

**Acts 16:11-15**

*The Birth of a Church (and the Death of Me)*

**Main idea:** The church of Philippi began with just a few believers going to a new place, where they prayed, and taught, and baptized one woman who then opened up her home to begin a church. What could happen if you — just one person — are faithful to obey God this next year?

*[Nick sings "Eleanor Rigby" by the Beatles]*

Ah look at all the lonely people  
Ah look at all the lonely people

Eleanor Rigby, picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been  
Lives in a dream  
Waits at the window, wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door  
Who is it for

All the lonely people  
Where do they all come from?  
All the lonely people  
Where do they all belong?

Father McKenzie, writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear  
No one comes near  
Look at him working, darning his socks in the night when there's nobody there  
What does he care

All the lonely people  
Where do they all come from?  
All the lonely people  
Where do they all belong?

Ah look at all the lonely people  
Ah look at all the lonely people

Eleanor Rigby, died in the church and was buried along with her name  
Nobody came  
Father McKenzie, wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave  
No one was saved

All the lonely people  
Where do they all come from?  
All the lonely people  
Where do they all belong?

That was a Beatles song called "Eleanor Rigby," and it's about two lonely people who really represent a whole lot of lonely people. The sad truth is that there a lot of people who just don't feel like they fit in with anyone anywhere, and so they live out their days with no friends, and no one even notices whether they live or die. And so the Beatles sang, "All the lonely people, where do they all belong?"

Well, I hope that we would be humble and bold enough to invite them and say that they belong here, with us.<sup>1</sup> So many lonely people don't think they belong anywhere, not even at church, because they feel like they've just messed up too much to be accepted anywhere by anyone. So by God's grace working through us, we need to be the first people to admit that we've all messed up, and no matter how many times we try, we can't get it right.

In the second verse of Chris Rice's song, Clumsy, he sings:

I'm gonna get it right this time  
I'll be strong and I'll make You proud  
I've prayed that prayer a thousand times  
But the rooster crows and my tears roll down again

I often feel like that's the story of my life. It's like I sing, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back." And then I turn back. And I'm ashamed. So then I recommit myself to God again, and again sing, "I have decided to follow Jesus," and the process begins all over.

Sometimes at the low point of all this, I feel like one of the lonely people, and I wonder, "what's the point?" What's the point of trying if I always mess up? What does it matter if I do some small good thing, when I follow it up by doing so many big bad things? And what does it matter to try to be good at all, when I'm aware of my utter sinfulness, and I'm in need of salvation by grace alone? And once I realize that, I once again I sing, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back."

Well, I've come to understand that this is actually a very biblical process. Even the greatest heroes of the Bible like Moses and David constantly messed up and repented.<sup>2</sup> The most sinful thing would be to turn back, and then stop singing "I have decided to follow Jesus." So no matter how times you have to do it, keep repenting, and keep running back to God's grace.

In just a couple days, a new year begins. And I know, resolutions are going out of style, and very few people hardly even think about making resolutions anymore. And yet it's always a good thing, no matter what day of the year it is, to examine your life, and resolve to be more faithful to God.

D.L. Moody is attributed as saying:

"The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him." - D.L. Moody

Moody resolved to be that man. He ministered to the poor and supported various charities. He shared the gospel with thousands. He sought to live and be fully consecrated to God.

You know, the only reason anyone has ever even considered making any kind of resolution is because we know things aren't quite right. We know that we're not quite right, so we resolve that we're going to get it right this time. We say to God, "I'll be strong, and I'll make You proud."

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 26:15-18

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 51

Well, I really can't remember how many times I've resolved to be more faithful to God. If I'm honest, none of them have really stuck. I've broken all my promises. I've doubted. I've lost faith. I've sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and I've done it over and over again.

And yet, it always seems like it's when I come to the end of myself that God begins something new in me. It's when I realize that I've been wandering in darkness that I finally see the light of Jesus. It's when I come to know that I'm dead that God gives me new birth.<sup>3</sup> It's like God doesn't even want to begin to use me until I see that I'm useless, and then, by His power, He raises me from the dead.

And it's the same story for the church. The Old Testament was never meant to be a roadmap to heaven, even though the Jews often took it that way, and even many Christians treat it that way today. No, the Old Testament doesn't teach us how we might make God happy with us, but teaches us that we can't possibly fully consecrate ourselves to God. We sin, and fall short.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the law reveals that we're dead in our trespasses and sins.<sup>5</sup> But out of the ashes, out of the dirt, God gave birth to something new.

Acts 16:11-15.

So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:11-15)

*Father, help us to be faithful to You. Help us to follow You in going where you would have us to go, and to share Jesus with all the lonely people. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

So this was the beginning of the church of Philippi. This morning, we're looking at the circumstances through which the Philippian church began, and in the weeks to come, we're going to be studying the letter that Paul wrote to the Philippians.

We see in our passage this morning that it all started with just a few believers, Paul and his missionary team, going to a new place. Verse 11.

So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. (Acts 16:11-12)

So Philippi is located in Macedonia, which is modern day Greece and Turkey. This was a place where the gospel had not yet been preached. We might say that Philippi was spiritually dead, or at least that all the

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:4-5

<sup>4</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 2:1

people there were spiritually dead. They had not yet heard about Jesus, or salvation through faith in Him alone, so everyone there was on the course to experience God's wrath in hell.<sup>6</sup>

So, naturally, Paul wanted to do something about that.<sup>7</sup> I mean, shouldn't we all? If there are any lost people in the world, whether you know them personally or not, and whether or not they even live in countries that we consider to be enemies with our own, shouldn't we at least want to send missionaries to share the gospel with them so that they would at least hear about Jesus and have the opportunity to be saved?

But back up to verse 8 a second, because I think this text encourages us to do more than just send missionaries. Verse 8.

So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:8-10)

I want you to notice the shift that takes place in these verses in terms of how the story is being told. At the beginning of verse 8, it says "they" went down to Troas, referring to Paul and his team. But by the end of verse 10, it says that "we" sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called "us" to preach the gospel.

You might remember that we studied the book of Luke for 3 ½ years. The book of Luke was written by Luke as a kind of historical narrative of the life of Jesus. Luke had researched all the facts. He talked to eyewitnesses, and he wrote it all down so that we would know and be sure of the truthfulness of the gospel story.

You might also know that the book of Acts is the second book that Luke wrote.<sup>8</sup> And for the first 15 chapters of Acts, Luke did the same thing that he did when writing the Gospel of Luke. He researched all the facts, and wrote about all the things that took place as the early church was being born. But then there's a shift in chapter 16. Luke himself steps into the story. He's no longer writing in the third person, talking about events that he heard about and researched, but from the first person, because he was there, ministering alongside of Paul, preaching the gospel.

And when it comes to life in the church today, you have a choice. You can watch all the ministry take place, or you can get involved. Sure, getting involved can be risky, and messy, and hard, and it can lead to losing yourself as you follow Christ, but it's the only way that God has prescribed for you to grow in faith and serve Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

As Luke stepped into the story, he got to be a part of God starting a new church in a new place. And it wasn't just Paul's or Luke's idea to go to Philippi, it was God directing them. It sometimes seems like many people have this view of God that He's indifferent to how many people are saved from their sins. Like Jesus gave us the Great Commission, and now it's completely up to us whether we preach the gospel to the lost or not, and God doesn't really care one way or the other. But Paul received this vision about the Macedonians and concluded, I think rightly, that God called them to preach Jesus to a people who would otherwise perish without the good news.

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<sup>6</sup> John 3:36

<sup>7</sup> Romans 9:3

<sup>8</sup> Luke 1:1-3, Acts 1:1

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 4:15-16

God said through the prophet Ezekiel:

I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)

So God sent Paul and his missionary team to Philippi to urge them to turn from their sin and trust in God. And it began with prayer.

Verse 13.

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. (Acts 16:13)

So the church of Philippi started with a few believers going to a new place. And when they got there, they began to pray and teach the word of God. They went to where people were. They could have started a church themselves, and just told people to come, but instead, they went to where people were, and engaged them with the gospel message.

Ah, look at all the lonely people.

So wherever you go where there are people, realize that so many of them are lost and lonely, and share Jesus. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have.<sup>10</sup> Don't just rely on your pastor, or your Sunday School teacher, because you are also called to be a witness. Be ready in season and out of season, at all times, to share the word of God.<sup>11</sup>

As Paul taught the word of God, there was one woman in particular who really paid attention. Verse 14.

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:14-15)

The church of Philippi began when they baptized just one woman who believed the gospel, as well as her whole family when they also came to believe.

Luke wrote that even before she met Paul, Lydia was a worshiper of God, but she didn't yet know Jesus. It was great that she worshipped the true God, but in order to be saved from hell and saved unto heaven, she needed to hear the good news that Jesus came to save her from her sin so that she could go to be with Him forever. And once she heard it, she believed it, and followed Jesus in baptism.

And if you believe, be baptized. That's the first step of obedience that you can take as you rejoice in what God's done for you.<sup>12</sup> If Lydia had never gotten baptized, she likely wouldn't have been faithful to invite new believers into her home, either. She likely wouldn't have been so generous to Paul and his missionary team.

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

<sup>11</sup> 2 Timothy 2:4

<sup>12</sup> Acts 2:38

And therefore the book of Philippians, the letter that we're going to start studying together next week, may never have even been written.

Listen, every act of faithfulness that you do matters. Even if it seems like such a small thing, it matters.<sup>13</sup> It doesn't earn anything for you, but it sure does matter in terms of the growth of kingdom of God, and the gospel going out, and lost people being saved. God works through every good deed so that He's glorified and sinners are sanctified.<sup>14</sup> So resolve this year to do good. Resolve to love your neighbor. Resolve to go on a mission trip, or give more of your time to God, or even just get baptized as you follow Jesus and begin a new year.

Lydia could have been content to just hear the gospel and be baptized herself, but instead, she shared the gospel with her family, and they believed and were baptized, and then she urged Paul and his team to come and stay at her house. Then, as more people heard the gospel and trusted in Jesus, the church began to meet in her house.

Now, we're not explicitly told the details about how this happened, but it's not hard to connect the dots. Lydia hosted Paul's and his team in her home. There, she fed them, encouraged them, and allowed them to use her home for things like worship, Bible study, and discipleship training. And then, even when Paul and his team eventually left, she continued to invite believers to her home, gathering every week, and they became a church: the church of Philippi.

They didn't have a nice building, just a home. They didn't have a lot of resources, just what they themselves were faithful to give week by week. And churches today really don't need anything fancy or professional, because churches are nothing more and nothing less than believers who gather together to worship and serve the Lord Jesus.

Well, as we're going to see as we study the letter to the Philippians, the church of Philippi suffered in many ways. They were persecuted, and yet they endured. In fact, they didn't just "hang in there," they were generous! They sent a gift to Paul while he was in prison, and that's the reason Paul wrote the book of Philippians, which was a letter to them, thanking them for their gift.

As a church, we're not just to hang in there, but to be the church. We're to be a light in the darkness, we're to engage in missions, love the lost, invite the lonely, and be generous with everything God has given us.

So as we begin this sermon series through the book of Philippians, we're going to be looking at the encouragement that Paul gave to the church of Philippi to simply be the church, and how everyone single one of us is called to be a minister in our church. Lydia was one woman who opened up her home to believers, and a church was born. What will happen when you open up your life to be used by God?

Will you, like Luke, and Paul, and Lydia, step into the story to be used by God? Here's the thing. Like Luke, you can study and know all kinds of things — true things, good things — when it comes to Jesus and Christianity and church. But until you engage with the mission of God, you haven't yet stepped into the story. That could mean stepping into a role of service here at church. It could mean accepting the call to be a pastor, or a missionary. Or, it could mean becoming a Christian, and being baptized as Lydia did.

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<sup>13</sup> Philippians 2:13

<sup>14</sup> Romans 8:28

Or, it could just mean being who God has called you to be in your current context. Maybe you've been living for you. But Jesus calls you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.<sup>15</sup>

It's interesting that whenever we find the word "church" in the Bible, it's never referring to a building, but to the people who assemble together to worship. God isn't interested in buildings. He's interested in you. In fact, by grace, through faith in Jesus, you are the temple of the Spirit of God.<sup>16</sup>

So resolve, like D.L. Moody, to be fully consecrated to God.

But is that even possible? Because even as I believe in Jesus, it's still inevitable that right after I sing, "no turning back, no turning back," I still turn back. And I'm sure that even D.L. Moody sinned until the day that he died, because the Bible is clear that anyone who says that he doesn't sin is a liar.<sup>17</sup> So he ultimately failed in his goal.

But where we fail, Jesus never failed.

You see, we have seen what God could do with a man fully consecrated to him. Jesus was fully devoted to God, accomplishing all of God's will, and what did He do? He allowed Himself to be crucified on a cross.

If you really want to be useful to God, Jesus calls you to carry your cross and follow Him. If you really want to be useful in the church, it requires you to set aside your own preferences in order to love others. If you really want to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, it requires you to crucify your flesh along with its passions and desires, so that you may live by the Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

Maybe the Spirit is calling you this morning to take a step of faith. Maybe you need to commit to inviting lonely people here, letting them know that they belong. Or maybe you need to commit to going to where lost people are, so that you can share Jesus with them. Or maybe this morning you need to take the very first step: to be baptized as you trust in Jesus. I invite you this morning to follow the Spirit and take that step of faith.

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I asked the youth to make this church building for this sermon series, and it looks pretty good, Amen? They did a good job! But here's the thing: the church is not a building. It's a people. We are the church. So here's what we're going to do. As you leave this morning, Ed is going to take your picture, and we'll print these pictures out, and next week, you're going to nail that picture to this church building. That'll be your way of saying, "I am a part of this church, and I want to be the church. I want to share the light of Christ in this dark world."

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 16:24

<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16

<sup>17</sup> 1 John 1:8

<sup>18</sup> Galatians 5:24-25