

#101
January 12, 2020

Acts 14:8-15; 19-20.
“Do you have stones?”

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, 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.

But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

The Bible is filled with people making journeys. Abraham and Sarah left Ur of the Chaldees. The people of Israel wandered in the desert. The magi followed the westward leading star. Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt. In a couple months we will be focusing on the most important expedition of all: Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem and his journey to heaven which we call the Ascension. We look forward to His promised coming again.



Today we resume studying the book of Acts and the missionary journeys of Paul. The whole book of Acts is about the work of the Holy Spirit. It starts with Jesus instructing Christians that we are to journey to the uttermost parts of the earth making disciples of every nation. First, though, the believers had to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost equipping them of their journey and their work. We have met Peter, John, Stephen, Philip, Silas, and John Mark. We experienced Paul's conversion on his journey to Damascus.

Today's text meets us towards the end of the first missionary journey of Paul. Paul and Barnabas were forced to flee from Iconium into the rural and relatively uninhabited countryside of the province of Galatia.

Little did they realize they were jumping out of the pan and into the fire.



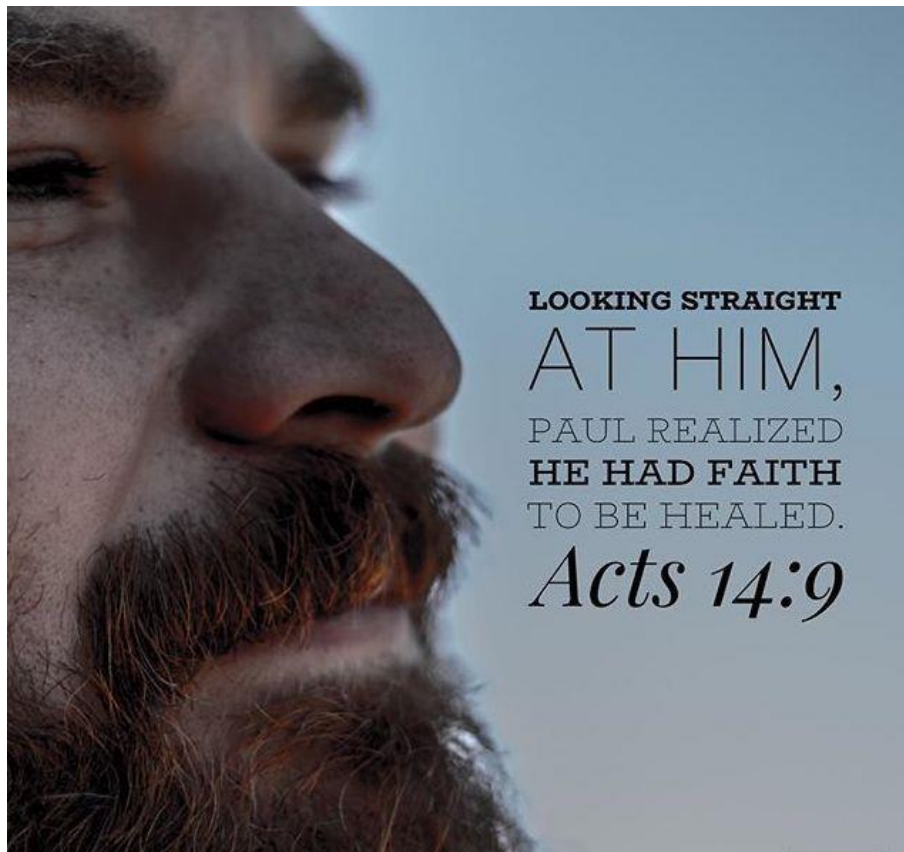
After traveling on foot for over twenty miles in “no-man’s land”, they came to the rural outpost of Lystra.

There is a legend that everybody in that little town knew and believed. The gods, Zeus and Hermes, decided to leave the heavens one day and visit Lycaonia to see how friendly the people were. Everyone was extremely unfriendly and no one would give them the time of day. They were rejected thousands of times. Finally, at the edge of town, the gods encountered an old woman and her husband, named Baucus and Philemon.

They quickly welcomed the strangers into their simple home and offered them all the food and drink they had. They even tried unsuccessfully to catch and kill their only goose to eat, to the extreme amusement of the strangers. When morning came, Zeus and Hermes revealed their identity to the old couple.

Zeus and Hermes then completely wiped the town off the map and put a lake in it's place. On the shore of the lake, they built a castle for Baucus and Philemon.

“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”.

Last Sunday we talked about having perfect 20/20 vision. We are called to look deeper and further through the eyes of God. How many times do we pass by and look but do not really see? Are we able to look at a person and see that person as a beloved child of God?

Paul preached the word of God. Paul looked into the lame man's eyes. Through the Holy Spirit he saw a faith in this man. The thought that comes to my mind is that the

man got well first in his soul. Paul saw the man's faith. His soul was healed and he was saved. Paul realized that this man, paralyzed from birth, had faith to be healed.

Jesus told the woman who touched the hem of his garment, "Your faith has made you well." Jesus marveled at the faith of the Roman centurion with the sick daughter. Jesus said that you can move a mountain if you have faith.

Paul spoke in a loud voice: "Stand upright on your feet." Like a coiled spring the man jumped to his feet, found that they supported his weight and began to walk for the first time in his life.

Would you praise God or Paul, who was visibly seen and spoke the words? If there is a person that God uses and heals others through him, how much would you stick around that person, how much would you talk to others about that person? As much as we want to give all the glory to God, by our nature, we really start glorifying the person that God chooses to work through. It is a much bigger danger for the person who starts to receive adoration.

We can presume that Paul preached in Greek. It was the universal language of the Roman Empire. The people of Lystra understood Paul's sermon and could visit with him. The people were excited so they dropped back to their native tongue of

Acts 14:13

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

Lycaonian.

"The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" "We blew it the first time they came and destroyed our city because of our lack of hospitality. It will not happen again.

Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes. The priest from the temple for Zeus brought garlands and was preparing to sacrifice oxen. They were going to honor these gods to the best of their ability.

It seems to be human nature to want gods that can be seen and touched, gods in the likeness of men. It is strange when you think about it: When Christ, the Son of God, appeared in the likeness of a human and did many miracles people did not offer him a sacrifice. Instead he was turned into a sacrifice. Paul and Barnabas worked only one miracle and they were treated like gods.

So why did God allow the miracle? All the people started to believe that they were Zeus and Hermes instead of worshipping the true God that Paul was preaching about!

A miracle exposes the heart and worldview of people. Extremely good things show who we truly are in our hearts. Adversities, problems and difficulties will reveal our character. Success is much more telling.

Remember when something really fantastic that happened in your life. Did you give all the glory and credit to God? To yourself? To a lucky fate? To somebody else?

In Lystra the hurdle that needed to be overcome was that they worshipped false gods. Today, we do not give much credence to mythological gods. Instead we place our highest priority on wealth and fame – possessions and popularity. What or who do you worship?

There is only one true living God who is worthy of all adoration, glory, honor and praise. The good news of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died and rose again, challenges us reconsider all that we worship.

Some people think that if only God would reveal himself in miracles than everyone would turn to the true God. Here we see that they wanted to make Paul and Barnabas gods.

They did not want to change religions. They wanted Paul and Barnabas to be a part of their religion. In what ways are we the same?

At first, Paul and Barnabas had could not understand what was happening. They did not speak the language. Once they figured out what is going on, “they tore their garments in anguish 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. We are only messengers bringing you good news that you should turn from these empty things to the living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.”

Paul and Barnabas could have said nothing and just enjoyed the popularity. The people in Lystra loved them so much they became their gods. “Look at us. We are pretty special. We are above everyone else. Look at what we are doing. We are

healing people. God is blessing us and not others. We have it made and we deserve all this”

Herod would have enjoyed such praise. Maybe that was why they reacted the way they did. Herod was called a god and he was eaten by worms. To them it was blasphemy and they wanted no part of it.

Faithful Christians understand that only God is to be worshipped.

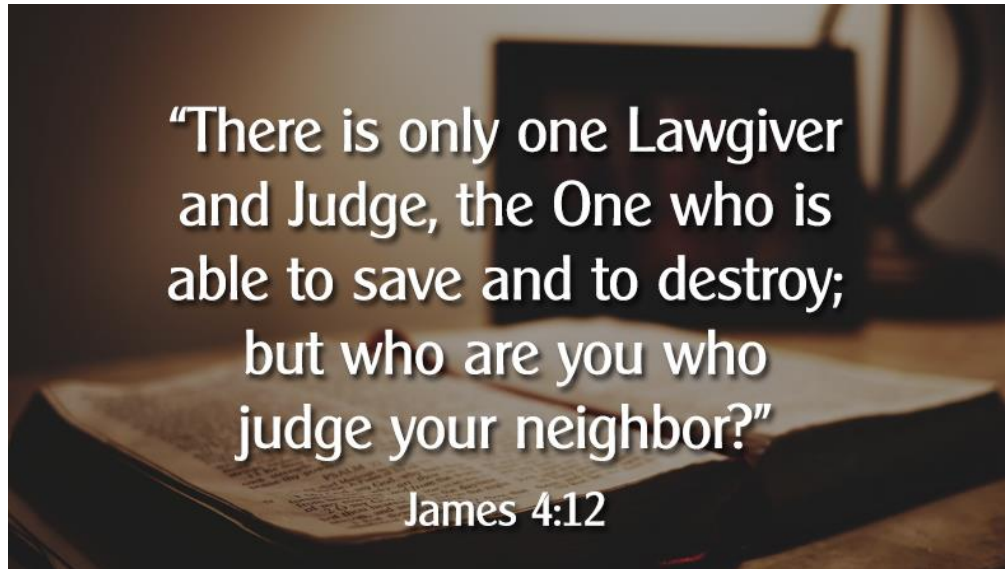
We all know that life can turn on a dime. It certainly did for Jesus. One moment all of Jerusalem was singing Hosanna. 4 days later the same crowds were shouting, “Crucify him.” One year an athlete or actress or politician is wildly popular and the next year we cannot even remember his or her name.

One moment Paul was considered a god and then “Some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul. We are so fickle.

The next part is astonishing: Paul is knocked unconscious by rocks thrown at him. They drag him out of the city.



One moment all the crowd loves Paul and Barnabas and next moment we see a group of angry Jews traveled twenty miles from Iconium and about hundred miles from Pisidian Antioch in order to persecute Paul. These guys were vicious. Many of them gave up days of pay in order to throw rocks at Paul.

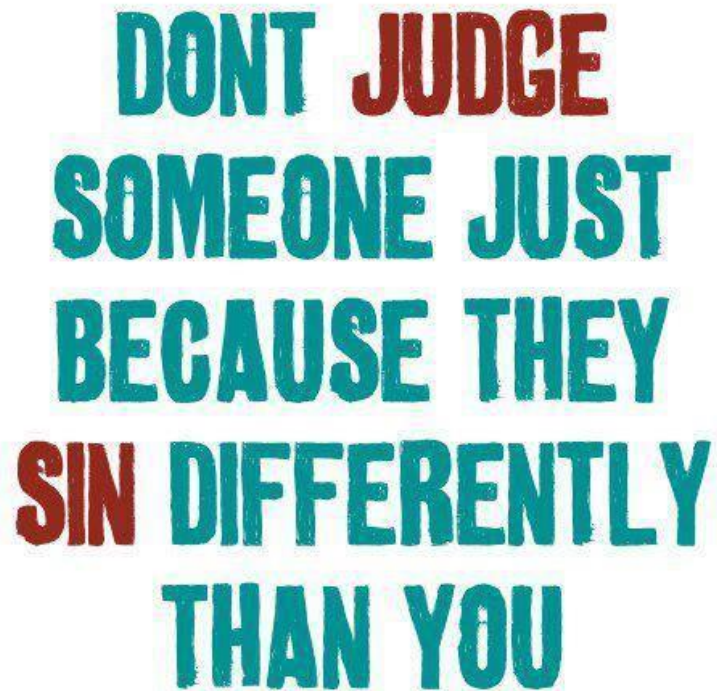


Let's check our hearts. Some of us have been carrying stones more than twenty or a hundred miles. We are still walking with a stone or stones that we will not let go. We are still angry at somebody. We cannot forgive. We know that anger and unforgiveness take away from us joy and health. Knowing all this, we still choose to travel many miles and carry that rock.

As you came in today you were given a little stone. I want us today to put that rock down. Choose to forgive. God knows and he sees. He is righteous. If we believe in God's righteousness we should listen to what the Bible says: "God is our judge, and he can save or destroy us. What right do you have to condemn anyone?" (James 14: 12).

What stones do you carry around? What resentment and anger do you harbor in your heart? What annoys you about someone else? Is there someone who gets under your skin? Are you looking for opportunities to get even?

When they saw Paul and Barnabas they were ready. Why did they stone Paul? Just because he disagreed to be whom they wanted him to be?



**DONT JUDGE
SOMEONE JUST
BECAUSE THEY
SIN DIFFERENTLY
THAN YOU**

Today you have the opportunity to lay the stone down instead of throwing it. As you place the stone down, may it be a physical symbol of forgiveness. Jesus taught us to pray for forgiveness just as we forgive others.

Hold the stone. Look at it. What burden does it represent to you? What are you going to do with it? I invite you to lay the stone on the altar step as a prayer that God will help you to forgive those who have hurt you, who have been unfair to you, who make your life miserable.

Pray for those with whom you disagree. Pray for those who live differently by their words and actions. Pray and do not go home carrying the rock. Bring it and leave it at the altar.