get up on the Jewish Sabbath morning and join a few other Jewish women outside of town along the riverbank to pray, we don’t know. But there she is, a gentile among a few Jewish women and along came Paul and Silas and Timothy and they started telling these women about Jesus. And this next verse is really important! *As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptized.* Now, I know that what I am about to say may seem whacky, but I have to say it. When Mark tells us that, ‘The Lord opened up her heart and she accepted what Paul was saying,’ our natural response to this sort of statement is like this. “Oh, isn’t that wonderful that her heart was opened! I bet it was like a warm, emotional fountain was flowing in her soul. Lydia let go and she went with her heart!’ that may be our response but can I tell you that nothing could be further from the truth. You see, in the ancient Greek world, all that warm, fuzzy stuff was believed to emanate in our bowels; they believed that we feel things in our stomach, liver and our intestines. The heart was the location of rational thought, ideas and decision making. We attribute that to the mind, while the Greeks thought that our brains were just some grey, soupy stuff in our heads that helped things flow throughout our bodies. When it says here in the Bible that the Lord ‘opened up’ Lydia’s mind, it meant as she listened to Paul’s message about Jesus being crucified and resurrected for the sins of the world, the Holy Spirit helped her put together all that she’d come to believe from the Jewish scriptures, and she came to the logical decision that Paul was right! Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord and the Savior.’ And she believed so strongly that this is true that she was baptized! And then she had her entire household baptized along with her! One quick thing about this: women almost never had the authority to have their entire households… their relatives, their children, and their servants… change religions with them. Now it was an expectation that everyone in a household would follow the family leader’s religious leanings… but almost all family leaders were men! What this most likely means is that Lydia was a single, probably widowed, wealthy woman in the unusual position of having ultimate authority over her household. The second half of verse 15 then says, ‘*And she asked us to be her guests. “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my home.” And she urged us until we agreed.’* Lydia is doing two things here: first, she is giving these Jewish men the option of **not** staying in a gentile home unless they are convinced of her conversion. She wants them to, but she is sensitive to their Jewish traditions. There is a deference here that is noteworthy. And secondly, she is opening her apparently large home to these traveling missionaries… and ancient people didn’t let just anyone stay in their homes… they only extended hospitality to people that they felt they were deeply connected to… and if you put all of this together she was telling told the whole world that she was standing in full solidarity with Paul. This, too, is noteworthy.

I want to step back and put Lydia’s circumstances in perspective. First, she is a foreign resident of a highly Roman city. Second, she is there to sell expensive cloth to the few people rich enough in that well-to-do city to buy her cloth. Thirdly, she is a single woman in a highly patriarchal society. Plus, she is a follower of the God of a very small, unimportant sect within a very Roman city and she is a thinking, rational woman in a culture where women are born to make babies and be quiet. Can I just say she is about as brave a woman as we will find in all of scripture? Almost everything we can figure out about her before she meets Jesus, says, ‘Who is this amazing Lady?’ BUT then, when she figures out that what Paul is saying makes perfect sense and she gets baptized and converts her home to a Christian household and invites these strangers with this new, odd message about a resurrected-from-the-dead Jewish Messiah to stay in her home, you take all of THIS into consideration, there is no question that she is as brave as anyone in the whole Bible. First, her acceptance of Paul’s message about Jesus put her relationship with the very Roman, Philippian citizens at risk. In Philippi, everyone knew that the only person who deserved to be called Lord was Caesar, but Jesus was now Lydia’s Lord. And her association with Paul puts her business relationships at risk. What rich Philippian would want to do business with someone who could possibly believe what this odd man Paul was saying? Why, her choosing to be baptized and publicly stand with this message from Paul put just about everything else in her life at risk! We don’t know how her family and the rest of her household reacted to be told they had to be baptized. And we don’t know how her employers back in Thyatira reacted when they heard she’d become a follower of Jesus… but we do know that the Christian’s back in Thyatira had spotty reputations! And we don’t know how her friends and neighbors in Philippi reacted to this change in Lydia. We do know that within a couple of days the entire city fell into an uproar over ‘These Jews!’ meaning Paul and Silas. And when you read what happened next to Paul and Silas in the rest of this chapter, you’ll see why what we read in verse 40 is such a sign of Lydia’s bravery. There we read, *When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more.* Everything in her life was at risk, possibly even her very life, with all that was swirling in Philippi related to Paul and Silas… and yet her home became the location of the first church in Europe, such was her bravery.

Ok, what do we do with this? Almost every sermon I could find on Lydia spoke about her being a merchant and her using her wealth generously for the kingdom. That may be there, but I think that is a bit of a manipulation of the story, to be honest. I think it comes down to a couple of things. The first is related to Lydia’s conversion. Hers was a decision based on the truth of the message: Paul gave her the facts related to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and those facts made logical sense to Lydia. She accepted the message, not because it made her feel warm inside, but because it connected with all that she knew to be true about God… that he is loving, and he cares about us, and she had seen in His word all that he was willing to do to win us back to himself. And that morning beside the river, she realized that this message about Jesus was a message powerful enough to change her entire life. I know that as followers of Jesus our faith is one of great hope, but Lydia’s story tells me that our hope isn’t in something disconnected from the real world. Our hope is based on events that happened… in the real world. And they happened at a specific time, not ‘once upon a time.’ And they were events that were witnessed and recorded by people who saw them happen… real people just like you and me. And this is the faith that Lydia accepted, and can I tell you it is a faith that is **still** worth giving our lives to. That doesn’t mean we won’t have questions and confusions and difficulties and heartbreaks and such as followers of Jesus, but what it does mean is that our hope isn’t in something that is just wishful thinking. Our hope is based on the fact that Jesus lived and died and rose again to save us from ourselves and to give us abundant life now and into eternity. Lydia story says, ‘Use your heart… and it will all make sense!’

And secondly, I feel we have Lydia’s story to inspire us to bravery. I have never had my being a good citizen questioned because I am a Christian or my work and my family put at risk because I am a follower of Jesus. So, I can’t say with total confidence what I would do if any of this did happen. But my prayer is that I would be as brave as Lydia… I know that in our culture we work overtime not to offend others and I understand this, I honestly do. Still, the faith that we hold in Jesus wasn’t called ‘the Gospel’ the ‘good news’ for nothing. I suppose the challenge today is to live this faith in such a manner that it is still received as ‘Good News’ without being colored by all of the ‘bad news’ that so many in our world now connect with Christians. I want my life to be such that if my family members or my neighbors or my acquaintances are ever asked ‘if they agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,’ like Lydia asked Paul, their answer will quickly be, ‘Yes, I agree you are!’ And they’ll answer this way because I’ve been tender, compassionate, agreeable, and loving; that I’ve been willing to work with others with one mind and purpose; that I’ve been selfless, humble, and always thinking of others as better than myself. These are all attitudes that Christ Jesus had. This list I just quoted was directly from the letter that Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi, the letter we call Philippians… and it was Paul’s list of what it looks like to be a good citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven… and we know from all that we have in the Bible that it took great bravery to live this way in Philippi a city where everyone prided themselves on being citizens of the kingdom of Rome. But we can be certain that there was one member of the Philippian church, one proud citizen of the kingdom of heaven, that lived exactly this kind of life… and that was Lydia, someone we can all be proud to claim as one of our spiritual ancestors. And I ask you to join me in a quest for bravery like Lydia’s; you see it’s her kind of bravery that can set aside the fears that often come as we stand for Jesus in our dark world; and it’s her kind of bravery that makes it possible for us to stand firmly in the truth and power of the gospel… this is the kind of bravery I want… because this ‘Lydia bravery’ is the kind of courage that can, when coupled with the power of the Holy Spirit, change the world! So, let’s pray together and ask for this kind of bravery!