

To God Alone Be The Glory

Most of us learned about Jesus from our parents, when they read Bible stories to us at home. That's how God wants it—one generation sharing the Savior with the next. This idea of parents teaching religion to their children is well understood all over the world. In fact, when parents decide to teach their children nothing so that the children can make up their own minds, they actually set up their children for failure, because those children then have no spiritual background from which to make sense of anything that happens in life.

So it was in Lystra, where our sermon text takes place. The moms had taught their children about the Greek gods. The children grew up on stories about how the chief god Zeus would sometimes leave his home on Mt. Olympus, take on human form, and visit the people of Lystra. And how many times had the children heard the local legend about Hermes, the main spokesman for the gods, how Hermes had accompanied Zeus on one of his visits to their village. The townspeople of Lystra had not welcomed these strangers, had not been friendly. The only villagers who treated Zeus and Hermes well were an old couple, Philemon & Baucis. The oft-repeated story reminded the Lystrans to be hospitable to strangers.

So when the two strangers Paul and Barnabas came to town, apparently they found people ready to talk to strangers, even if the strangers wanted to talk about someone named Jesus. Normally these two Christian missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, would have gone to the local synagogue and reached out to the Jews first. But it seems that there was no synagogue in Lystra. Luke's report of this incident begins in the middle of a presentation that Paul was making. I imagine the Lystrans standing around Paul similar to how people today will gather around a good street performer to listen or watch. But Paul wasn't performing. He was just sharing what he knew about Jesus. And the good news was working in the heart of at least a few of the people. That's what the gospel does. It's God's power for saving people because the Holy Spirit himself works through the good news about Jesus. That's one **LESSON WE CAN LEARN FROM LYSTRA**: share the gospel with people. When you're talking about anything good that has happened to you, slip in how gracious God is, because all good comes from God. When you talk about a challenge you're facing, mention how relieved you are that God is helping you with it, how you are certain that he is not punishing you, because it would be wrong to punish those whom he's already forgiven through faith in Jesus. You never know whom the gospel will bring to faith.

We don't know how he did it. Maybe Paul had a special gift from the Holy Spirit. Maybe the man's face was beaming with joy—when some people listen intently, it shows in their facial expressions. Somehow Paul knew that a certain man in the crowd had just been brought to faith in Jesus. This translation says Paul saw that the man ⁹“*had faith to be healed.*” The Greek actually says that *he had faith to be saved*. So, yes, this could mean the man believed he would be made well through Paul. It could also mean that he believed in Jesus as Savior. We don't know. Perhaps Paul was talking about how those who believe in Jesus will all be healed from all ailments when God takes us to heaven. Whatever Paul was saying, it really resonated with this man because he was crippled (or handicapped or disabled). The point: the guy couldn't walk. In fact he had never walked. But when Paul interrupted his speech and called out to him, ¹⁰“*Stand up on your feet!*”, the man actually leaped up and kept on walking around, like a kid that just learned how to ride a bike and keeps saying, “Daddy, look at me, look at me.” Just imagine this guy strutting around like Mick Jagger.

Now envision the crowd. None of them questioned the validity of the miracle. They all knew this man had never walked before. If you saw a miracle

this awesome, how would you react? I'd certainly say, “Praise God! Look at what God just did!” That's what my Mom taught me to say when I was growing up and something good happened. But the Lystran moms had taught their children about the Greek gods. And it wasn't long before people in the crowd were saying to each other, ¹¹“*The gods have come down to us in human form!*” About Barnabas they were saying things like, “That one there, he looks more stately and has a nicer bearing. He must be Zeus. And the other guy [Paul], he must be Hermes because he's doing most of the talking.”

I doubt Paul and Barnabas knew what the people were saying. Although the Lystrans knew Greek well enough to converse with outsiders, when they got excited about something, they reverted back into their native language Lycaonian. Paul and Barnabas knew that people need time to process when they have seen a miracle. Most people process by talking out the experience. So Paul and Barnabas probably thought, “These folks are most likely saying, ‘Did you see that? He just did a miracle. We better listen to what he's saying.’” That's why God does miracles, you know. Yes, it's nice to help people, but miracles are intended to draw attention to the message about Jesus. The good news saves people. Miracles don't save

people. If you want evidence of that, think about what the Lystrans did next, right after they saw a miracle, or heard about it.

Somehow the priest who served at the temple of Zeus outside the city wall found out about this miraculous healing. He wasn't about to let his village make the same mistake they had made in the legend. This time they would welcome the gods properly. He brought bulls and wreaths. He gathered the people around and started preparing the bulls for sacrifice to these 'gods in human form.'

Perhaps Paul and Barnabas asked one of the locals to explain what was happening. Or else they put two and two together. But when they realized what the Lystrans were doing, they knew they had to put a stop to the sacrifice. Only God is to receive that kind of acclaim. Not professional athletes. Not rock stars. Not winners of reality TV contests. No matter how good they are, they're just humans. Worship only the one true God. That's a lesson we can learn from Lystra.

Imagine how the Lystrans felt when Paul and Barnabas ran screaming into the crowd and told them to stop the sacrifice. The people probably went from elated to confused rather quickly. They are about to turn angry. Paul tried to explain. ¹⁵“Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like

you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things.” How do you like that! Paul just called their religion worthless. Apparently Paul did not subscribe to the idea that all religions have the same God. That's another lesson to learn from Lystra. We don't all have the same God. There's the God revealed in the Bible. And then there are all the other things that people treat like gods.

Can you imagine yourself ever telling someone that their religion amounts to “worthless things”? I don't recommend we kick people in the shins with the truth. But if someone ever puts your back up to the wall, and asks you point blank to acknowledge that all religions teach the same God, I hope you'll join Paul and Barnabas in speaking the truth.

The point of the truth is to help people turn from all things that won't help them, to help people turn *to the living God, who made heaven and earth and 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.”* These are things that God does for everyone in order to prepare them to hear about an even greater thing he did for them:

rescuing them from hell through the blood of Jesus shed on the cross.

Paul was just barely able to stop the people from sacrificing those bulls to them. Unfortunately almost no one in the crowd was convinced of the truth. And it just so happens that there were some hostile people present from the two towns Paul and Barnabas had recently visited. In one of those towns, the people had pitted themselves against Paul and Barnabas, stirred up the city, and hatched a plot to stone Paul and Barnabas to death. But they found out about it and fled to Lystra. That's another lesson to learn: if someone wants to kill you because you are sharing Jesus with them, it's okay to leave town and find other people to share Jesus with.

But this time the agitators got the Lystran crowd so stirred up that they started throwing stones at Paul. Apparently they knocked him unconscious. They dragged him outside the city and left him for dead. But he wasn't dead. And not everyone was against him. Some people had been brought to faith in Jesus. They gathered around Paul. He got up and walked back into the city. How do you like that for courage! Paul rested overnight and the next day left for the next town. Ah, there's another lesson we can learn from Lystra. No matter what bad thing happens when you share the good news

about Jesus, never stop sharing the good news. How will people know that God loves them even better than children love cupcakes, unless believers share the treasure we have in Jesus? You might object, "Paul shared the gospel, and it got him a knock on the noggin!" True, but God brings good out of bad situations. Do you know who the Holy Spirit brought to faith that day in Lystra? Two women named Lois and Eunice. Anyone remember who these two women were? The grandmother and the mother of Timothy. On the second missionary journey when Paul went back to Lystra again (courage!), Timothy, who had been taught about Jesus by his mother and grandmother, was so well spoken of that Paul took him along on his missionary journey. Timothy became a pastor in the early church and spent his life telling others about rescue from sin through Jesus. You never know what good God is going to bring out of the bad that sometimes happens when people don't want to hear about Jesus. So never stop looking for ways to glorify the Savior in your life. Keep watching for ways to bring Jesus up in conversation. And get ready to praise God for blessing your efforts. He wants everyone to be saved through faith in Jesus, and he wants to reach them through you.