

Sermonette for Creation Celebration
Preached on 07-15-2007

The Text: Acts 14:8-18

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. 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. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: "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 to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. 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." Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

The Introduction Draws Our Attention:

If you were asked to choose one word to describe your life, which of these two words would you choose: success? Or failure? That's a no-brainer! Who wants to be regarded as a failure? The word itself carries the connotation of being a loser. So failure is something we dread. It is something we want to avoid at all costs. No matter how hard we've worked at avoiding failure, however, not one of us has succeeded. We have all failed before. Whether we neglected to clean our room when mom told us to; received an "F" on a report card; bombed on a job interview; missed a deadline at work, each of us, at one time or another, has failed at something.

That is not true of our God, however. As we take in the beauty of His Creation today, we find ourselves in awe. To know that He made the heavens and earth and sea and everything in them simply by speaking His Word is mind-blowing. To know that God called everything He made, **“Very good” (Genesis 1:31)** proves how successful He was in His work. Failure has always been a foreign concept to Him. He’s never experienced it before. His bounteous creation testifies to that. All we have to do is look around us to see...

Theme: God’s Success at Creation!

The Historical Context & Biblical Text:

Paul and Barnabas were certainly no strangers to success. In the verses immediately preceding this section, Luke described their preaching by saying, **“They spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed” (Acts 14:1)**. From a human perspective, we’d say that sounds like a pretty successful ministry. And yet, Paul himself would be the first to say that his success was not the result of his oratorical skills or his persuasive personality. Rather, he attributed his success to the power of the Holy Spirit, who always worked through the Gospel message he proclaimed. People were always ready and willing to listen to Paul preach because the Lord confirmed everything he said, **“By enabling him to do miraculous signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3)**. We have an example of one of those miraculous signs in our text. A man, crippled from birth, listened as Paul spoke the Word of God. Suddenly Paul turned and commanded him, **“Stand up on your feet” (v. 10)!** The man jumped up and began to walk for the first time. It was a miracle; a success of the Almighty God once again!

Now if you were there; if you witnessed this incredible sight, wouldn’t you listen to what Paul had to say? Many did. Many others, however, just couldn’t let go of their Greek culture. Seeing what Paul had done, they shouted, **“The gods have come down to us in human form” (v. 11)!** Why did the people of Lystra consider Paul and Barnabas to be gods? Roman history

tells us why. There was a legend that said the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes had come down to this region once before. Because they were disguised, however, no one welcomed them into their homes and their town was punished as a result. So when the people of Lystra saw Paul and Barnabas perform this miracle, they weren't going to take a chance at angering the gods again. So Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes.

The Application Proclaims Law (Sin) & Gospel (Grace):

Can you imagine the temptation this would have presented to these two apostles? It would have been easy to allow this idolization go to their heads; to just sit back and take all the credit for what had just happened; to allow their popularity with the people to become more important than their faithfulness to God. If you think about it, their success in the eyes of the world had the potential to become a real stumbling block in their relationship to God. And we face the same temptation today. The biggest stumbling block in our relationship to God these days is not our failures, but our successes. When you walk through that opening in the trees later on, take a look at the parking lot. You'll see thousands of dollars of fully loaded comfort and convenience. Let's face it. When it comes to earthy, material things, we're all doing pretty well. Compared to the rest of the world, we'll all very successful.

But how has all this material wealth (or success) affected us? Has it gone to our heads? Have we grown so accustomed to having so much stuff that we've lost sight of where it all comes from? Have we developed a standard of living that is so high that we feel returning to God a tenth of what He's given to us is simply out of the question? Could it be that every success God grants us is somehow twisted and distorted into becoming a god for us? As long as we take the time to look, it's not at all hard to see just how many times we've broken the First and Ninth Commandments. We are all idolaters in God's sight. Earthly success is what we covet! BUT there is a way to get back on track. Paul lets us in on it when he says, **“Turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and**

everything in them” (v. 15). These words are a call to repentance. Not only for the people of Lystra, but for you and me as well. Paul is calling us to turn our attention away from all our worldly success to focus instead on the one who successfully created our world in the first place. Not only was God successful in creating the world. He was also successful in saving it!

The Conclusion Points Us to Heaven in Christ:

Without a doubt, God has shown kindness to the world. He has done so by giving rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. He provides us with plenty of food and fills our hearts with joy (v. 17). In addition to all these earthly blessings (or successes), He also sent His Son to accomplish our salvation. That too was a success! It was on a bloody cross where Jesus destroyed the devil’s power once and for all. He did it by laying down His life. He proved it by raising it up again. Believing that puts us in a right relationship with God. It takes away the guilt and shame of all our idolatrous, covetous acts and replaces it with sheer joy, confident that our sins ARE forgiven; certain that Heaven IS ours! That is something no idol; no worldly success; no Greek (false) god could ever do. Only in Christ, then, do we have cause to celebrate! We celebrate, not our success, but God’s Success. Today we celebrate *God’s Success at Creation!* Amen!