

Paul's First Missionary Journey: Iconium and Lystra--Acts 14

by J.R. Miller

The sermon highlights the importance of trusting in the living God and not idolizing human leaders, while also emphasizing the value of loyalty and faithfulness in true friendship.

Scripture: Acts 14:8

Topics: "Miracles", "Loyalty in Faith"

Description

J.R. Miller discusses Paul's first missionary journey, focusing on the miraculous healing of a lame man in Lystra, which stirred the crowd to mistakenly worship Paul and Barnabas as gods. Despite the initial excitement, the fickleness of the people quickly turned against the apostles, illustrating the dangers of superficial admiration and the need for true loyalty in friendship. Miller emphasizes that while the apostles performed miracles, they were merely messengers of the living God, urging the people to turn from worthless idols to the true source of life. He warns against accepting glory that belongs to God alone and highlights the importance of recognizing God's hand in everyday blessings. The sermon concludes with a call for steadfastness in faith and loyalty among believers, as exemplified by the disciples who stood by Paul after his stoning.

Transcript

The healing of the lame man at Lystra, made a great stir in the town. Lystra was a wild place. The traditional meaning of the name was Wolf-land, and the character of the people corresponded to this designation. They were easily excited and knew no self control. Paul was preaching and this lame man was in the audience. He had been a cripple--"a creeple," one who creeps--from his infancy. He had never walked. There seems to have been no request from the man himself for healing. There was something, however, in him which interested Paul. Probably it was the man's infirmity. His sorry condition made its own appeal. As Paul observed him from time to time, he noticed his intentness and earnestness, and saw that the man was accepting Christ. So he spoke to him, saying, "Stand upright on your feet." Instantly the man's faith responded, and he leaped up and walked.

People say there are no miracles in these days, and that if there were, that they would believe on Christ. But are there no miracles? Christianity itself is the most marvelous miracle the world ever knew. We have but to think what it has wrought in the world. Every day we see about us evidences of a divine power in the

changing of lives, and in victories over weakness, temptation, sin and sorrow!

The effect of the miracle upon the people was startling. "When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, The gods have come down to us in human form!" What they said was true in a sense. God had come down in the likeness of men in Jesus Christ. Christ had returned to heaven, having accomplished his work on the earth--but now he lived again in the lives of these missionaries who had come to tell the people of God's love and mercy. God himself, though unseen, walks ever with us and lives among us. We do not need to go far to find him. Christ lives also in all his true followers. "Christ lives in me," said Paul himself. We do not need to speak of Christ's kindnesses in the past tense.

The apostles were great grieved, however, when the people came to offer sacrifice to them as deities. "When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you!" They would not for a moment accept the homage which belonged to God alone. They were but ministers of Christ, human messengers from God to the people, and they were horrified at the thought of being worshiped.

No one is coming to fall down and worship us and call us "gods," and yet we are in danger of allowing ourselves to come in between people and God. When we are doing Christ's work, helping and blessing others in his name: when people love us and express their gratitude for the good they have received at our hands--we are in danger of forgetting that the honor does not belong to us--but to Christ, and that if we take it as our own and do not point the grateful people to our Master--we are accepting that which ought to be laid at his feet only! It is always easier to get people to love us and thank us--than to love and thank Christ! We should most jealously guard the honor of our blessed Lord and turn every thought and every adoring word and all gratitude and trust--toward him; seeking to be nothing--that he may be all in all.

Paul and Barnabas hastened to tell the people what they should do. "We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them!" Idols are worthless things. They have no power to give help. We all know this. We would not turn to a marble statue of Jupiter, if we were in trouble; we know that it could give us no help. But there are idols which are not carved in statues. Wealth, power, pleasure, honor, self--are idols, and are just as really vanities--empty and worthless things--as were those which Paul and Barnabas condemned. When we are in need, in trouble, in sorrow, in the depth of remorse, in the presence of death--what power have any of these things to give us comfort, help, or deliverance? There is only one living God, who can aid us in any of the great needs of life. If we rest on anything but God--we shall find ourselves in fearful plight when our trust is swept away from us--and we have nothing left to which to cling!

The missionaries spoke to the people further of the living God whose messengers they were. He had not left himself without witness even to heathen people--but had done them good, giving them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. We oftentimes forget that the common mercies of life are evidences of a Father's loving thought and care for his children. There is no such thing as 'chance' in this world. God, too, sends the rains, orders the seasons and brings the harvests. In enjoying the gifts--we should not forget the Giver. In accepting and using the blessings, we should not fail to see the Hand which brings them to us!

Now we have an illustration of the fickleness of these Lystrans. One hour they came with their garlands and their offerings to honor the missionaries as deities; the next hour they were stoning them and dragging

them out of the city! They dropped the garlands they had brought--and picked up stones and began to hurl them at Paul!

There is too much of the same kind of friendship in all times. Many people are very enthusiastic in their devotion to a leader--until someone comes and talks against him, when they veer around at once and become his violent enemies! Their friendship is only a selfish impulse. True friendship rests on character and is constant and firm, unaffected by what other people say. When enemies malign our friend--we cling to him all the more closely and stand by him all the more loyally, if our friendship is sincere. One of the lessons to learn here, is not to rely too much on the admiration of professed friends, when we are on the wave of popularity. Any evil word, any sinister influence, may in a day turn the whole drift of sentiment.

Another lesson to teach here, is the baseness of such fickle friendship as this. When we are friends, let us be loyal through all changes of sentiment. We see an illustration of this kind of faithfulness in the Christians at Lystra. "The disciples gathered around him." When Paul had been stoned and dragged out of the city, and left for dead, those who had become followers of Christ through his preaching, gathered around him, no doubt weeping over him as a friend they had lost. The secret was that these men had accepted Christ. Christ was the common bond. How nobly this little group, standing around the apparently lifeless body of the apostle, contrasts with the fickle crowd! It was dangerous at that time to profess friendship for the apostle--but these disciples did not think of their danger. They were one in Christ!

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