

**July 1, 2018**  
**Lydia: Citizenship in the Kingdom**  
**Acts 16:11-15**

This summer we're looking at some of BIG little people in Scripture – passing over the Moseses, Davids, Pauls, or Peters – to consider lesser known people like Lydia (today). These folks may be a bit less well known but are no less important – some are wonderful models of faith; some are powerful warnings about how we ought not to live.

Today is also Canada Day. Canada turns 151 today! I want to think a bit about citizenship: what does it mean to be “in the world” as a citizen of Canada, but also “not of the world” as a citizen of the Kingdom of God? How do we live the tension between our loyalty to country and or preeminent loyalty to God, our Creator, Saviour and King?

***Welcome to Philippi***

Philippi is a city where citizenship mattered. It is an important mining town in Macedonia, home base of the late great Alexander the Great. It is a rough, tough, proudly Greek city. To keep the locals in line, the Romans made it a colony for retired legionaries – soldiers who had earned their Roman citizenship through hard-fought military experience. Roman legions regularly pass through both to prevent the local Greeks getting too patriotic, and to fortify the frontier.

The Greeks in Philippi are very proud of being Greek – they know their Alexander-the-Great-heritage: think about how they feel being occupied by Romans. The Romans in Philippi are very aware of being Roman citizens – most have won citizenship through tough years in the army. They are very conscious of being Roman citizens in a foreign land: think about what THAT means.

***Introducing Lydia***

Lydia is

1. **a foreigner, an outsider**, neither Greek nor Roman, from [Thyatira](#), what is now Akhisar, western Turkey. She has a house in Philippi (v.15), so she apparently made the trip often. Caught in the Greek-Roman tension, she doesn't belong. How would you feel if this were you?
2. **a woman in what was very much a man's world** – a woman could not be a full Roman citizen and had few legal rights. She isn't a citizen of anywhere; she can never be a citizen because of her gender. What would that be like?
3. **a business woman** in a man's world (“*a dealer in purple cloth*” – purple was the most expensive dye; purple cloth, the most expensive cloth). Imagine being Lydia: on the one hand successful, on the other held back as a woman?
4. **a convert to Judaism**: “*worshiper of God*” means she believes in God but is

not Jewish; she belongs to neither the Greek/Roman world or in the Jewish world nor here in Philippi or home in Thyatira. How would you feel?

Philippi has so few Jews there is no synagogue, so the Jews and worshipers of God, like Lydia, meet out of town along the river. Paul, Silas, and Luke visit. Paul is talking about Jesus. *"The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message"* (16:14).

That's great! Lydia is now a believer in Jesus. She is baptized.

### ***Everything changes***

For us, 21 centuries later, we read this in a "ho-hum" sort of way. This kind of thing happens all the time, right? Does it, really? This is actually a BIG deal – it was then, and it still is now. Why? Because everything changes. She is a new creation in Jesus.

1. **Lydia is now a citizen of somewhere** – for the first time! Paul writes a letter to the church in Philippi (including Lydia), saying this: *"Our citizenship – including Lydia – is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 3:20). She is living in Philippi/Thyatira, but she is now a full citizen of the Kingdom of God. How would it make you feel to actually "belong"? What does that mean?
2. **Lydia is no longer a foreigner** – she is part of a family, a community, a people, a nationality. She has brothers/sisters wherever, whenever she is/they are, even though she is discriminated against in society. What does that mean?
3. **Lydia belongs** to what Peter describes as *"a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God"* (1 Peter 2:9-10).
4. **Lydia is an equal citizen in the kingdom of God:** there isn't special privilege for men and an inferior place for women; neither is there a special place for wealthy people and a lesser place for not-so-wealthy people. We are all equal citizens in the kingdom of God even though you are living in a culture which treats you as second/third class: how does that make you feel?

### ***Being a citizen of the Kingdom of God in a foreign land.***

Lydia lives in Philippi/ Thyatira, but her citizenship – in her case her ONLY citizenship – is in the kingdom of God. Think about being a citizen of the Kingdom in a foreign land:

1. **We speak the language of our homeland** (the Kingdom of God) and we are part of its culture, despite the fact the world around us speaks a different language and has a different culture.
2. **We live the culture of our homeland.** The Romans in Philippi were not Greek. They kept their culture, traditions, and religion. Lydia was not trying to

“fit in” and be Greek or Roman; she “worshipped God”/loved Jesus. To try to go “Greek” would have been silly and dishonest. We are called to live as citizens of Kingdom of God with honesty and integrity. It’s who we are. We are a colony of heaven. We are strangers in a strange land. We are ambassadors of God. We live by His standards. His ethics, His principles.

3. **One day, some day, we look forward to return to our homeland.** Most of the Romans living in a backwater town like Philippi would much rather be in Rome. Lydia would much rather be with other people who love Jesus. How about us? Do we long for that future with Jesus, too. Or are we pretty happy with life in this culture and find our faith in Jesus chafes?

### ***Dual Citizenship***

We are citizens of the Kingdom of God. Like Lydia, we are citizens of the Kingdom of God right now, the moment we believe. It is not something in the future, that we have to wait for. Yes, we wait for its fulfillment when we are with Jesus. But we are citizens now. We possess it now. We have this dual identity now.

Most of us are Canadian citizens. How do we navigate this dual citizenship? What do we do when we feel the values of one citizenship conflict with the other?

As Canadian citizens, we have rights that include: democratic rights (e.g. the right to vote), language rights, equality rights, legal rights, mobility rights, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association. We also have responsibilities that include: obeying the law, taking responsibility for oneself and family, paying our taxes, voting in elections, helping others in the community, and protecting and enjoying our heritage and environment.<sup>1</sup> We can be thankful for, celebrate, and take full advantage of these blessings.

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we have rights that include: the right to become children of God (John 1:12), friends of Jesus (John 15:9), saved by grace (Ephesians 2:9), blessed with His Spirit (John 14-16), forgiveness of sin (1 John 1:9), looking forward to going home and being with Jesus (John 14:1-3).

We also have responsibilities. Jesus says, *"If you love me you will do what I command"* (John 14:15) and the most important command are these: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"* and *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Mark 12:30-31).

Paul loves to lay this out clearly as in Galatians 5. He begins by listing the fruit of

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://settlement.org/ontario/immigration-citizenship/citizenship/rights-and-responsibilities-of-citizenship/what-are-my-rights-and-responsibilities-as-a-canadian-citizen/> and <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/discover-canada/read-online/rights-responsibilities-citizenship.html>

people who are not living as responsible citizens of the Kingdom, and who are NOT being formed by the Holy Spirit: among other things their lives are characterized by hatred, discord, sexual immorality, jealousy, fits of rage, dissension, factions, envy, and conceit. Citizens of the Kingdom, walking in step with the Spirit, live Kingdom values, like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Our responsibility is to become more and more mature on these values.

We live differently than most Canadians because we have this identity as both Canadians **AND** citizens of the Kingdom of God. We will fulfill our Canadian citizenship responsibilities, **AND** seek to become more and more like Jesus, living His values.

We know that the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship, when we follow them, create a good, just, safe society. How much more so, when we live with our Kingdom rights and responsibilities?

Of course, Canada isn't perfect. Like all of human society, we are a nation marred by sin, struggling to find hope in the darkness of life (mostly) without God. Our responsibility is to be salt and light, bringing God's good news in Word and in deed, to our country. Our responsibility is to be the body of Christ in our hurting land. We want everyone to know Jesus!

Once in a blue moon, our Christian values bring us into conflict with the culture/authority of our country. That is when, like Lydia, we have to claim our primary citizenship as citizens of the Kingdom of God, and like Peter and the apostles, "*We must obey God rather than any human authority*" (Acts 5:29). Those times are few and far between – in that case, when the authorities forbade them to speak of Jesus. Perhaps also when we see blatant injustice and systemic evil (like Martin Luther King). Like Lydia, ultimately our citizenship with God matters; our national citizenship is passing.

We live here, fully present, as citizens of Canada. We live here, fully engaged, as citizens of God's Kingdom, praying and living, "*Your Kingdom and Your Will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.*"

But we know that this latter citizenship – being God's people – is the one that really matters because we look forward to being with Jesus. Live today as a fully engaged Canadian citizen of the Kingdom of God. Be God's good news to this great country of Canada. Bring the best thing of all – knowing and following Jesus – together with being the best citizen of one of the best countries in the world, Canada.