

Fickle – Acts 14:8-20

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Set the Scene*

1. Paul & Barnabas were part of the leadership team in the booming church at Antioch in Syria.
2. One day as they'd given themselves to a special time of seeking God through prayer & fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke through a word of prophecy that they were to embark on a mission.
3. They set sail for the Island of Cyprus, where they traveled from one end to the other, preaching the gospel in every city they visited.
4. Then they sailed north to the coast of Asia Minor, modern day Turkey.
 - a. Making their way north, they again preached & taught in every city they came to,
 - b. Planting churches all along the way.
5. Their pattern was to go first to the Jewish synagogue.
 - a. They figured the Jews would be the most apt to respond to the Gospel because Jesus was the Messiah they'd been looking for, for generations.
 - b. Some believed, but where the Gospel proved most fruitful was among the God-fearing Gentiles who attended the synagogue.
 - c. The Jews who *rejected* the Gospel often became hostile toward Paul & Barnabas & began to create trouble.
 - d. Paul & Barnabas weren't scared of them; they stayed & continued to work until their presence created trouble for the new believers.
 - e. Then they'd move on to the next city.
6. In this manner, Paul & Barnabas worked their way along the main road from Perga, to Pisidian Antioch, & Iconium.
7. When they arrived in Lystra, something unusual happened.

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. There was no synagogue in Lystra, so Barnabas & Paul took advantage of the *city square* to proclaim the Gospel.
2. A public forum was a standard fixture of Greek & Roman cities.
 - a. It was usually located near the marketplace where there would always be lots of people.
 - b. A raised dais held a seat where the city magistrate would sit & render judgments on both civil & criminal matters.
 - c. Anytime a citizen of the Empire wanted to make an announcement, he would stand on the steps & shout his message.

- d. All important news was proclaimed there.
3. Since there was no synagogue in Lystra, Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to proclaim the Great News of Salvation from the position of this public venue.
4. As he spoke, not far away sat a man who'd been born lame.
 - a. He was probably there in that busy place because he was begging.
 - b. As he listened to Paul preach the Gospel & teach on the life & work of Christ, he heard great words of hope.
 - c. Jesus had healed the weak & infirm. The more Paul spoke, the greater his faith grew.
5. As Paul looked around at those gathered to listen, he saw the hope grow on the lame man's countenance, & perceiving it was his time to be healed, as Peter had done with the lame man at the temple gate some 15 years before, he boldly told the man to Rise.
6. He did. Standing up his legs were made whole & he put them to good use jumping around the square.

7. There's a minor point I want to draw on here before we move on.
8. In v. 9 Luke says – Paul **saw** the lame man had faith to be healed.
 - a. The word means to **know** something because you **see** it.
 - b. How? What did Paul **see** that informed him of the lame man's faith?
 - c. His **countenance!** Faith in Jesus had transformed this man's countenance so that hope shone where it had not been before.
9. Last Wednesday we read how when Barnabas visited Antioch to check on the revival there, he **SAW** THE GRACE OF GOD at work among the people.
 - a. The presence & power of the Spirit to conform lost sinners into saved children of God was so real Barnabas could SEE it.
 - b. He could tell who the believers were just by looking at them.
10. On our first few trips to Russia, our Russian guides encouraged us to watch ourselves when out in public.
 - a. They didn't mean we needed to be cautious against crime,
 - b. They meant we needed to rein in our tendency to be loud & boisterous.
 - c. Years of oppression had taught the Russians to avoid drawing attention to themselves.
 - d. So when they were out in public, walking the streets, which nearly everyone did because only a few had cars,
 - 1) They didn't talk to each other.
 - 2) They didn't laugh.
 - 3) They didn't wear clothing that stood out.
 - 3) They didn't make grand, expansive movements,
 - 4) Everything they did was an attempt to blend in.
 - e. It didn't take long till we were able to tell who the Americans were in Russia,
 - 1) They wore bright colors.
 - 2) And they walked down the street together, laughing, talking, punching each other in the arm.
 - 3) The Russians would cross to the other side of the street, not wanting to

- be seen near the foreigners.
- f. And while Russians would avoid Americans *in public*, they craved hanging out with us in our hotel rooms.
 - 1) We'd have laugh fests where they would at first smile, then giggle, then join right in to our joy.
 - 2) They asked to be a part of these nightly hotel room celebrations.
 - 3) They were drawn to them likes moths to a light.
 - g. We were in Russia, but we were Americans and the joy of our citizenship could not be taken from us just because we weren't in our native land.
11. As Christians we are citizens of Heaven and children of Almighty God.
 12. Though we live in an oppressive land, that doesn't change the fact of our identity nor steal the joy our faith brings.
 13. That joy, that faith, that hope ought to mark us, sit on us, like our being Americans marked us in Russia.
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14. Have you ever gone to the movie and had to stand in line waiting for the previous show to get out so you can go in and get a seat?
 - a. I like to watch the faces of the people *exiting* the theater.
 - b. They've just seen the flick and their countenance usually gives you a pretty good idea if the movie's going to be good or not.
 - c. If it's a comedy and no one comes out smiling, it's a dud.
 - d. If it's an action movie and people come out with bored expressions, it's no good.
 15. So, what does your countenance convey about your faith?
 16. Listen – God loves you & has a wonderful plan for your life.
Jesus died for your sins and rose again to give you a new life.

HALLELUJAH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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. The crowd was excited by the miracle of healing & got all worked up.
2. They spoke in a dialect Barnabas & Paul didn't understand, so the 2 had no idea what a mistake they were making in their assumptions about who the apostles were.
 - a. The Lystrans concluded Barnabas & Paul were a couple of their chief deities - Zeus & Hermes.
 - b. They thought this because according to popular myths & legends, the gods would often assume human form & stroll around.
 - c. It was the divine version of *cruising*.
3. Barnabas was the larger of the duo, so they named him Zeus, head of the gods.
4. And because Paul was the spokesman they called him Hermes, Zeus' son and the messenger of the gods.

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. Archaeologists have unearthed this ancient temple to Zeus just outside the ruins of Lystra.
 2. Inscriptions identify both Zeus & Hermes were worshipped there. One refers to the priests of Zeus who served there.
 3. As soon as the priest heard the 2 gods were visiting, he did the *priestly thing* & gathered up sacrifices & offerings & headed into town.
 4. The people hurried Barnabas & Paul toward the temple & the 2 groups met at the city gate.
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5. The *urgency* of the crowd & priest was because there was a popular story from a few years before, Zeus & Hermes had visited this same area going door to door seeking hospitality.
 - a. Supposedly they visited a thousand homes before someone finally invited them in.
 - b. Philemon & his wife Baucis were poor senior citizens living in a humble cottage.
 - c. But they spread a banquet for their guests that used up their meager resources.
 - d. In appreciation, Zeus transformed their cottage into a temple with a gold roof & marble pillars.
 - e. Philemon & Baucis were made the priest & priestess, & never died.
 - f. But before Zeus & Hermes left, they destroyed all the houses of who'd failed to invite them in.
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6. When the Lystrans saw this healing, they correctly identified it as the finger of God, they just attributed it to the wrong deity.
 7. They didn't want to incur divine displeasure, so they set about to show homage to Barnabas & Paul.
 8. The furor of the crowd was at first bewildering to the apostles.
 9. But when they saw the priest of Zeus leading oxen & carrying offerings, they realized what was going on.
 10. They'd witnessed pagan sacrifices before & the realization of what the people were so excited about hit them like a ton of bricks.

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 unthinkable to the apostles that they should be **thought** of as gods.
2. They were mere men & apart from Jesus, no different from those in the crowd.
3. To **prove** this, they tore their clothes.
 - a. The ancient world didn't have clothing stores on every corner like we do today.
 - b. There were no *Targets* or *WalMarts* with rack after rack of inexpensive clothes.
 - c. The making of clothes was time-consuming and costly.
 - d. Most people owned only 1 outfit.
 - e. You were considered fairly well-off if you had 2 or 3 sets of clothes.
 - f. The wealthy had 4 to 5. Any more than that and you were considered **super-rich**.
 - g. So, if someone **purposely** tore their garment, it was a sign of utmost concern & grief.
 - h. It was an act meant to arrest the attention of those around & pull them up short.
4. The apostle rent their garments here as a way to halt the crowd's headlong pursuit of foolishness. Drastic action needed to be taken & this was it.
5. They had to be stopped from treating Barnabas & Paul as though they were gods.

6. Now, think for a moment how **tempting** this could have been to the apostles.
 - a. They'd been chased out of the last 2 places by hostile opposition.
 - b. Now here in Lystra, the entire city is ready to **worship** them.
 - c. It's fun to have people fawn over you, to prostrate themselves before & honor you as special.
7. Is there any more fundamental & seductive temptation than that?
 - a. Consider what prompted the Fall of the human race in the Garden -
 - b. Satan suggested man could become a god.
8. Well, after a couple of disappointments in Antioch & Iconium, here's a crowd of people singing their praises & worshipping them.
9. As appealing as this might have been, the apostles would not entertain it for a moment.
10. They tore their clothes & moved in among the people to reason with them at eye level – face to face, up close & personal.
 - a. They understood the need to make themselves tangible, present, equal to the people.
 - b. They didn't stand **away** from them, **up** on some pedestal, **pretending** humility.
 - c. They got right down on the same ground as them, among them, eye to eye.
11. You've seen people who when they're praised, they deflect it, trying to **appear** humble, but they do so in a way that actually uses the feigned humility as a calculated ploy to make themselves look good.
 - a. No one likes an arrogant boaster. We respect humility.
 - b. The clever manipulator knows that, & uses the **show** of humility to make himself look even better.
12. Barnabas & Paul loathed anything in themselves that found the adulation of the

- crowd as something to seek after.
13. Their humility was genuine & proved by their *refusal* to stand aloof and distant.
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14. Even with such a clear demonstration of their simple humanity, they were *barely* able to keep the sacrifices from being offered.
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15. At this point, what the Lystrans **OUGHT** to have done was realize the *true greatness* of the apostles.
 - a. These were mere men who'd been in a position to take them for all they were worth.
 - b. But they refused, even to the point of alienating the Lystrans.
 - c. I mean, they **WANTED** to worship Paul & Barnabas.
 16. The apostles have proven themselves to be great men.
 - a. Their message was fantastic!
 - b. Their power amazing!
 - c. Their humility astounding!
 - d. And their righteousness outstanding!
 17. Look at what the Gospel does! Look at what kind of men it makes!
 18. All of this ought to have produced an awareness in the Lystrans that Christianity offers a new way to be human.
 19. **Better** than their myths, legends, and religions of fickle gods who play with people for sport & entertainment – the Gospel produces people who are genuinely GOOD!
 20. They aren't perfect, but they're being perfected.
 21. Sadly, that's NOT what the Lystrans concluded . . .

E. V. 19

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. At the instigation of hostile Jews who'd come from the previous 2 cities the apostles had visited, the crowd attacked them & stoned Paul to death.
2. Then they dragged his corpse outside the city walls and left him for the wild beasts.

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.

3. Not all the Lystrans took part in Paul's stoning; some of them had been led to faith and gathered round Paul's body.
 - a. They were probably stunned, shocked.
 - b. But while they stood there wondering what to do, Paul stirred, opened his eyes, stood up and went right back in to the city.
4. They cleaned him up then he & Barnabas moved on to the next city.

F. Man is Fickle

1. Don't miss the incredible *irony* in this story.
 - a. In v. 18 the apostles were barely able to restrain the crowd from worshipping them.

- b. In the next verse, they stone Paul.
2. Talk about fickle! The Lystrans were the poster children for fickleness.
3. They see a miracle and conclude the worker is a god, then at nothing but some clever words they're convinced he's a dangerous criminal who must be gotten rid of.
4. Wow! That makes sense.

5. Here's the point – It's not just the Lystrans who are fickle, all people are – the world is.
6. Sin has bent the human race so it doesn't think straight about spiritual things.
 - a. Morally, man is all messed up!
 - b. He may be brilliant in regard to science & technology.
 - c. He can peer into the fabric of the material universe and devise the periodic table.
 - d. He can develop complex formulas that define quantum mechanics.
 - e. He can parse the nuances of chemistry & physics.
 - f. But he's a bumbling idiot when it comes to the realm of the spirit.
7. Knowledge does not equal wisdom. This is a fact lost to the modern age.
8. Man possesses the *knowledge* to create a nuclear bomb, but not the *wisdom* to **NOT** create it.
9. 2 of my passions are history & art. What's cool is that I can blend them into one – art history.
 - a. I was amazed to discover up to the start of the 20th Century, some of the most intricate & beautiful artwork was done on weapons. How bizarre is that?
 - b. The essence of art is beauty. It aims at ornamentation that creates a delight that enhances life & living.
 - c. Weapons exist to create pain & deal death, the very *antithesis* of art.
 - d. Yet since the dawn of time, it's upon weapons that some of the finest artwork has been done.
10. Man is a fickle contradiction.
11. And we see that clearly in Lystra.
 - a. Between vs. 18 & 19, Paul & Barnabas had done nothing. They were the same guys.
 - b. But the crowd goes from worship to murder. The Reason? There isn't any!
 - c. There's all the proof we need that man is fickle.
 - d. The crowd changes quickly and there's no forecasting where it will go.
12. Today's hero is tomorrow's hated.
13. If you live for man's approval, you may get it, but it won't last.
14. The admiration of people is like sand, you can't hold on to it.

15. Andy Warhol recognized the fleeting nature of fame in the modern age and said the popular media would allow everyone to have 15 minutes of fame.
16. *American Idol* is a perfect example of the fickle nature of the crowd.
 - a. Every season, 1 new "idol" out of a potential field of tens of thousands is promoted.
 - b. A new star is born and set on a pop pedestal for all to bow before.
 - c. I know it's a popular show, but I can't watch it, it's too painful.

- d. Early in the season is a long parade of people saying how they want to be famous, want to be accepted by millions of Americans.
 - e. But when Simon tells them they sound like a cat being run over by a truck, they fall apart and shed crocodile tears.
 - f. If you can't take rejection – WHAT ARE YOU DOING AUDITIONING FOR *AI*??
 - g. The whole show is *about* rejection!
17. AI is little more than a microcosm of life in the world.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Whose Approval?*

- 1. If you live for the world's approval, you have to follow the world's ways, do what it wants.
 - 2. The problem is, this world hates God! It hates Jesus with a passion.
 - 3. So it disapproves of all those who believe in God & follow Christ.
- James 4:4 • The world & God are enemies, so anyone who wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**
- 1 John 2:15 • Do not love the world or it's ways. The love of the world & the love of God are mutually exclusive.**
- Jesus said that God will not share our heart with the world; either it's all His or the world's, we can't split it in two & love both.**
- 4. Listen: Don't live for the world's approval, for fame, to be popular.
 - 5. Don't aim at being thought cool, hip, dope, slick, fashionable. Live to please God.
 - 6. If you do that, if you make that your single minded pursuit, Matthew 6:33 says He'll take care of everything else.

B. *We Become Like What We Worship*

- 1. Another thing the Lystrans teach us is that we become like the thing we worship.
- 2. Both Psalm 115 & 135, says those who worship idols become like them.
- 3. The Lystrans were fickle because the gods they worshiped were fickle.
 - a. Zeus, Hermes, Athena, Hera, Poseidon, they were all incredibly inconstant, petty, & fickle.
 - b. Really bad traits for a god, but all in abundance in the many stories told about them.
- 4. While the fact that we become like what we worship isn't so great for those who worship false gods, it's great for us who love & serve Jesus Christ.
- 5. We're becoming more like Him – Good, humble, righteous, powerful, virtuous.