

## **Paul's Missionary Journeys Handout #4**

Having left Iconium, Paul and Barnabas travel south to Lystra where they encounter a crippled man and Paul heals him. The reaction of the people might be better understood with some background from the folk lore of the area. Barclay records that "The people round Lystra told a story that once Zeus and Hermes had come to this earth incognito and in disguise. There was none in all the land who would give them hospitality. At last two old peasants, Philemon and his wife Baucis, took them in and were kind to them. The result was that the whole population was wiped out by the gods except Philemon and Baucis who were made the guardians of a splendid temple and who were turned into two great trees when they died." With this backdrop, let's read what happens to Paul and Barnabas.

### **Acts 14:8-13**

**Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup> He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, <sup>10</sup> said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. <sup>11</sup> 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!" <sup>12</sup> Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup> 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.**

Barclay continues, "So when Paul healed the cripple man the people of Lystra were determined this time not to make the same mistake and to ignore the gods again. Barnabas must have been a man of noble presence so they took him for Zeus the king of the gods. Hermes was the god of speech and the messenger of the gods and, since Paul was the speaker, they called him Hermes."

**Question: What examples of folklore, stories, or superstitions have been passed down for generations in our culture, maybe especially here in Hawaii, in which something hard to explain is given god-like importance or meaning?**

**How might we redirect people who hold onto such beliefs so that they could be introduced to the real living God?**

Let's look at how Paul and Barnabas react and what they say in response to these people.

### **Acts 14:14-18**

**But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, <sup>15</sup> "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. <sup>16</sup> In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.**

Barclay points out something significant about how Paul handles this situation. It won't be the only time that he uses this approach with people, and it might be something instructive for us. "But the passage is specially interesting because it gives us Paul's approach to those who were completely heathen and who had no Jewish background to which he could appeal. When Paul talked to such people he started from nature to get to God. All men knew about the rain and the sun and the seedtime and the harvest; and Paul started there to lead men's minds to the God who was behind it all. Paul, like the great teacher he was, did what every teacher must do - he started from the here and now to get to the there and then. We would do well sometimes to remember that the world is the garment of the living God. It is told once, as they sailed in the Mediterranean, Napoleon's suite were discussing God. In the talk they had eliminated God altogether. Napoleon had been silent but at the end of the talk he lifted his hand and pointed at the sea and the sky, 'Gentlemen', he said, 'who made all this?' Sometimes we would do well to look at the world and remember the God who made all this."

**Question: As we think about how important nature and "mother earth" is to so many in our community and the world today, what might be some ways we could use Paul's method in our conversations?**

**If you think about the first articles of the two creeds we use in our worship services, how might those be used as our starting point for conversation to help lead people from "here and now to then and there"?**

In spite of the crowds still considering Paul and Barnabas to be gods, not everything is going to go well for them.

#### **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.**

**Question: What do you think it was like for Paul to be adored and idolized by one group and then to have another throwing stones at him, trying to kill him? How do you think you would feel?**

**In what ways do you think this sort of thing happens to Christians today, or do you think it does? What about to Christian leaders, like pastors?**

"It is true that Lystra was a Roman colony; but it was an outpost. Nevertheless, when the people saw what they had done they were afraid. That is why they dragged what they thought was Paul's dead body out of the city. They were afraid of the strong hand of Roman justice and they were trying to get rid of Paul's body to escape the consequences of their riot."

#### **Acts 14:20-23**

**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. <sup>21</sup>When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we**

**must enter the kingdom of God. <sup>23</sup> And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.**

“But the outstanding feature of this story is the sheer dauntless courage of Paul. When he came to his senses again his first act was to go right back into that city where he had been stoned. It never struck him to run away. It was John Wesley’s advice, ‘Always look a mob in the face.’ Paul never did a braver thing than to go straight back into the city which had tried to murder him. It is quite clear that a deed like that would have more effect than a hundred sermons. Men were bound to ask themselves whence came the courage that enabled a man to act in such a way.”

**Question: What do you think about the courage Paul shows in returning directly to the city where he was stoned; was it courage or foolishness?**

Paul and Barnabas travel east to Derbe and seem to make a short stop there before turning around and returning to the cities they have just passed through. Surely, they knew that those who had opposed them before would still be there, but they also knew that the new believers there would need to be encouraged. They also needed to leave a structure in place for the ongoing growth of the churches in those communities.

**Question: What is the “reality check” message they give these people?**

**What structure do they put in place for the ongoing encouragement and growth of these new “churches”?**

**In what ways does the Christian church communicate this message to its members today?**

**How well does the structure of the church today work to strengthen the souls of her people?**