



ACTS OF THE [ONLY] APOSTLES

FELLOWSHIP CHURCH OF SIDNEY

The gods Have Come Down

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well,^[b] ¹⁰ said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. 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!” ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ¹⁵ “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” ¹⁸ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

PRAYER

Picking up where we left off last week, Paul, Barnabas and their companions had made it to Iconium, where they found a synagogue and began to preach the Gospel. A great many Gentiles received their word, as well as some Jews it would seem, but prominent women among the Jews led a campaign against them and began to poison the minds of the Gentiles against them, and after staying longer than they might have otherwise in order to make a defense of the Gospel, they eventually fled this city – like others – once the persecution turned physical.

They had come to Lystra, a city only about 30 miles away from Iconium. This is where we pick up.

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.

The exposition of this should be pretty straightforward. As was common in the day, those with disabilities would often sit at intersections and public gathering places in order to receive alms, or offerings, from those of good will. This man had a problem with his feet; so problematic that he couldn't walk. He had been crippled from birth and had never, in fact, walked.

⁹ He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well,^b ¹⁰ said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.

Paul would have preached in a public gathering place, giving credence to my assertion the crippled man was there in a public gathering place, so disabled, he needed alms to get by. Paul looked intently at him, it says here in verse 9.

I addressed that phrase "looking intently" in Acts 13:9, a few weeks ago, when Paul dealt with the Jewish false prophet, Bar-Jesus. I said at the time that the word is "*atenizō*" meaning that it is "to fix your gaze at someone in a serious manner." I also explained that the phrase is often used as a metaphor, meaning, "set your mind upon something." It is to look at something to try to figure it out. When Paul gazed at Bar-Jesus it says that he was "full of the Holy Spirit" and he instantly knew Bar-Jesus was a false prophet and called him Son of the Devil. Here, the Spirit-filled Apostle looks at the beggar and the ESV reads, "*seeing that he had faith to be made well...*"

It's here that we need to look more closely at the Text. If you have an ESV, do you see how there is an asterisk and a small letter there by that phrase? Follow that down to the margins and you will see this note, which is an alternative rendering, "or be saved." The phrase in Greek is actually a singular word, "*sōzō*" and means, "to be made whole." The question for the translator is, "does that mean whole *physically* or whole *spiritually*?" Some versions interpret it as to be made whole physically, rendering the term "healed" and some interpret it as to be made whole spiritually, rendering the term, "saved."

I would rather they interpret the Text exactly as the Greek says it, translating it "be made whole," and let the reader decide rather than to decide *for them*. The English Revised Version does translate it "made whole," the Young's Literal translates it "be saved," and most others translate it "to be healed." Here, I would agree with the assessment that it should be translated "made whole," and from the context of the passage I believe that the man had the faith to be made whole *spiritually*, rather than physically.

Well, why would I say that? Well, I say that because physical healing is rarely tied to one's faith in the Scripture. It is true that we have places like Mark 5:34 where Jesus says, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be healed of your disease." However, much of the time, as Jesus and the Apostles healed people, it was often irrespective of their faith. Sometimes it was the faith of their friends, like the man lowered through the roof in Mark 2. Sometimes it was the faith of their family,

like the Centurion's son in Matthew 8. However, in places like Luke 6:19, Luke 9:11, Matthew 15:30 Jesus healed people without any respect to their faith at all. In John 11, he raised a man from the dead, and corpses don't have faith. In Luke 8 he healed the Demoniac without any indication of his faith, and in fact being that he was demon possessed, was probably on some level *occultic*. In places like John 5, Jesus healed people like the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda who not only didn't have faith in Jesus, he didn't even know who Jesus was until after the fact. Jesus did many miracles among the disciples who often explicitly *lacked* faith. Out of 35 accounts of healing in the Gospels, only 10 have reference to the individual's faith.

I believe that what was happening here in Acts 14 is that Paul gazed intently at the cripple man, it was by the same discerning of spirits with which he gazed intently at Bar-Jesus and knew he was of the devil, recognizing as he spoke that the man was coming to faith, and coming to faith to be made whole *spiritually*. Imitating Christ who said in Luke 5:23 to his critics, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk?'" and then pointing to the man whose sins were *already* forgiven, and healing him as a demonstration that he had the power to do anything.

Like in Iconium, the Apostles would do signs and wonders by the will of God, in order to confirm their Apostleship and validate their Gospel. As I explained last week, whenever God gives new revelation, he always accompanies it with signs and wonders. If someone claims to be giving us something new from God, we should ask for a sign or wonder to be performed by them. Remember that the next time someone says, "God told me such-and-such." By all means then, prophet, do a miracle for me and demonstrate this is so.

And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well,^[b] ¹⁰ said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.

Like all Biblical signs and wonders, this one was impressive. The man was disabled from birth and, the Text says, never walked. No doubt, he would have had atrophy in his muscles. But, upon Paul's command, he not only stood up, he *sprang* up, and instantly began walking. I've seen all five of my children now take their first steps and learn to walk, and none of them sprang up or leapt up and just started walking around. This was a divine and everyone knew it.

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!"

It's here that we'll spend some time in the so-what portion of the message, the imperative, which will come in just a moment. But first, notice the response. The response of the crowd was quite different than what happened in Iconium. Here, the acclaim of the Apostle's healing prowess quickly spread far and wide, so much so that the people came to essentially worship them. What's interesting about that is

that this cripple is anonymous. We don't know his name, which means that Luke probably didn't know his name. If this man was anonymous, why did it provoke such a response? If you were at a healing service of any number of today's renown, coat-waving, trance-inducing faux-miracle workers and a random person nobody knew got up out of a wheelchair after being "healed," you might rightly be skeptical, and look to see if that man gets healed at the next revival service in the town over, and if he's taking a cut of the offering. So why is a man, apparently not important enough or well known enough for Luke to give his name, getting healed, why did that solicit such a response from the community?

Well, the answer is that given the crippled man's constancy in that public space, begging his entire life, everybody knew him. Oh, they might not have known his name, but they would have known him, because he's always there. We have the same thing here in Sidney. We very much love our neighbors who happen to have disabilities and very much love our neighbors who happen to have *mental* disabilities. We are honored to have a home for Richland Opportunities Incorporated right behind us here, and they have a key to our church for tornado warnings and strong storms so they can seek refuge here, and I love them all very much and often have the opportunity to make new friends among them. I say all that to say that I certainly mean no disrespect, but desire to make a point. I would suspect that the most famous resident of Sidney is a man of certain challenges who rides around town on his tricycle with a coat from the Sheriff's Department. Everyone knows him. Everyone knows him because he's always there. Wherever you are, there he is; fairs, parades, open houses, events, businesses. Now, here's the thing. I happen to be friends with the man and know his name, but many people wouldn't know his name if I said it...but they still know him. If I described him, they would know him. And if the man was suddenly healed of his disability, in spite of the fact few know his name, everyone would know him and would hear about it and the news would spread as though it were the mayor or prominent businessman to whom the healing happened.

The crowds see this man healed, a man they all knew and recognized from his begging about town, and they responded by saying, "*The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*"

¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

Zeus was the leader of the Greek Pantheon of gods and Hermes the messenger of the gods. Paul was the head honcho, but they equated him to Hermes because he did the talking.

And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

They were prepared to worship Paul and Barnabas. Notice the Apostle's response.

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

This tearing-their-garments business was a way in the ancient world to demonstrate you were serious about something. I assume the same would be true today, but we're rarely serious enough to waste a good shirt. It's something one would do if they were lamenting or mourning. This clearly distressed the Apostles. Paul, Barnabas and the others asked him, "Why are you doing this? We're men, just like you! We bring you Good News that you should turn from these vain things to a God who's alive, the one who is the Creator."

The inference is clear.

1. The pagans in Lystra were impressed with the sign and wonder performed by Paul and *not* his message. They were not paying attention to what he preached, but the miracle he performed. Had they been listening, they would have caught on to the fact that Paul was preaching about another, and not himself. They missed the *object* of his preaching, and got caught up on the miraculous work.

2. Paul and his Apostolic companions clearly did not want to be the center of attention, instead preaching Christ.

3. Paul and his Apostolic companions, by referring to their God as the Creator and as the Living God, were contrasting Yahweh with the mythological pagan gods of the Greek Zeus and Hermes. While defending Yahweh, the Apostles insulted and slighted the Greek pantheon as being, in contrast, fake and capable of creating nothing.

4. Notice that the Gospel included the message of turning from idolatry. One cannot be simultaneously an idolater and a Christian. To receive the Gospel is to turn *from* idolatry. This is why we deny the notion that those who practice the priestcraft of the Roman Church in the West or its Eastern Counterpart, who pray to idols and to the dead and have made Mary and the Saints into idols, that they can't be considered in any real sense of the word a *Christian*. Like Paul, I deny that an idolater of Mary and the Saints or those who pray to or through images of Jesus can be Christians, any more than followers of Zeus or Hermes. To receive the Gospel is to turn from idolatry. What business does the house of God have with the temple of idols, Paul asks in 2 Corinthians 6:16? The same, he says, that Christ has Belial. The same, as Christ with the Anti-Christ. None.

16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving

you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”¹⁸ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

Paul points something out to the Gentile pagans. He points out that God previously had allowed them to walk in their superstitious traditions and pagan ways. However, he gave them a witness, which included rains and fruitfulness, food and gladness. Here, Paul speaks of what we might call “common graces,” good and perfect gifts that come from God; even to unbelievers. Fresh air. Cooling rain. Sunrises. Babies. Intimate marital relations. Taste buds. Here, Paul is referencing the idea he will soon go on to explain in the first chapter of his letter to the church in Rome. All men, even the pagans, are without excuse, because what can be known about God – chiefly his power and eternal attributes – have been made known to them by the things that have been made. There’s enough about the Creator spelled out in Creation to condemn every man, leaving him with enough knowledge of the Almighty Eternal God to make them know that they should worship Him.

Even their rebuke, Luke writes, was barely enough to keep the pagans from worshipping them with sacrifice.

They were so caught up in their idolatry of Paul and his associates, even Paul could barely keep them from worshipping him.

Well, that’s the *what* of the message. But what’s the *so-what*? That’s the indicative, but what is the imperative? That’s what we should know the Text says, but what does that mean for us? How does that affect our life? What do we do with it?

Let’s go further down into the mine shaft of Scripture in verses 11-13 and see what the Holy Spirit has left there for us.

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!”¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds

Now, consider this treatment of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra with that which they received in Iconium. In Iconium, which had a sizable contingent of Jews, sought to stone Paul, Barnabas and their companions. They come to Lystra and they were being *worshipped*.

Imagine how the Apostles might have responded: “Oh, this is a nice change. No rocks are being pelted at us.” However, quite to the contrary, when they were threatened with stoning in Iconium, they kept their cool, kept their heads down, and continued

to preach until it was made impossible for them. They were cool as cucumbers, bold, Luke writes, in their preaching and conduct. Afraid of nothing. Not reactionary at all.

Here, when the Lyconians roll out the red carpet in their honor, call them gods, and bring in a herd of livestock to barbeque in their honor, the Apostles rend their clothes and cry out in horror.

Think about that for a moment. At the thought of their own death, they stand defiantly and boldly and calmly. At the thought of them getting glory for what God had done, they tear their clothes and, in despair, cry out in horror and agony.

Lesson one, beloved. Teachers and preachers and leaders who are of God desire he get the glory, even if they get stoned. Teachers and preacher and leaders who are not of God do not respond as Paul and his companions; to the contrary, they receive the praises of men and often will promise miracles that will bring them glory, which they steal from God who alone is worthy of it.

It's here that you need to be on guard. Let me add this polemical caveat, which is necessary for the day in which we live. As your under-shepherd, it's always my goal to apprise you of the wolves that currently prowl our woods.

The most nefarious false teachers, false preachers and false prophets will drop the name of Jesus off their lips like a wolf drools saliva at the sight of wounded sheep. They have no problem saying his name. And those false teachers and workers of false signs and wonders bringing unto themselves the glory of men will speak and speak often of giving glory to Jesus or claim that their ministry is all about Jesus. Let me make this simple but pressing point as a warning to you. If one's ministry is all about Jesus, you will know it, because it will be about Jesus. Some of the most self-centered, self-glorifying, narcissistic preachers on the planet will repeat over and over again, injecting the phrase as though it was a filler like the words "um" or "uh," "Glory to God." One charlatan I'm thinking of at the moment, who I'm surprised has not cut his lips upon his mirror from kissing his own image, who posts a dozen selfies a day through flattering filters on Instagram, ends his self-aggrandizing, womanizing stunts with the hashtag, #JesusJesusJesus. Three sins of blaspheming the name of God is no better than doing it once. If a man's ministry is about the Gospel, you'll know it, because he makes it about the Gospel. If a man's ministry is about the glory of God, he won't have to say it as some kind of incantation or slogan; you'll know it, because he makes everything about the glory of God. Talking about yourself for an hour and throwing in Jesus' name like a byword to mislead believers doesn't make something about Jesus, it makes you a blasphemer.

I watched Joyce Meyer one time complain that people say she is not cross-centered. She then pointed to a cross on her platform, which was used as a prop, and pointed out that it was literally in the center of the stage, as though holding up a crucifix made her somehow less a devil, as though satan himself doesn't often march his demons under the banner of Christ. Don't be fooled, beloved.

Now, notice verse 18.

18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

Here's what was amazing about the whole ordeal. Paul preaches the Gospel. To substantiate the message, God performs a miracle through him. The pagans and their priests begin to worship the Apostles, and Paul jumps in to say, "That's exactly what I'm talking about, guys. Stop that. That's idolatry. Quit it. Turn away from these myths and from your idols and your deaf, dumb, impotent, little gods and turn to Yahweh, the Creator and Redeemer of mankind.

Paul scolds them severely and says, "This is exactly what you have to repent *of*. You don't repent by doing this, you repent *of* this."

And yet, having the Gospel preached to them twice, once before the healing and once after, even that could barely pour enough cold water on them to stifle their idolatry.

Why? Why were they so stubborn and blind that they could ignore the message while simultaneously worshipping the messenger? It doesn't make any sense!

Or does it. Here's what is up. The pagans and their priests didn't care about the message of God. They didn't care about the Gospel. Not a lick of it. They were spiritually deaf, dumb and blind. Like talking to a brick wall. They didn't hear the message.

Why?

Let me teach you an expression, beloved: "The same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay."

Those who God gave ears to hear, those whose hearts were softened by God, saw the sign and wonder as demonstrating the validity of the Gospel message. They were on the fence. Their heart was responding, but there was doubt. God performs a miracle and it pushes them over the edge and they believe.

On the other hand, we have the pagans who remained unregenerate who also saw the sign and wonder and never even heard the Gospel somehow. All they cared about was the sign and the wonder. That which worked faith in the regenerate worked idolatry in the unconverted. The same sun that melts ice, hardens the clay. What an amazing contrast here.

All of their deaf, dumb, blind little idols and all of their myths couldn't heal a crippled man. The God preached by these men *could*. So, the pagans and their priests

assume that these men are the gods they've been looking for. And on account of what this God could do, they worshipped their idols.

Get this. Get this point. If you hear nothing else I say today, hear this: **If all you want is the stuff you can get *from* God, but don't want the Gospel, you're not a Christian; you are an *idolater*.**

If you follow Christ merely to get his stuff, you're no better than the multitudes who abandoned him in John 6.

Break in Manuscript



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