

33—Acts 14.8-18—Turn from the Worthless to the Worthy

- I. Introduction
 - a. What do you think of when St. Patrick’s Day rolls around?
 - b. “The March 17 feast day (first declared in the early seventeenth century) remembers Patrick as the one who led the fifth-century Christian mission to Ireland. Unlike Britain, the Emerald Isle lay beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire. The Irish were considered uncivilized barbarians, and many thought their illiteracy and volatile emotions put them outside the reach of the gospel.” (David Mathis, “The Mission of St. Patrick)
 - c. “But Patrick knew better. In a strange and beautiful providence, he had spent six years among them as a captive, learned their language, and developed a heart for them. Like Joseph sold into slavery to one day save Egypt and his brothers, God sent Patrick into slavery to ready Ireland for a coming salvation.” (DM)
 - d. This is what Lystra was like. And these messengers of the God bring the good news to them! I wonder what will happen.
- II. Main Point
 - a. God sends Paul and Barnabus to illiterate pagans who worship worthless things to tell them the good news
- III. Outline
 - a. God reveals his power through a powerless man
 - b. The Crowds Respond with worthless worship
 - c. Paul and Barnabus miss their chance to be celebrities
- IV. Exposition
 - a. Paul and Barnabus arrive in Lystra where there is no Jewish synagogue. That’s been their starting point to proclaiming the gospel. They begin speaking but no one seems to hear them, except one certain man. There God makes himself known through a miracle. The powerless to walk hears the message of the powerful God.
 - i. Remember, the messengers of the gospel were previously ran off. After hearing of the plot to stone them, Paul and Barnabus flee Iconium to Lystra.
 1. Persecution has been a means to move God’s people in the Acts of the Risen Christ to take the gospel to other places.
 2. Disciples of Jesus take up their cross and follow. I suppose it doesn’t look like they are following but if Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth then he is governing the affairs of this world to move his disciples exactly where they need to be—even when attempts to stone them are made.
 - ii. Lystra is a rural, backwoods sort a place. These kinds of people need the gospel too.
 1. We prayed for an unreached people group like this Wednesday night. They too were illiterate but they need the gospel too.
 2. Sometimes strategies like—go where the majority of the people are or the biggest stage—just does not work out that way.
 3. We will find out later that Timothy lived in Lystra.
 4. Paul and Barnabus find themselves among an illiterate audience.
 - iii. But...“And a certain man powerless in Lystra.” That’s how the sentence begins in the original.
 1. Messengers of the gospel seek an audience. Thankfully, there was a normal way to do that in this culture. It was typical for people to gather and listen to new ideas people had. This would be a public debate like many of the philosophers of the past.
 - a. I think it’s safe to say, this certain man wasn’t the only one present. In v. 11 the crowds were there. And in v. 13 the priest of Zeus was there.

- b. The problem wasn't language. Most of the Roman ruled world had a very similar culture and spoke multiple languages. Whatever language the messengers are speaking in, they knew what they were saying.
 - i. So, there's more than just a language and culture issue to actually hearing.
 - ii. Picture the scene here. The crowds, the priest of Zeus and this certain man were there.
 - 1. Luke heaps up the image for us with three descriptions a certain man.
 - a. This man had no power in his feet hence "who could not use his feet."
 - b. Lame from his mother's womb
 - c. And he never walked
 - 2. This isn't the first person we've seen like this in Acts or the Gospels.
 - iii. But notice in ^{NKJ} **Acts 14:9** *This one heard Paul speaking.*
 - 1. If I might help you with something. No one else heard Paul. Yes, they heard the words coming out of his mouth but it was like the adults in the cartoon, Charlie Brown. Wah-wah-wah-wah.
 - 2. How does this man hear? The simple answer is, "the grace of God."
 - a. Does this man hear if he was well like the rest of the crowd? Imagine if your hands are full and someone tries to give you something...can you receive it with full hands?
 - b. By the grace of God, this man has nothing!
 - c. Furthermore, do the crowds hear if this man isn't there?
 - i. Like the woman at the well in John 4. She was the access to the crowds in Samaria.
2. We are not told what the message was but we hear Paul command this lame man to stand up.
 - a. He stared at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well (saved).
 - i. The man who had never walked before sprang up and was walking.
 - 1. Notice in (Acts 14:11) ¹¹ And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"
 - 2. Now they are listening. They had just been hearing noise but now they see something so unusual they think the gods have visited them in the likeness of men.
 - b. The lame getting up and walking was a sign that the Kingdom of God had come.
 - i. Notice what this in (Isa. 35:1-6) The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; ² it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. ³ Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save

you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

- ii. At this point in the story, all we can affirm is that God has visited these people! The Kingdom of God has come.
 - iii. Will these people know who God is?
- b. Our next point in the story is the response of the crowds to the certain lame man now walking was worship but worthless worship.
- i. You can never anticipate how people will respond. This hasn't been one of the patterns we have seen.
 - ii. When Paul commands the lame from birth man to stand, they see what Paul did.
 1. They draw the conclusion that Paul is a god in human form. They can't read but they have put two and two together and know that no mere human being can do that.
 2. The question is now, who is Paul?
 - a. Well, this little backwoods town already believes and worships some gods.
 - i. Notice: Barnabus, they call Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.
 - ii. They think the Greek gods have just healed a lame man right before their eyes.
 - b. There's no written revelation from these gods that they believe in.
 - c. They believe what has been passed down to them by their parents and grandparents who would have told the stories given on to them.
 - d. They hold to superstitions and unexplained events. Things happen like storms and the people would likely believe their gods were angry with them. The priest would suggest that sacrifices be made to appease them.
 - i. They often worked...if you know what I mean. These myths and idols were not real yet these things are closely connected with demonic activities.
 - ii. Moses even sang about Israel doing such things: (Deut. 32:16-17) They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods.
 - iii. Now that maybe you see the connection between false gods and demonic activity take note how these demons manipulate things to make them think these false gods are real.
 1. Here's a good example of this in (Jer. 44:16-18) ¹⁶ "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you. ¹⁷ But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster. ¹⁸ But since we left off making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine."
 2. Just because something good happens to them doesn't make their worship of the queen of heaven right. This is Judah! They are to worship YHWH alone!

- e. How did these pagan, illiterate people in Lystra come to understand that Paul and Barnabus were possibly the Greek gods of mythology? There was a story told by a Latin poet, Ovid.
 - i. He described a story about “how the gods descended to this region, seeking hospitality, but everyone rejected the gods except one poor couple, Philemon and Baucis, who took them in and treated them kindly. The gods rewarded them by transforming their cottage into a magnificent temple and making them guardians of it. The gods punished the unwelcoming residents with a severe flood. The superstitious people of Lystra may want to escape disaster, so they praise Paul and Barnabus.” (Tony Merida, 199)
 - ii. These are the kinds of stories that get passed down and believed. They have no idea what to be looking for. They have no idea how the gods will respond. They are always changing. This is how people end of worshiping worthless things.
 - 1. Praise the God who tells us exactly what to expect. He never changes.
 - 2. They should expect more out of their gods!
 - 3. Our God is worthy of worship.
 - iii. The priest of Zeus goes to his temple to bring bulls to be sacrificed with the crowds.
 - 1. Here’s Paul and Barnabus’ opportunity to become celebrities. The priests and the crowds are convinced from seeing this lame man stand up that Zeus and Hermes is among them.
 - a. How much would it cost to sell their souls away?
 - i. We read about Herod not refusing the claim from the crowds that we spoke as a god and we know how that ended.
 - 2. We might ask the question, “What would I do in this situation?”
 - a. Here’s what Paul will say later to Timothy in this pastoral letter: (1 Tim. 4:1) Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times *some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*
 - b. I bring this up because people look at the immediate results to determine if they are on the right path.
 - i. Is not the praise of men very tempting?
 - ii. Is not making a name for yourself even on the back of someone else attractive?
 - iii. We live in a world that says build your brand! More followers. More likes on social media.
- c. The accolades of men are enticing but in our last point, Paul and Barnabus resist the praise of men.
 - i. This response was probably a little confusing because initially when the crowd lifted up their voices, they spoke in their own dialect. The messengers would not have understood that language.
 - 1. But when the priest brings bulls cloaked with garlands to the entrance of the city gate, Paul and Barnabus immediately attempt to stop them.
 - 2. At no point do they take advantage of the ignorance of the people.
 - 3. The tore their clothes at the blasphemous act.
 - 4. They question why they are attempting to offer sacrifices to someone who is man just like they are.

- ii. The message of gospel never changes but, in this pagan, illiterate context Paul's message begins with creation.
 - 1. They plead that they are just men sent from God—the living God—with good news!
 - 2. They demand that they turn from these worthless things to the living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.
 - a. Imagine being told what you have worshiped your entire life was worthless.
 - b. Imagine all the animals they had given away to appease a god that doesn't even exist and probably suffered hunger for nothing!
 - i. (Ps. 96:5) ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.
 - c. Turn...repent. Instead of worshiping worthless idols, come and know and believe in the Creator and Redeemer. Come to Jesus through repentance and faith. Turn from the vain things.
 - i. This is exactly what the people in Thessalonica will do on another missionary journey. (1 Thess. 1:9-10) ⁹ For they themselves report...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
 - 3. Paul goes on to explain God allowed the nations in past generations to walk in their own ways but God did not leave himself without witness!
 - a. God's common grace upon everyone is a witness of his divine providence and goodness.
 - b. Yes, every breathe is a gift from God. Every rain bears witness to God when the harvest comes by which he satisfied their hearts with food and gladness.
 - i. Have you ever thought about those rains being a witness of God's goodness?
 - 1. Can you imagine standing before the judgment seat of God and the records are brought out how he gave you rain and food that pleased you and made you glad?
 - a. And the Judge asks, "Who do you think gave you those good things?"
 - i. I thought it was mother nature.
- iii. Yet...even with these words, they with difficulty restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.
 - 1. Sometimes things do not go as you might hope. They are a long way from home and they certainly do not want to waste their time.
 - 2. Maybe we should not have come here, Barnabus. I mean these people don't know anything. What hope do we have to see any of these people turn to Christ?
 - 3. That's how it often feels when you share the gospel. There's one man in Acuna, Mexico that sticks out in my mind. Three of us stood in the street pleading with him to turn to Christ. We poured out the gospel so clearly and with great passion. I scarcely know how he looked us in the face and just walked away. It was so cold.
 - 4. Yet, this isn't the end of the story of the people of Lystra as we will see later.
 - 5. At the end of the day...at the end of every conversation...it is God who saves or not.

V. Response

- a. We should be like Jesus: (Mk. 2:16-17) ¹⁶ And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and

sinner?"¹⁷ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

- b. We need not avoid those like the people of Lystra. God didn't avoid a Lystra like town where I grew or a person like me who was barely literate, had lots of superstitions and was just as backwoods as anyone.
- c. If you are one of those like me, Jesus came to save sinners. Will you come to Jesus? He will save you, too.