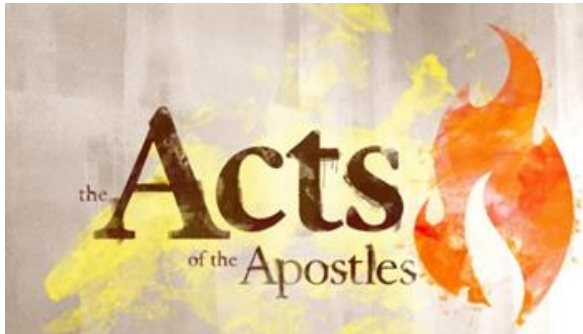




"Acts of the Apostles: Acts 14 Pt 2: Lesson 25" by Faber McMullen, Union Grove Baptist Church ©2018

"Hunger in the Heart of Man for God"

In Lystra and Derbe

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

This morning we continue in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul and the trustworthy and encouraging "Joe Levy"¹ who had been renamed Barnabas by the disciples because of his gift of encouragement. Last week they stayed in Iconium just as long as they could before they determined that the crowd was intending to stone them. They escaped and the text this morning tells us they've landed in Lystra, centered in modern day Turkey.



Lystra is a different kind of a place. Lystra is a Gentile place and it had no synagogue in it. It is where Paul would meet his young disciple Timothy. Lystra was altogether religious, and yet altogether heathen. The people of Lystra were deeply committed to the old pagan gods of the Greeks and the Romans which for the most part had been abandoned in much of the Roman Empire by this

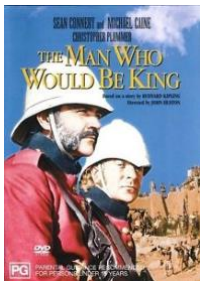
time. Pagan people who are religious (those who don't know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) will often refer to themselves as "spiritual but not religious". That means they have a deep hunger for the things of God but they don't exactly know if there is a God or if there is one, they are not sure what they should have to do with Him/Her/It etc.

¹ Joshe the Levite in English

So there, probably in the gateway of the city, a lame man sat. He had been lame from birth and the whole town knew about him. It reminds us of that episode we saw very early on in our study of the Book of Acts when Peter told a lame man *"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."* (Acts 3:6 NIV) Paul spoke to this lame man and the lame man looked intently at him. This was a person who had hungered his entire life for something real, for something supernatural, for a healing. He longed to be in a real relationship with a supernatural power that could hear the cry of his heart. And, unfortunately, the gods he had grown up trusting in, had nothing to offer him.

Paul discerned in his spirit that this man had more than a mustard seed of faith. Paul called out to him and told the man to stand up on his feet. The lame man jumped up and began to walk. Paul had no time to explain how this miracle had been wrought. Remember in the instance with Peter that we just talked about Peter had quickly said, *"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."* On this occasion there was no time to react. The crowds saw it and went wild.

Verse 11 - ¹¹*When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"* ¹²*Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.* ¹³*The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.*



This scene reminds me of the Rudyard Kipling story entitled "The Man That Would be King" that was made into a moving starring Sean Connery (Danny) and Michael Kane (Peachy). In the film, the two of them are British soldiers stationed in India who get off of the beaten path and end up in Kafiristan which was unknown to Europeans since being conquered by Alexander the Great. In a battle scuffle Danny takes an arrow to the shoulder that gets stuck in a leather belt hidden under



his clothing. As he pulls it out, the natives looking on think that he is a god. They quickly reason that he is that long promised son of Kasander (Alexander), and they bow in worship to him. The fast-talking Danny takes note of what is happening and takes on the role of a god who is adorned with gold, gifts, adoration, and a lovely maiden Roxanna. Danny and Peachy are finally set. (so they think). The cover is blown when the lovely Roxanna bites Danny in a wedding ceremony only to find that he bleeds as a mere mortal. Danny's spectacular death

at the hands of the disenchanted natives is one of the greatest deaths in Hollywood films.

Well, this is exactly the position in which Paul and Barnabas find themselves. The crowd saw the healed lame man and the text tells us they shouted out in the Lycaonian language. *“The gods have come down to us in human form!”* I don’t think Paul and Barnabas were exactly sure of what was going on. Lycaonian was an obscure dialect spoken up in what is now known as the backwoods of central Turkey. Wikipedia hints that the people there were a “lawless race of freebooters”. I think this means they were backwoods people with backward ways. As mentioned, they still were devotees of Zeus and Hermes (whom the Romans referred to as Jupiter and Mercury) when the rest of the empire had abandoned those gods.

The crowd quickly reasoned that Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes because he was the obvious spokesman. As a reminder, I’ve told you all that Hermes is the messenger god and that is where we get the term we use in seminary called Hermeneutics which is the art of interpreting scripture by determining what the writer, the “messenger”, intended to say.



Then scripture tells us of the strange event where a pagan priest shows up driving oxen with garlands around their necks, and giant wreaths are brought to worship these gods who have appeared. These spiritual people were hungry to see a real manifestation of a real and living God. They had been hungry for centuries to see the supernatural and now they have seen it. Unlike Danny and Peachy who decided that they sort of liked being worshipped, Paul and Barnabas wasted no time in setting things right. Turn with me to verse 14.

¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

Paul does all in his power to take the glory from himself and Barnabas and he points the crowd to the God who is. Paul explains that he and Barnabas are just weak humans as are they in the crowd, but Paul is bold to say that he and Barnabas are bringing that GOOD NEWS that instructs all of mankind to turn from “worthless things” to the living God. This God of whom they speak is not a god made of wood and stone, but rather is the very Creator of the heavens, the earth, the sea and everything in them. If indeed Barnabas is the writer of Hebrews, perhaps he was thinking of this event when he wrote, *“³ By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” (Hebrews 11:3 NKJV).*

Paul continues explaining that this one true God did not leave man forever without a testimony of who He was, but rather He has shown Himself in the way the earth works with rain, growing crops, and the fruit of men's labors which brings food from the earth and fills the hearts of all people with joy. Even with these words, Paul and Barnabas had a hard time convincing the crowds not to make sacrifice to them. This reminds us that people (us included) are stubborn about giving up idols. We grow comfortable with idols and we put our faith and confidence in them. Our idols today can take the form of our businesses, our busyness, our jobs, our friends, our family, our wants and desires, our phones, our money, and the list goes on and on. These Lystraens had grown comfortable with their false gods. Let's read on from verse 19.

¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

Then as always happens with a presentation of the truth, the enemy stepped in. The Jews who had opposed Paul and Barnabas in Antioch-Psidia and Iconium showed up and won the crowd over. You see, this was a fickle crowd. They went from worshipping Paul and Barnabas to helping to stone Paul and drag him out of the city. The cruel crowd beat Paul with such intensity that the text tells us that all who watched thought Paul was dead. This is part of the hardship that we spoke of last week. This is a perfect picture of perseverance. What did Paul do? The text tells us that "he got up and went back into the city" and the next day he left for Derbe to present the gospel again to those who had never heard it. Let this be an instruction for each of us. If you present God's truth and you are ridiculed, get up and go back into the city! Keep on keeping on! Let's read on from verse 21.

The Return to Antioch in Syria

²¹ They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. ²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. ²⁴ After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵ and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

²⁶ From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷ On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Paul and Barnabas made their way to Derbe and the text tells us that they won a large number of disciples there. They then went back through Lystra where they had been beaten, through Iconium where they had been beaten, through Antioch-Psidia where they had sketchy results, and as they went they encouraged those who had made a faith

commitment to Jesus. Paul and Barnabas found mature believers in those places and appointed them as elders for each of the churches. I want to remind you that scripture seems to lump this general office of “elder” to include three words used in scripture: pastor, bishop, and elder. That means they appointed leaders to steer these newly established congregations of Christians in the proper things of God. They then made their way back to Antioch (in Syria) where they returned to their home church to declare the mighty move of God among the Gentiles.

French Philosopher and scientist Blaise Pascal said, “There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.” Pascal was right.

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There is no man, no woman, no lover, no amount of riches, no amount of possessions or land that can fill the empty spot that is inside of each of us. If we're honest and we look deep into our souls, we know we're missing something. We all might know this, but like the Lycaonians many put their faith again and again into people or things that cannot and

will not satisfy our thirsty souls.

You know, the Lycaonians yearned and longed for a manifestation of a true and living God. They had hungered for something spiritually real for centuries. And then, a loving God presented Himself to them and they couldn't get their eyes off of their idols. Their hearts told them it was real, but they let the reasoning of evil persons convince them otherwise. They talked themselves out of a relationship with a loving God.

How about you reader? How about you friend in this congregation? Have you trusted in your own abilities, your own talents, your own riches, your own self? Can I tell you a spiritual secret? Those will always fail you. Those will never satisfy. Jesus said, *“²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (Revelation 3:23 NKJV)*

Do you hear the knocking? How long will you put off this glorious Savior, this magnificent Lord, this King of the Universe, this Jesus who is the lover of your soul. Without Him, you are destined for an eternity of bulls, garlands, and things that have no spiritual significance. You are destined for an eternal separation from Him and the people of God. Jesus said, *“²⁸ Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29 KJV)*

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling you. Today can be the day of your salvation. You have but to believe and receive. Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Fryday Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.