

## **“The Fickle Heart of Man” - Acts 14:8-20**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **A. Fame**

1. Interesting looking at the ads for the Ventura Theater on Chestnut in Ventura
2. Bands play there almost every week that at one time were really big
3. Played venues like the Forum in LA, and the Cow Palace in San Francisco
4. But now, there playing to small crowds in places like Ventura
5. [Name some]
6. In the music business, fame is fleeting
  - a. riding the gravy train one minute
  - b. the next your driving a broken down bus
7. Another place we see how fleeting fame is, is in Professional athletics
8. Consider baseball . . .
  - a. it seems almost on a weekly basis, someone new had captured the limelight
  - b. and in baseball, the standard phrase team managers ask their players is - “So, what have you done for me lately.”
  - c. the guy everyone is giving a standing “O” for today –
  - d. tomorrow is booed off the field

### **II. TEXT**

#### **A. Vs. 8-10**

**{8} And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.**

**{9} This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed,**

**{10} said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.**

1. Barnabas & Paul are on their first missionary trip
  - a. they are on the mainland of Asia and are going from city to city sharing the good news of God's love and grace
  - b. their pattern when coming to a new city was to go to the synagogue of the Jews and begin their teaching there
  - c. they did this because much of their message was drawn from the OT scriptures which were read each Sabbath
  - d. the response to their message was pretty consistent in every city
    - 1) many of the God-fearing Gentiles who attended the synagogue services came to faith in Jesus
    - 2) as well as a few of the Jews
    - 3) but the majority of Jews resisted and became hostile toward

## Barnabas & Paul

- 4) and they ran them out of town
- e. so far in the story, this has happened in Antioch of Pisidia, and in Iconium
- f. now they arrive in Lystra
- g. but this time we don't read that they went to the synagogue to begin their ministry
- h. it appears that they began in some other place - probably the market area, where there would always be a crowd
2. Paul begins to speak, and as he does, people gather round to listen
  - a. in many cities of the ancient world,
  - b. special places were set aside in the marketplace for public announcements
  - c. they were used by the city leaders and special envoys or messengers from the government
  - d. they were also places where people would hang out, sharing gossip and news about events of the day
  - e. that is likely where Paul & Barnabas went
  - f. as Paul stood up and began to speak, people would naturally think something somewhat official was being proclaimed
3. As he shares, his eyes keep coming back to one man who was seated there among the crowd
  - a. it was obvious by his appearance that the man was crippled
  - b. his feet were without strength, meaning they were withered
  - c. the three-fold description is meant to impress us with the fact that this man was a hard case
    - 1) Luke tells us he was without strength in his feet,
    - 2) a cripple from birth
    - 3) he had never walked!
  - d. as Paul preached, his eyes scanned his audience, and came repeatedly back to this man
  - e. there was a connection made between this man and Paul
  - f. Paul could see that this man was not only listening intently to him, but that what he was hearing was being received and believed
  - g. there was something about his countenance - something about the way he responded to Paul's words, that indicated to Paul it was time for this man to receive a touch from God
4. So Paul looks at him, and with a loud and sure voice, issues the command for this man to stand
5. That was all the man needed to hear
6. He acted by faith, stood up - and sure enough, he was healed!

## **B. Vs. 11-12**

**{11} Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"**

**{12} And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.**

1. Here's evidence this occurred in a public place rather than a synagogue
2. There were people around who witnessed the miracle of this man's healing
3. And they weren't moved to give glory to the God of Israel –
4. Rather, their praise went to the pagan gods of Greece; Zeus & Hermes
  - a. in fact, they started proclaiming that Barnabas and Paul were Zeus & Hermes
  - b. Zeus was the head of the pantheon of Greek gods
    - 1) and no doubt they called Barnabas Zeus because he was of larger stature and more dignified bearing than Paul
    - 2) from several other passages in the NT we get the impression that Paul was rather short and wasn't exactly someone you'd find on the cover of GQ
  - c. Hermes was son of Zeus and the messenger, or spokesmen for the gods
    - 1) Paul gets that designation because he was the one who did the preaching
5. The crowd spoke in their native language, and at first Barnabas & Paul didn't understand them
6. That's why they didn't try to correct them right away

### **C. V. 13**

**{13} Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.**

1. Archaeological digs at the site of ancient Lystra have discovered this temple to Zeus
2. Two inscriptions dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century identify that both Zeus and Hermes were worshipped there, and one even refers to the “priests of Zeus”
3. As soon as the priest heard the news that the two gods had decided to visit the city, he did the priestly thing and gathered up sacrifice and offerings to make to them
4. The urgency of the crowd and the priest was due to the fact that there was a story told among them at this time that many years before, Zeus & Hermes had visited this same area and had gone from door to door looking for someone to show them hospitality
  - a. they visited a 1000 homes before someone finally invited them in
  - b. the story went that Philemon and his wife Baucis were poor, elderly folk who lived in a humble cottage of straw and reeds
  - c. they spread out a banquet for their guests that strained their meager resources to the breaking point
  - d. in appreciation, the gods transformed their cottage into a temple with a gold roof and marble pillars
  - e. Philemon & Baucis they appointed priest and priestess of the temple
  - f. who instead of dying, became an oak and a linden tree next to the temple
  - g. but before Zeus and Hermes left the area, they destroyed all the houses

- of those who had rejected them
5. When these people saw the miracle of the crippled man's healing, they correctly identified it as the finger of God
  6. But they misapplied it to the finger of Zeus or Hermes
  7. They didn't want to run the risk of incurring the gods wrath, so they immediately set to show due homage to Barnabas & Paul
  8. I'm sure it must have been a bit bewildering to Paul & Barnabas at first as they heard the uproar of the people in another language
    - a. they saw their excitement
    - b. and then it wasn't long before they saw the priest of Zeus heading toward them leading an ox and carrying garlands of flowers
    - c. now, Barnabas & Paul were sharp
    - d. they had witnessed the pagan sacrifices of people just like this in other places
    - e. and it didn't take them long to figure out what was going on
    - f. so they asked the people to tell them what they were doing . . .

#### **D. Vs. 14-18**

**{14} But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out**

**{15} and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them,**

**{16} "who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.**

**{17} "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."**

**{18} And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.**

1. It was utterly unthinkable to Barnabas & Paul that they should be thought of, let alone treated, as gods
2. They were mere men, not really very unlike those in the crowd around them
3. So they took the drastic action of tearing their clothes
  - a. remember that in the ancient world, they didn't have malls and clothing stores on every corner like we do today
  - b. there were no Marshall's or TJ Maxx, or even a WalMart to go to
  - c. the making of clothes was time consuming and very costly
  - d. most people possessed only one, or two changes of clothing
  - e. in fact, wealth was often marked by how many clothes one had
  - f. when a person took the cloth of their clothing in hand, and purposely rent it - it would bring an immediate and startled response from those around them
  - g. there was really no more definitive way to arrest the attention of people than to tear your clothing

4. Paul & Barnabas did so because they realized drastic action needed to be taken
5. These people had to be stopped from sacrificing to them and treating them as though they were gods
6. Now, stop and think for a moment how very tempting this actually have been to Barnabas & Paul
  - a. to be treated as a god!
  - b. to have people fawn before you
  - c. to have people lay themselves before you and consent to do what ever you say - if it will mean you bestow blessing on them
  - d. is there any more fundamental and seductive temptation than that
  - e. consider what prompted the fall of the human race
    - 1) it was Satan's offer that man could become a god
    - 2) ultimately, this deception is what lies at the heart of ALL sin
  - f. and now, here is a crowd of people singing the praises of and worshipping Barnabas and Paul
  - g. I'm sure there was a pull of tremendous strength that gripped the heart of these men --
  - h. a temptation to stand and accept the praise
  - i. they probably even had a fleeting thought of rationalization that said that if they encouraged the crowd's praise and respect, it would provide them a platform to proclaim the gospel with even greater effectiveness, because now the people would give them rapt attention
  - j. yes – maybe this was the hand of God Himself prospering their mission!!!!!!
7. We've all heard the voice of rationalization of sin haven't we?
  - a. we all know that subtle counsel of pride that seeks to justify sin and tell us that really it's okay
  - b. that God's word doesn't apply in our case
  - c. or that God will make an exception for us
  - d. friend, it's no wonder Satan chose the form of a serpent when he seduced Eve to sin
  - e. as it says in Genesis, the serpent was subtlest creature of the field
  - f. indeed, his temptations are subtle [sssssssssssubtle]
  - g. and if you listen closely to the voice of rationalization, you will hear the hiss of the serpent still
8. But Barnabas & Paul rejected the devil's offer and moved in among the people with torn clothes
9. And with impassioned words, they were just barely able to convince them to stop

### **E. Vs. 19-20**

**{19} Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.**

1. Personally, I find this to be one of the most troubling passages in the entire

bible

2. In v. 18 we read that they were barely able to restrain the crowd from sacrificing to them as gods, and in the very next verse, they kill Paul
3. Some of the Jews who had opposed them in Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra, bent on creating trouble for them there
4. When they arrive, they begin to sow seeds of distrust and discord among the crowds
5. They cast Barnabas & Paul as dangerous men who need to be put away
6. And the passions of the people, which had been burning so hot in the direction of worship, swing to the other side of the scale and burn hot toward rage and hatred
7. They picked up stones and pummeled Paul till he was bloody and unconscious
8. Thinking him dead, they disposed of his body by dragging it outside the city gates where they left it - probably for the wild dogs that lived in such places as scavengers

**{20} However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.**

9. Paul wasn't dead, though the crowd and the disciples all thought so
10. From all appearances, he looked as though he couldn't have survived it
11. In fact, as we read in his letter to the Corinthians, he didn't; he did die at this point [\[1\]](#)
12. But he came back, stood up, and went right back into the city
13. One thing you'd have to say about Paul - he wasn't timid or afraid
14. I guess he figured, "Look, they killed my and God sent me back. What else can they do?"

## **F. The Fickle Heart of Man**

1. There are several things we can learn from this passage but what I'd like to concentrate on this morning is the startling change that took place in the crowd's attitude toward Paul
2. One minute they treat him as a god - the next they treat him as a criminal
3. One minute they are throwing flowers - the next they are hurling stones
4. One moment they are singing songs of praise - the next, they are gnashing their teeth
5. They *adore* - then they *abhor*
6. Are their actions reasonable? Does what we see here make good sense?
7. No - but what we see here is very true to human nature apart from Christ
8. For what we see here is the fickle heart of man
9. You see friends, God has created us for Himself
10. And in the heart of every man, woman, and child there is a empty place that can only be filled by God
11. Nothing else can fill that place
12. Pascal, called it a God-shaped vacuum
13. Augustine put it this way, "You have made us for Thyself O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

14. Indeed, human history is the story of man's attempt to fill the emptiness of his heart with everything but God
  - a. at first man tried religion - but it didn't satisfy
  - b. then man tried power, but that too didn't satisfy
  - c. then man tried knowledge, but that still left him empty
  - d. next he tried wealth, but once again he was disappointed
  - e. now, in our time, man is trying technology, but still the emptiness goes unfilled
15. In our passage today, we saw people trying the route of religion
  - a. but it was a religion of their own design
  - b. and as a result it didn't satisfy
16. When Barnabas & Paul pointed out their error, rather than really listening to them and coming to a knowledge of the truth, they became resentful and angry that the emptiness of their hearts was revealed
17. So they picked up stones to end what they thought was the source of their discomfort
18. But Paul wasn't it - it was their own emptiness, their own rejection of God
19. Paul was simply the one God had sent to them to point it out
20. We see the fickle heart of man every where we turn
  - a. at the mall
  - b. on the freeway
  - c. at school
  - d. at work
  - e. we see it on TV, we hear it on the radio
21. We see it every time people pursue some new thing, some new interest or hobby
22. Like butterflies in a field of flowers, their heart will light upon this, then that, drawing pleasure for a moment, but then it is used up and off they go to something new
23. But they never rest -they can never rest, because their heart was made for God alone

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. *Christians With Fickle Hearts***

1. One of the hardest types of counseling I have to do is with Christians with fickle hearts
2. They can't seem to find any rest
  - a. they flit from one thing to another
  - b. they are always busy, but never seem to really get anything done
  - c. usually they are caught up in the pursuits of the world
  - d. trying to find satisfaction in the things of the world
3. They are saved - they believe that Jesus died for their sins and rose again from the dead to give them new life
4. But they see the Christian faith more as fire insurance than anything else
5. It's good for getting into heaven - but as far as daily life here on earth is

- concerned, they don't make the connection
6. Listen, I want to tell you an important truth: Jesus didn't just die to get us into heaven after we die – He also rose again to get heaven INTO us now!
  7. God want's us to give Him that secret place in our heart so that He can come to live there, today, tomorrow,, Tuesday, Wednesday . . .
  8. And it isn't until we learn this and appropriate this that we will find rest
  9. Are you restless? Give your heart to God not the world

***B. Finally [To The Lost – How about you?]***

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[\[1\]](#) 2 Cor. 12:2-4