

“THE WOMEN OF BEREIA.”

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Scripture Texts: Acts 17:10-15

Introduction.

As we read through the book of Acts we must remind ourselves of what is going on, why this is recorded for us some 2000 years later.

This is not just a travel log. My sister and her family just got home this week from a 9,000-mile road trip to Orlando and back via San Diego. Every day she posted a few pictures on Facebook and Instagram. It was nice to travel with them and see their progress.

That is not the purpose of Acts. We are not reading Luke’s diary or journal entries. We are not reading about the endeavors of some men in the first century to spread the Gospel. This is God’s writing, inspired by the Holy Spirit for the intentional edification of us all. This is the unfolding of God’s redemptive plan. This is the revealing of the fulfillment of what God had promised from the foundation of the earth.

This is God’s mission to defeat and bring down the kingdom of Satan and to reclaim His creation from the grip of sin and death. This is the power of the Holy Spirit spreading out in ripples or waves from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth. And it is still moving, nothing has hindered or stopped it.

These stories are God’s gifts to us all and I want us to hear what God is saying to us through them.

We don’t celebrate the men and women of Acts; we celebrate the all-powerful sovereign God who is at work in our fallen world redeeming all things for His glory and He delights to call men and women out of the world into His purposes.

We are all living in God’s story. God gives us each a part to play, a role to fulfill.

We all need God’s grace and perhaps we could say no one knows this more clearly than mothers. So let’s take a good look at God’s grace and how He pours it out into our hearts and homes.

When I saw the mention of not a few women of high standing believing in the Gospel preached by Paul and Silas I decided to take this text as an opportunity to encourage and challenge mothers and all women, and actually all believers male and female, young and old. So while I may focus on one slice of our flock, please know everything I say applies to us all.

I want to begin by backing up for a moment to consider again the woman Lydia in Acts 16.

Acts 16:13-14, Prayer and the Grace of God.

Acts 16:13-14 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. 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.

Women had gathered by the river for prayer on the Sabbath. From this we gather there was no synagogue in Philippi, so these women improvised and found a place outside of town that was quiet, a place for worship and prayer.

Who knows how long or how often they prayed? Who knows what kind of prayers they prayed or what kind of answers they experienced? But they prayed. They knew their need, that apart from God and His grace they were powerless and hopeless.

And what happens in the midst of their praying? God answers, God does more than they could have possibly asked or imagined. God sends some missionaries from a faraway country on a journey across Asia, walking hundreds of miles. And then God diverts them from Asia to take a boat to Macedonia in Europe. God leads them to Philippi even though there is no synagogue there and on a particular Sabbath day to their little spot on the river.

Notice what God has done, He has bared His arm, He has revealed Himself to them in His sovereign grace.

God is still sovereign, God still hears our prayers, and hearing our prayers God still acts, working, moving, bring about events, causing things to happen.

Isaiah 64:4 From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts [works] for those who wait for him.

God is acting when we see no action. God works when we can't see anything happening. When we work, we work; when we pray, God works.

What happens to these women in prayer? More than they ask or imagine. That is the kind of God we pray to, a God who doesn't just answer, who doesn't just begrudgingly supply what we need. No, He delights to do more than we ask or imagine.

What saint here cannot testify to God doing far more abundantly than they asked or imagine, God going above and beyond.

Would you like 10 steps to a better marriage or better parenting or better success in life? OK, maybe ten is a lot, so how about four solid steps. Four we can write down.

You can go to lots of websites, visit lots of blogs, listen to lots of those self-help sermons to get all the steps you want and more.

I am going to boil it down to two steps, but you may not like them because they aren't like those other lists of life hacks, tips, and tricks.

The first step is a desperate sense of your own inability to fix everything, to make everything better, you can't do better, be better and try harder. You need a clear and desperate sense of your own spiritual poverty and weakness. The women of Philippi and Thessalonica had that.

The second step is a desperate sense of our dependence on God and His grace, a clear sense that we live not by sight but by faith, that apart from God we can do nothing. With this clear sense of utter dependence on God we cast our cares on Him, we ask and seek and knock, by prayer and supplication we make our requests known to God.

You don't need another self-help book or sermon, you need the Gospel of God's grace to be a practical, lived out reality in your life every day, every morning when you wake up and every night when you fall into bed weary and exhausted.

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

We are all broken sinners, and the only solution is humbly recognizing what is wrong with us and then applying the spiritual solution given to us by God, which is the Gospel, the blood of Jesus, the forgiveness of our sins and those of others.

II Corinthians 9:8-10 God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 9 As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

They sowed in prayer and reaped a harvest of righteousness, a harvest of a new church, the kingdom of God being built, the Gospel spreading, salvation coming to our country, to us.

Do you see what God did here by prayer? "God opened Lydia's heart to believe." Pray this Scripture over your children and grandchildren, over anyone you know who doesn't believe.

Ezekiel 11:19 I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:27 I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Your children are vulnerable to your prayers. Your spouse is vulnerable to your prayers, your boss, your co-workers, your friends, family neighbors, your pastor. We have not because we ask not.

You will pray this way when you believe that saving faith is God's work done by the power of His Holy Spirit. Faith is a miracle; it is the grace and mercy of God. The sovereignty of God makes our prayers powerful when we ask according to His will and for His glory.

God uses means, and prayer is one of His favorite means.

Turn your fears into prayers.

Turn your weariness into prayers.

Turn your frustrations into prayers.

Turn your disappointments into prayers. Turn the desires of your mother's heart into prayer, confident the same sovereign God at work in Acts is still at work now.

Acts 17:11-12, Scripture and the Grace of God.

Acts 17:11-12 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. 12 Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

Luke points out these women were of high standing, of prominent social status, women who might think they were too good for the Gospel or above needing it or just fine the way they are.

Who today sets aside the desires of the flesh for the things of the spirit?

Who gives up creature comforts for eternal comforts?

Who dies to self and lives for Christ and others?

Who considers the reproach of Christ better than the glory of the world?

Who considers gaining eternity for one's soul better than gaining the whole world?

So this is no small thing. This is another supernatural act of the Holy Spirit. This is another miracle. They don't do this on their own.

By the Holy Spirit these women take God's Word seriously, and in the midst of the challenges of life and the pressures of what others might think, they embrace the Gospel, they honor Jesus, they love the truth of the Word preached and proclaimed to them.

Notice the tools or means God uses to give His grace to us.

Notice the means God used to bring Lydia to faith. He used a willing servant, Paul. He used the imperfect prayers of some women and their gathering for worship. He used the Word of God spoken and believed.

Notice what happens in Berea. These apostles show up out of the blue, unannounced, unexpected. They go to the synagogue, again on a Sabbath and they start preaching the Word of God. He used the Word of God spoken and believed. God met them in His Word.

The Berean's listened to the Word preached, they went back to the Word and read it and checked Paul's references. They received the Word of God with eagerness and notice the fruit it bore in their lives. The fruit of faith, the fruit of salvation, the fruit of redemption, the fruit of regeneration. It was life-giving and joy-producing. It turned their world upside down.

The Bible is supernatural. The Bible is the Word of God. The Bible is the living truth. The Bible is sharper than any two-edged sword. So why doesn't it seem that way when we read it?

Because in order to read a supernatural book you have to have supernatural help.

In Psalm 119 David asks God over a dozen time to teach him and give him understanding.

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

You will get nothing out of the Bible if you don't first ask God to bind Satan, remove the blinders, and give you wisdom and instruction from His Holy Spirit who inspired the Word. Beg Jesus to open your eyes.

Are you struggling in reading through the OT? Don't come to your reading without first praying, "God, help me. I am weak and foolish; I am blind and ignorant. These are eternal truths, help my finite mind to grasp what your Spirit would say to me as I take up and read your Holy Word."

Read your Bible supernaturally, that is, by asking for supernatural help. And teach this principle to your kids by praying this kind of pray at your family devotions.

God has the keys to unlocking the Scriptures and He keeps them until we ask for them. God wrote this book, and it is full of His glory, but our eyes cannot see it without God giving us the eyes to see His glory. The same principle applies to hearing sermons, ask for supernatural help.

Conclusion and application.

Do you find yourself having a short fuse, losing it a lot, getting impatience, frustrated, exasperated? Do you see your kids misbehaving and then misbehave in response?

Start with Jesus, with Scripture and prayer, seek forgiveness for yourself, your own sin, it will then be easier to give to others. God's Word will make your heart softer.

With smartphones you can read Scripture anytime, anyplace, while waiting, in between other things, you can read while waiting to pick up your child, waiting for practice to get over, I read on the treadmill. Read it before you read anything else.

Ask God for the desire to want to read the Bible. It is the power of God in your life. It is as important as drinking water. When you don't drink you get dehydrated and that is bad.

Do you see how God gives great grace to those who pray and search the Scriptures, who seek Him in His Word and take Him at His Word?

On this Mother's Day receive this plea to do three things for the sake of our souls and your spiritual growth in faith and patience endurance for the challenges of life and family.

Be women of prayer so that the power of the Holy Spirit will be at work in you, so that the power of faith and holiness will come down from heaven upon you, so that your spiritual influence would increase at home, at church and in the world as it did with Lydia and her household.

Be women of the Book so that the supernatural wisdom of God will guard and keep your heart and mind, so that you will be renewed with hope and faith, so that you will continue to grow in understanding to face the ever-increasing challenges of these evil days, as for the noble women of Thessalonica.

Through prayer and Scripture be women who have a solid grip on the sovereign grace of God, that He loves you and is working for you, that He is present in all the circumstances of life, and He is with you leading you, going before you as He did in the days of Acts.

Being a mom is one of the most important jobs in the world. It is valuable beyond human measurement. It is a God-created, God-ordained work. It is truly a high calling.

It can only be done through a desperate sense of your own inability and a desperate dependence on God's grace and through the means He uses to bring that grace to you, prayer and Scripture and worship.

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Prayer: Father, do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Change our hearts. There are some listening who desperately need you, need your Spirit to stir, need your Spirit to wake up, need your Spirit to remove hindrances, barriers to Gospel, lies of Satan. Others are feeling dry, complacent, like you are distant, come and revive and renew with a fresh wind of your Spirit. Give a new hunger and thirst, a new longing and desire.

Bless us with a deep and lasting hunger and thirst for righteousness, fan the flame of our zeal for the truth of your Word. Grant in our brokenness and imperfection that we would desire the fullness of Christ. Help our unbelief, forgive our wandering affections. Deliver us from our small desires and our foolish pursuits. I pray for your Fatherly blessing to be upon this flock. Make us faithful and fruitful for your glory. And above all, dear Father, grant that our lives will increasingly bring glory to your dear Son, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, in whose precious name we pray. Amen.