

November 14, 2021 by Steve Brandon



# We Bring You Good News

## Acts 14:8-20

- 1. A Lame Man Springs Up (verses 8-10).**
- 2. A Crowd is Stirred Up (verses 11-13).**
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The following quote comes from a book entitled, "Gospel Reset" by Ken Ham:

Something is happening to America — in fact, to the entire once-Christianized Western world. Whether you get your news from television or online, the information is the same. The United States is no longer the country she once was. It is shocking to compare the worldview of today's generation with the one embraced by older generations in the West.

America has the largest number of Christian churches, colleges, seminaries, resources, and media of any nation in the world. Yet, her values and predominant worldview demonstrate that America is becoming less Christian every day. Western culture is changing. In fact, Western civilization as a whole is becoming less Christian in its worldview, whether it's the United Kingdom, Europe, or Australia. We are seeing moral relativism spread throughout Western culture like an infectious disease. There's even talk that an ideological civil war is being waged in America. And as moral relativism enjoys greater national acceptance, Christians and their worldview are treated with increasing intolerance.

The elimination of prayer and the Bible from state schools was only the beginning, as now Christians themselves are being targeted for the free exercise of their faith in the public sphere. Nativity scenes, Ten Commandments, and crosses have been systematically and progressively removed from public places.

Even terminology associated with Christian teaching is being changed or removed. For example, "Merry Christmas" changed to "Happy Holidays." In short, Christianity's influence is slowly being purged from America's national conscience.

Simultaneously, Christians are not having an impact on culture and those in it, choosing instead to remain content and safe within their own churches and Christian circles. We are not imparting the gospel in a way the next generation can grasp. Of course, the message of the gospel hasn't changed, but the way people think has changed dramatically. Therefore, we must speak the truth of Scripture in the language of culture. ...

There's no doubt there is a widening chasm between the older generation and the Millennials in America. The older generation, even those who aren't Christian, nevertheless have more of a Christianized worldview because of the significant past influence of Christianity. Today's younger generations do not have such a worldview because their thinking has been secularized through education and culture. This, then, is the divide we're seeing. Understanding the difference between these worldviews is an essential first step to having an impact on this generation with the gospel.

In Acts 2, Peter preached to Jews, while in Acts 17 [or Acts 14], Paul preached to Greeks. Their approaches were different based upon the worldviews of their audiences. The Jews in Acts 2 believed, thought, and viewed their world from a Jewish perspective. They already knew and understood what the Bible teaches about creation, sin, and other topics. However, the Greeks in Acts 17 [or Acts 14] did not have a foundational knowledge of biblical teachings on creation, sin, or other matters.

America, as a culture (in fact, the entire Western world), used to be like "Jews" in this respect. But that's no longer the case. Our culture has declined, having become more like the "Greeks." Biblical illiteracy (i.e., having little or no knowledge about God and the Bible) is becoming the rule rather than the exception.<sup>[1]</sup>

For the past year and a half, we have been working our way through the book of Acts. So far, we have mostly seen the gospel spread in Jewish contexts, where the Scriptures are dominant, where the Almighty God rules and reigns. The battle in those cities has been over Jesus. Is he the Messiah, or not? But today, as we come to Acts, chapter 14, we will see Paul and Barnabas begin to encounter a new culture, that had neither the Scriptures to guide them, nor the knowledge of God to restrain them. They are much like our culture today. The culture that I'm talking about is the culture of the Ancient Greeks, as found in Lystra.

Paul brings the good news to this culture who does not know God. We would do well to learn from Paul's dealings with these people, because they are like our culture in many ways. The title of my message this morning is, "We Bring You Good News" because that's what Paul does to those in Lystra.

Our text begins in Lystra, with Paul and Barnabas arriving in this city. Paul and Barnabas arrive there on their first missionary journey. Now, Lystra was a small village, built upon a small hill. Off the beaten path. Away from any significant trade routes. If you are looking for a modern parallel, think of someplace in the boondocks! think of someplace in deep Arkansas or Missouri.

Here come Paul and Barnabas, into the little village, with the gospel. Be encouraged, there is no place too insignificant for the Lord. On the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas go out, and among the towns they visit, they visit little Lystra.

Again, I want to remind you of how they arrived there. I figure that if I remind you enough, you will never forget it. Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church in Antioch in Syria. They walked down to Seleucia, where they caught a boat for the day-long journey to the Island of Cyprus. They landed on the eastern shore at Salmas, traveled across the entire island, preaching in the synagogues along the way. They ended up in Paphos, where Sergius Paulus believed in the Lord. Then, they set sail northward to Pamphilia. They disembarked in Perga and continued north to Antioch in Pisidia. After preaching there in the synagogue, they traveled east to Iconium, which we looked at last week. [\[2\]](#)

When they were run out of town, they traveled south about 25 miles to Lystra, which is where we pick up their story today. and it's a great story!

#### Acts 14:8-20

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. 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!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 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. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, "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. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 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." Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to 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. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

The first thing that we see in Lystra is We see a lame man who is healed. As a way of giving some structure to the text, I'm calling it the following:

### **1. A Lame Man Springs Up (verses 8-10).**

We are introduced to this man in verse 8.

#### Acts 14:8

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

It seems as if Luke, the author, wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt as to this man's helpless condition. He gives us three statements to confirm his hope: (1) he couldn't use his feet; (2) he was crippled from birth; and (3) he had never, ever walked!

It's good to get an idea in your head of what they man may have looked like. He was seated on the ground. His legs were shriveled up from never being used. He was obviously a needy person.

Certainly, this man was in the public square, begging. It's the only thing that such a man could do in his situation. Certainly, this man also was brought there somehow by his family or his friends. and being an older "man," I would suspect that he had been begging for years, and that most everyone in this small town knew him. But in the public square, he was able to listen to the apostle Paul. And we read in verse 9 that ...

#### Acts 14:9

He listened to Paul speaking.

Now, it is worthy of noting that Paul is not speaking in a synagogue. Typically, Paul's pattern when entering a city is to enter the synagogue and bring the gospel to the Jews first. You can ask yourself, "Why didn't they go to the synagogue in Lystra?" Our best guess is that they didn't have a synagogue in Lystra! Which means that the Jewish population here is small. And so (as we shall see), Paul's ministry here in Lystra is to the Gentiles.

Anyway, this lame man was listening to Paul as he was preaching. And Paul discerned that this man was receiving his message, believing what he was saying.

#### Acts 14:9-10

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

Those of you who are familiar with the Bible will recognize this miracle. It has been done before.

Jesus did this miracle. In fact, Jesus did this on several occasions. Once, he did it by the pool of Bethesda. There were many invalids, who sat by this pool, waiting for the waters to stir, believing that if they were the first in the water, they would be healed. There was a man who sat by this pool for 38 years was never healed. But Jesus said to him "Get up, take up your bed, and walk" (John 5:8). Then we read, "And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked" (John 5:9).

On another occasion, Jesus was in Capernaum, teaching to a crowd that had packed together in a home. And there were four men who carried their paralytic friend to the home, hoping that Jesus would heal their friend. But the crowds were too much for them to enter the door. so, they entered by the roof. They dug through the roof, and let down their friend with ropes, right in front of Jesus as he was teaching. Jesus said to this man, "Rise, pick up your bed, and go home" (Mark 2:11). Then we read, "And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!' (Mark 2:12). I have never seen anything like this either. Where lame men are healed instantly, and they rise up and pick up their beds and walk away fully healed! But such is the power of Jesus.

But Jesus wasn't the only one to do such a miracle. In the book of Acts, we have already seen Peter do this. Do you remember in Acts, chapter 3, when Peter and John went up to pray in the temple. And along the way, they met a lame beggar at the "Beautiful Gate." who was asking for alms. He was asking for donations to provide for him his daily food! Peter fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us" (Acts 3:4). The beggar did. He was expecting some money, but received something far better! Peter said to him, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). Here's what happened: "And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God" (Acts 3:7-8).

For those of you who remember when I preached that sermon, you will remember how I enacted out this miracle! I enacted out how this lame beggar responded by leaping and jumping for joy on the stage.<sup>[3]</sup> This man was leaping high! Totally cured! He went from not being able to walk at all, needing help from friends to be brought to the temple to beg! To being able to dunk!

This is the sort of sign and wonder that we encounter in the Bible. We see this in the ministry of Jesus and in the book of Acts. We see instantaneous, verifiable, undeniable, acts of God! This is so unlike anything that we see or experience today. A guy who is known by the entire town, lame from birth, hearing the message of a stranger, and rising up and walking! That's what we see in our text as well. We see an instantaneous, verifiable, undeniable, act of God!

#### Acts 14:10

[Paul] said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.

Lots of miracles were taking place at this moment! New tissue was created in his legs. He was given new muscles. He was given the coordination to spring up and walk!

This word translated, "sprang up" is similar to the word that Luke used in Acts 3:8, when we see the beggar "leaping." In our text, he "sprang up." In Acts 3:8, the word is intensified. He "sprang way up!" Or he "sprang up and down," something like that.

That's not the only similarity in the text. We also see the similarity of the gaze. In Acts 3:4, we see Peter fixing his gaze upon the man, who fixed his attention upon Peter. In Acts 14:9, we see the man's attention fixed upon Paul as he spoke. We also see Paul fixing his gaze upon the man. Paul could see in the man, that he had faith to be saved! That's literally, what we read in verse 9. We read of Paul, "fixing his gaze upon him and seeing that he had faith to be saved" (Acts 14:9). We hear that word and instantly think about spiritual salvation, when you come to faith in Jesus, and believe his sacrifice upon the cross, you can be saved from your sin!

That's totally right. But here, this word is much more holistic! This man's body is rescued and redeemed! His life will be restored, as he will be able to provide for himself! That's shown in this miracle. The man can walk! But don't miss the element of faith in this healing process. not that if you have faith, you will automatically be healed of your diseases. we need to trust God with what we cannot do for ourselves. Though it isn't stated here, I have no doubt that this man was believing in Jesus. because, as Paul was preaching, surely he was preaching about Jesus. and this man was believing what Paul was preaching. And perhaps, that was the greater miracle that took place in this man's life.

I say that, because of how the crowd responded to this miracle. They didn't respond with faith in Jesus. Instead, they responded in worship to their gods. We see in verses 8-10, "A Lame Man Springs Up." Then, we see in verses 11-13, ...

## **2. A Crowd is Stirred Up (verses 11-13).**

#### Acts 14:11-13

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!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 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, to us, this is strange. Paul does this miracle, and these people begin to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods. For them it is Christmas! It is the gods coming in the flesh!

They even identified which god's of the pantheon had come! Barnabas was identified as Zeus, "the sky and thunder god in ancient Greek religion, who rules as king of the gods of Mount Olympus." His Roman name is Jupiter! Zeus was "the chief of the gods and assigned roles to the others."<sup>[4]</sup> Paul was identified as Hermes, "the herald of the gods." He was able "to move quickly and freely between the worlds of the mortal and the divine, aided by his winged sandals." His Roman name is Mercury! He was the 'soul guide' —"a conductor of souls into the afterlife."<sup>[5]</sup>

In some regards, this makes sense. Paul and Barnabas had entered this city and done something that no mere mortal was able to do, heal a lame man with a command. Further, Paul was speaking. He was speaking about the mortal and the divine, telling others about the afterlife! But it's still strange to us, because we would never do this. If someone would come among us and perform some instantaneous, verifiable, undeniable, act of God! Say, restoring an amputated leg. We would not worship the one who healed as God! We would revere him as a prophet as come from God. That's because of our background. We don't believe in the Roman pantheon of gods, as they did in Lystra. So,

when they saw an act of God, they understood it to come from their gods! they understood it that their gods came in the flesh. And they acted accordingly.

Still, there is something about this that is a bit unsettling to us. Why are these people so quick to identify Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes! Especially, with the priest of Zeus right there in town! If he was the priest in charge of the temple of Zeus, you would think that he was able to recognize Zeus when he came. Why was he so quick to identify Barnabas as Zeus?

Here's a little bit of advice for you all. If ever you don't understand what somebody is doing, it may be because you don't know the entire story. This is particularly true in dealing with people in their sin. If you don't understand what people are doing, it's because you don't have enough knowledge about their situation.

I remember years ago, talking with a high school aged boy who was having some difficulty with his parents. There was conflict in the home. He wasn't doing well at school. He was being disrespectful to his parents. He wasn't helping out at home. I met with him at a fast food place and was talking with him. As much as I tried, I couldn't figure out what was wrong. He had an entitled mentality, that he deserved his car. that he deserved his phone. I tried to explain to him that these were privileges. a car is a privilege. a phone is a privilege. We got nowhere. Come to find out, he needed these things to get his drugs. he needed his phone to contact his dealer. he needed his car to get his drugs. He didn't tell me that his drugs were why he needed his car and phone so badly. But once I learned about it, it all made sense to me.

I have found many things like that in life. I may not understand why somebody responded to me like they did, until I learn about their home growing up. I may not understand why somebody holds a view about current events in the news, until I learn of some event that took place in their life. Parents, mothers and fathers, if there is something going on in the lives of your children that you just don't quite understand their behavior, dig deeper. If there is something going on the life of your friend, that you just don't quite understand, dig deeper.

Now, when it comes here to this response of these people, on the one hand, we can understand their faith in the Roman pantheon. but there are some details that are still strange to us. Why were they so quick to assume that Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes? If you dig deeper, pull out a commentary, you will discover some things that will make all of this make sense.

Almost every commentary I picked up on this week commented about the historical background of what happened in Lystra that makes these events clear. I choose to quote from John Stott, because his commentary is so clear.

The crowd's superstitious and even fanatical behavior is hard to comprehend, but some local background throws light on it. About fifty years previously the Latin Poet Ovid had narrated in his *Metamorphoses* an ancient local legend. The supreme god Jupiter (Zeus to the Greeks) and his son Mercury (Hermes) once visited the hill country of Phrygia, disguised as mortal men. In their incognito they sought hospitality but were rebuffed a thousand times. At last, however, they were offered lodging in a tiny cottage, thatched with straw and reeds from the march. Here lived an elderly peasant couple called Philemon and Baucis, who entertained them out of their poverty. Later the gods rewarded them, but destroyed by flood the homes which would not take them in.<sup>[6]</sup>

And then, John Stott explains the situation.

It is reasonable to suppose both that the Lystran people knew this story about their neighbourhood and that, if the gods were to revisit their district, they were anxious not to suffer the same fate as the inhospitable Phrygians."<sup>[7]</sup>

Now, you can fully understand why the crowd was so stirred up to worship Paul and Barnabas! They didn't want their homes flooded! In the end, they were simply seeking self-preservation! They are not so unlike our nation, ultimately worshipping themselves! How did Paul and Barnabas respond? We see this in verses 14 through 17.

### 3. The Apostles Cry Out (verses 14-17).

At first, Paul and Barnabas didn't understand what was happening with all of the frenzy around them. All they could discern was the great kindness shown to them in Lystra.

When the lame man was healed, there was an uproar among the people! They were excited and speaking in tongues. That is, they were shouting out in Lycaonian, "the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men" (verse 11). But Paul and Barnabas didn't know this language. The dynamics are easy to understand. Those in Lystra could understand Paul's Greek. But Paul couldn't understand their Lycaonian. It's as if I cried out, "Alli Bani Comi Laki Mani" This may sound like an expression of praise!

For all Paul and Barnabas knew, they were turning to the Lord. For all they knew, their reception was similar to that in Iconium, when "a great number believed" (Acts 14:1). The attention they were receiving was an expression of gratitude that these two men had come to their city. Yet, at some point Paul and Barnabas were told that they were being worshiped as gods, not simply recipients of a good hospitality. We read of their response in verse 14.

#### Acts 14:14-17

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, "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. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 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."

The sad news is that "Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them" (Acts 14:18). Here were Paul and Barnabas, pouring out their hearts about their sin. "We are not gods! You must not worship us!" We constantly see in the Scripture

when people bow to others or to an angel in worship, there is instant rebuke. When John bowed before the angel to worship, he was rebuked by the angel, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you" (Revelation 22:9).

Here, the people were worshipping Paul and Barnabas. So they tore their garments as a sign of remorse and being upset. They had missed the message. And so, they needed to hear the right message. Somehow there was a disconnect between what Paul and Barnabas were saying and what the people were doing. I'm certain that they had been preaching to them about God and his and their need for Jesus. But with the events that took place, Paul had a "Gospel Reset."<sup>[8]</sup>

Paul came to understand that when he said, "God," he had a different vision than those in Lystra had. Paul was thinking about the Almighty God who rules and reigns and has no idols. They were thinking about Zeus or Hermes or any of the other gods that bickered with each other in the pantheon of gods.

Communication begins with an idea in my head. It travels through my mouth into the ear of another. When the other person hears, it goes into the mind. The hope of communication is that the idea in my head arrives into someone else's head the same way. When Paul said, "God," the people heard "god." This was a problem. So, Paul returned to the basics.

He began by talking about themselves. He said, ...

Acts 14:15

"We also are men, of like nature with you."

In effect, Paul said, "We are not divine! We are not gods! We eat like you all do. We drink like you all do. We use the restroom like you all do. When the sun is bright, we have to shade our eyes like you all do. If you poke us, we would bleed. There is nothing spiritual about us. We are no different than all of you. Instead, we bring you good news. It's not about us. It's good news about the God who made everything. Don't follow these vain idols. Don't follow the pantheon of gods. Those gods are more like us than they are like the true God!"

If you know anything about the pantheon, you know that it's these gods having all of these quarrels with each other. Greek mythology is all about these gods who can't get along. They are like humans who are raised to some higher spiritual level. This, then, becomes their explanation of the world. Quarreling gods cannot be good. This all is bad news. But Paul transitions to the "good news." Paul told them to ...

Acts 14:15

"Turn from these vain things to a living God."

That is, the God who lives, as opposed to the dead idols. Several Psalms contrast the Lord with idols (see Psalm 115 or Psalm 135). Both of these Psalms say that idols have tongues but cannot speak. They have eyes but they cannot see. They have feet but cannot move. If you want to move the idols someplace, you have to pick them up and put them down where you want them. Once placed, they won't move. This is in contrast to the living God who can move. He acts. He creates!

Acts 14:15

"[God] made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them."

The heaven includes the moon and all of the stars. You can read about it in Genesis 1:14-19. Further, God made the earth and the sea. You can read about this in Genesis 1 as well.

From this, you need to understand that if God is the creator of all things, then he is the ruler of all things. Just like the potter has a right over the lump of clay, so God has total right over us. You need to understand this if ever you are going to understand sin or your need for a Savior.

We live in a culture that doesn't understand God. People need to hear about God. So when you are mixing with your unsaved friends this week, whether in your office or at school or in your neighborhood, make efforts to talk about God, describing him to your friends. See if they understand who God is. Because you cannot address sin and Jesus apart from a holy God. This is what Paul is doing. When it becomes clear that those in Lystra don't understand God, he seeks to orient their understanding about God. He is the living creator.

Further, God is good to his creation. One question that often arises when talking about God creating the earth is all of the bad things that happen upon the earth like murders, thefts, and wrongs done to others. Paul begins to address this in verse 16.

Acts 14:16

"In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways."

Why are bad things happening upon the earth? Because people are bad and they have sinned. They have sinned against each other and harmed each other. It's not God's fault. It's the fault of the people. God created the world and allowed people to do as they have desired. They have done bad. But God has done good to creation. He has done good to those in Lystra.

Acts 14:17

"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."

God has done good in this world. How? By providing for your physical bodies and for your hearts as well. He has given rain and food and joyful times for us all! When you think about God, you need to realize that he has given you enough food to eat. Further, he has given you good times for your heart.

Think about your holidays. Isn't Thanksgiving a good holiday? Those in Lystra may have had such a holiday. Certainly, they had some type



of Spring festival, as most cultures do. Perhaps they had a festival of lights. Think about these times. It's about feasting with family and friends. Those are joyful times. There are also joyful events such as birthdays and weddings and other celebrations. God has been good to give us these joyful occasions.

This is God's common grace to all of creation. Jesus said, "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:45). He has gone further to all of creation, by showing us all of his glory. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Everything that God has made displays his glory.

Paul spoke these things because this is exactly what they needed to hear! They needed to be reoriented in their minds regarding the one true God. Lystra is like America. People around us need to hear about God. What he's like!

I read an article this week that spoke about America's fastest growing religion. It's the religious of self-worship.<sup>[9]</sup> This article posted the sacred commandments of this ancient and still-trending world religion:

- Your mind is the source and standard of truth, so no matter what, trust yourself. #theanswersarewithin
- Your emotions are authoritative, so never question (or let anyone else question) your feelings. #followyourheart
- You are sovereign, so flex your omnipotence and bend the universe around your dreams and desires. #liveyourtruth
- You are supreme, so always act according to your chief end, to glorify and enjoy yourself forever. #yolo
- You are the summum bonum—the standard of goodness—so don't let anyone oppress you with the antiquated notion of being a sinner who needs grace. #neverchange.
- You are the Creator, so use that limitless creative power to craft your identity and purpose. #authenticity.

This is the world that we are witnessing to today. Our world desperately needs a healthy dose of God that comes from your mouth. If they don't get God, they won't get Jesus. You need first to understand God as creator, owner and ruler over us. Before you will ever understand sin and our need for a Savior: Jesus.

Isn't it interesting here in our text that Paul, in the frenzy of the moment, never had the opportunity to speak about Jesus. He was only able to lift up the goodness of God. It seems as if he never quite got the opportunity to speak about Jesus.

#### Acts 14:18

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

Who knows, it may be that they didn't even want to hear about Jesus. Those in Lystra were convinced that they were right. They weren't about to change their minds to conform to the thoughts of this traveling evangelist. Still, we need to be a faithful witness to others.

I told you all a few months ago of an interaction that Yvonne and I had with a neighbor when we were out on a walk. She was walking her dog. We greeted one another. She asked how we were. I said that we are doing great, "Solving the problems of the world." Soon after that, I added, "And all the solutions to life are found in Jesus Christ." At that moment, she turned, "Oh, there you go, bringing religion into it!" She was hostile to Jesus.

Over the past few weeks, we have had opportunity to see her on our walks. We have learned that her dog's name is Marley. We have been friendly and cordial. This week, we had another encounter with her. Yvonne and I were walking past dark. She asked how we were doing (not knowing that we were the same people). With the darkness out and the brightness of the sky, I was able to talk about the glory of God and his beauty! This time, she responded kindly, by pointing out how the stars show us how small and insignificant we are. It shows an openness that I hope to build upon in the future.

This past Friday, we found out how interesting this neighborhood is. It's like everything that I have ever dreamed of our neighborhood to be. There are many long-term residents of this neighborhood who are having regular gatherings with each other. Every Friday evening at 5pm, they gather in their driveway to drink their alcohol and talk about life with each other. This Friday it was cold enough that their gathering was in the garage with a space heater. But they invited us every Friday evening at 5pm to join them! "We drink and talk every Friday at 5pm." I have thought how the gathering could be a good opportunity for the gospel. I won't drink my alcohol, but I sure can talk with them. I wouldn't see them as a project, but as an opportunity to rejoice with them in the good relationships that God has given them. Certainly, the gospel would be my message to them. These people are lost and they need to hear the gospel. It's an open door that I'm praying about finding the time to step into if at all possible.

Now, they may turn out to be like those in Lystra. Even telling them about Jesus, they will continue on in their way, drinking away every Friday evening together.

Finally, we see, ...

#### **4. The Apostles Are Cast Out (verses 18-20).**

I already read and commented on verse 18, how these people were not going to be convinced by Paul's words. They were more convinced of the legend of Ovid than with Paul's message. So they continued on to worship Barnabas and Paul as god's come down into the flesh. Those in Lystra were not going to be so easily convinced. They had seen a miracle. Their theology and legends had informed them that these were gods come in the flesh. They weren't going to stop their worship. As much as Paul and Barnabas tried. The crowds were not going to be deterred. That is, until the Jews came. the Jews who hated the message of Jesus.

#### Acts 14:19

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.

Antioch and Iconium are the very places where Paul and Barnabas had been earlier on their missionary journey proclaiming the gospel. We aren't told how these Jews came to Lystra. It may have been family or business. It may have been the rumors of these terrible evangelists traveling to other parts that they went to oppose.

The hatred of these Jews toward the gospel is demonstrated in their intense hatred for Paul. They went to these people and persuaded the crowds, not merely to ignore these preachers and refuse to hear their message. But they also persuaded them to turn against Paul, by dragging him out of the city and stoning him to his death!

This also shows the fickleness of the crowd. At one moment, they were identifying Paul and Barnabas as gods come down from heaven. And now, they are ready to kill him! Does this sound familiar? It sounds like the triumphal entry, when the Jewish crowds were receiving their Messiah! "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Yet five days later, they cry out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (Matthew 27:22). They turned against Paul as quickly as the Jews turned against Jesus. So, Paul felt himself to be in good society.

Paul alludes to his stoning in 2 Corinthians 11:24-25, when he writes about the sufferings that he received from the hands of the Jews, "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned!" Right here in Lystra was when he was stoned and left for dead.

Paul also referred to his sufferings in a letter written to Timothy.<sup>[10]</sup> He wrote of "my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me" (2 Timothy 3:11). This is what it means for God to rescue us from our trials and troubles. It may not mean removing all of the pain and hardships from us. Paul was left for dead! Yet Paul said that the Lord rescued him out of this trial.

How could Paul say such a thing? He was made to walk! Just like Paul granted the ability of the lame man to walk, so also God granted Paul the ability to walk after having been left for dead.

#### Acts 14:20

But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

One last point. When Paul rose up, where did he go? Verse 20 says that "he rose up and entered the city." What city is being talked about here? Lystra! Paul is going right back into the city which stoned him!

I think Paul was saying, "I didn't finish my sermon! I didn't tell you about Jesus. Let me tell you about Jesus!" He wanted to back into the city to finish his sermon!

That's the story of Lystra. It's a great story. But let us remember the lesson: we need to be attuned to the world-view of those to whom we speak, that we might accurately communicate the gospel to them.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 14, 2021 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org](http://www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org).

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[1] Ken Ham, *Gospel Reset* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2018), 15-19.

[2] Here's a good online reference to follow along with the map: <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/9-pauls-journey-to-cyprus-pamphylia-galatia-paul-starts-his-1st-missionary-journey/>.

[3] Here's a link to my sermon at the exact time when I enacted the joy of this man leaping and praising God: <https://youtu.be/qGp6DAYQuSY?t=872>.

[4] My source of information is <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus>.

[5] My source of information is <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermes>.

[6] John Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity-Press, 1990), 230-231

[7] *Ibid.*, 231.

[8] This is a reference to the book I quoted at the beginning of my message. See footnote #1 above.

[9] Thaddeus Williams, "Self-Worship Is the World's Fastest Growing Religion," <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/self-worship-booms/>.

[10] It is interesting to note that Timothy was from Lystra. This is Timothy's hometown (see Acts 16:1). The Jewish population there was obviously small, as they didn't have a synagogue in the city. Timothy's mother and grandmother were godly influences in his life (2 Timothy 1:5). So, Timothy was very aware of the sufferings of Paul.