

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

WHEN WE MAKE GODS

Acts 14:8-20

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Today's sermon has four points:

- Paul performed a miracle.
- The crowd's praise was misguided.
- The apostles protested.
- The crowd persecuted the apostles.

Paul and Barnabas continued to travel and tell people about Jesus. Some people believed but many did not. The apostles faced opposition and persecution in almost every place they visited. Today's story is set in Lystra.

PAUL PERFORMED A MIRACLE

SCRIPTURE: Acts 14:8-10

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.

EXPLANATION: During this time in history, many people considered disabilities or physical handicaps a punishment from God. Because individuals with disabilities had limited opportunities to earn an income for themselves, they were at the mercy of other people. There was no unemployment benefit. Their friends and family often placed them in well-traveled areas so they could beg. A prime location was near the temple or synagogue where they hoped to find people in a generous spirit. Since it was Paul's custom to visit and preach in or near a synagogue, it is likely that is where Paul met this man.

ILLUSTRATION: What if today, as you entered our church building, you saw a crippled man sitting on the front steps begging? Would you have compassion? I have to say, I must not grow calloused to helping people who have genuine needs. Last week, I saw a man with a sign who said he needed help. Nearby was a woman and two children. I told him the tire store right on the corner where we were standing was hiring. He said something in Spanish so I replied in Spanish. Then he said “Italiano, Italiano.” It’s hard to know who has real need and who does not.

Now, imagine if you will, that every day for as long as you can remember, the sidewalk to the church was lined with beggars. Would that change the way you might react?

Familiarity blindness is the problem we sometimes have with not seeing things that are right in front of our eyes. Some of us have experienced this when we have written a report for school or work. We work so hard to make sure that there are no errors. We read and re-read before finally turning it in. Then, a few days later, we notice a glaring mistake that we previously overlooked. Maybe you have this problem with your spouse or children. You send them to the fridge or pantry to grab something, but they insist it’s not there. When you point it out, they are amazed. How could it have disappeared and reappeared like magic?

Sometimes, we can overlook something that is staring us right in the face. This is especially true when we are not expecting to see anything different.

APPLICATION: The people of Lystra were probably so used to this lame man that they did not give him much thought. They probably ignored him completely. They did not notice him or concern themselves with his presence. But the Bible tells us that Paul looked directly at him. He zeroed in on him. Paul recognized that this man was listening and receptive to the message. Then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul healed him.

- Is there anyone in your life you are overlooking?
- Maybe there is someone that God has strategically placed in your path just so you can be a blessing or so that person can be a blessing to you?
- How often do we dismiss people because they are common?
- How often do we ignore people simply because we see them every day?

- Are we paying attention?

Paul noticed the lame man, and his life changed forever. Paul performed a miracle.

THE CROWD’S PRAISE WAS MISGUIDED

SCRIPTURE: Acts 14:11-13

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.

EXPLANATION: When the lame man started walking, the crowd paid attention. Unfortunately, they did not give credit where credit was due. The people of Lystra saw the miracle and believed that Paul and Barnabas were the mythical Greek gods they worshipped. Zeus was supposed to be the deity of the sky. He was portrayed as an older man with a beard. Hermes was Zeus’s son. Since the people called Barnabas Zeus, it makes me wonder if he was or at least appeared to be older than Paul. Since Paul was the chief spokesman, the people dubbed him Hermes who was thought to be a messenger of the gods. Instead of listening to the message, the people saw the miracle and jumped to conclusions. Believing that Paul performed the miracle by his own power, they dubbed the apostles gods with a lowercase “g.”

ILLUSTRATION: Recently, a young married couple travelled from Georgia back home to Kentucky. As the wife drove 70 miles an hour down a busy interstate near Chattanooga, TN, she saw a semi bounce across the divide between the north and southbound lanes. It barreled across the road in front of her. By the time she maneuvered her vehicle onto the shoulder, she realized that the semi was headed straight toward them. It stopped about three car lengths away. Not one car was hit. Not one person was injured.

Some people might say that was really good luck. Some people might even give credit to all the drivers for their quick thinking or their awesome driving skills. But the parents, grandparents, and friends of that young couple know better than that.

They had been praying for their safe travels, and they praised the Lord for his hand of protection.

APPLICATION: When good things happen to you or around you, who do you credit? Do you think that it's a matter of fortune? Do you look for a man to praise, or do you give credit where credit is due?

The Bible tells us that all good things are a gift of the Father. Thank him for the good things in your life.

- Paul performed a miracle.
- The crowd's praise was misguided.

THE APOSTLES PROTESTED

SCRIPTURE: Acts 14:14-18

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.

EXPLANATION: Of course, Paul and Barnabas were horrified with the crowd's actions.

- They tried to argue with the people.
- They tried to introduce them to the one true God.
- They pointed to their own humanity.
- They reminded them of all the blessings that God had given them.

Still, the people persisted. They simply would not listen to reason. The crowd saw Paul heal the lame man and assumed he had power. They thought that if they

worshipped him, they could gain his favor and secure his blessing because, after all, that's what gods do.

- A god has power over us and our fortunes.
- We seek the advice of gods.
- We imitate gods.
- We think they will solve our problems or make our lives better.

APPLICATION: You may not have ever bowed down to a wooden idol or tried to make a sacrifice to a golden calf, but maybe you have made the mistake this crowd made. Have you ever made your own god? Before you answer, really think about that question.

- Who do you try to imitate?
- Who do you call first when you have a problem?
- Who do you spend the most time with?
- Who or what are you willing to sacrifice your money for?
- Is anything more important to you than God?

It is our human nature to worship. If you look back in history, people of all races, of all ages, throughout all of humanity have worshipped something or someone. If you choose not to worship the true God, the creator of Heaven and Earth, you will still worship something. You may worship things like money or possessions. You may put your faith in power or positions. You may make the mistake of idolizing someone you admire or love. Like many in this world, you may believe that the only person you can trust is yourself. But, in the end, those things, those people, can never save us. We can only have one God. Who are you worshipping today?

- Paul performed a miracle.
- The crowd gave Paul the credit.
- The apostles protested.

THE CROWD PERSECUTED THE APOSTLES

SCRIPTURE: Acts 14:19-20

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.

EXPLANATION: False gods will always disappoint. As Paul and Barnabas continued to reason with the crowd, some dissenters came into the mix. They stirred up the crowds, and when the people realized that the apostles were merely the men they claimed to be, they were disappointed, angry, and probably embarrassed at themselves. Although they tried to kill Paul, God saved him, and the apostles continued on their way.

- Paul performed a miracle.
- The crowd gave Paul the credit.
- The apostles protested.
- The crowd persecuted the apostles.

CONCLUSION: When we make gods, there will always be disappointment and anger because no one and nothing can fill the place in our lives that is set aside for our Savior. What about you? Who or what are you trusting today? If you're trusting anything or anyone other than the Living God, you are sure to be disappointed.

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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