

2024 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - Missing the Message

Sermon Text - Acts 14:8-20

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction

"Souls that are barren find life in the Savior, Those who are hungry will feast at His table
Prayers yet unanswered fulfilled in His timing, Trials on this journey will cease at His coming"
With all the crazy things that life can throw our way, aren't you glad that in the midst of it all, we find life in the Savior? A number of our church folks had significant damage this week! But I want to tell you that even though they are going through really hard times, I was so impressed to see the faith, the strength, and the joy in their lives in spite of the hardships! And it was a beautiful thing to see our folks coming together with chainsaws, or just pulling debris to the street, or going to find food for the folks working! Thank you! We don't understand why things like this happen, but we remember that while not all things are good, God can make good things come out of the worst circumstances! His timing and the way in which He answers our prayers, is always right if we will trust Him. Let's be faithful to lift up the hurting people in prayer and to help when and where we can! And I pray that we will never miss the message that while the world may be mean, hard, and even unfair, God is always there! He holds our hand like a loving Father should, guiding us and providing for us, because He cares! Let's pray and ask God to teach us today and to help us not miss His message for us! Pray.

We've been talking about Paul and Barnabas for several weeks. Up until this time Paul had preached in Jewish settings. Some gentiles were reached, however, Lystra was Paul's first encounter with a totally Gentile audience. And what an encounter! Let's read it...

Acts 14:8 In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.

Acts 14:9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed

Acts 14:10 and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

Acts 14:11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"

Acts 14:12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.

Acts 14:13 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.

Acts 14:14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:

Acts 14:15 "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 to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

Acts 14:16 In the past, he let all nations go their own way.

Acts 14:17 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."

Acts 14:18 Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

Acts 14:19 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.

Acts 14:20 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.

The people of Lystra totally missed the message Paul and Barnabas were trying to share. As we'll see in a minute, they got caught up in the miracle and missed the message! And did you notice how fickle the people were. One moment they were treating Paul and Barnabas like gods, wanting to offer sacrifices to them and then some folks came over from Antioch and Iconium who were against Paul and Barnabas, and in short order convinced them to stone Paul! People in our day totally miss the message of the gospel as well. The message of the gospel is not complicated. It is a message of hope, forgiveness, and love. It's the message of God's offer to all who will believe to receive miraculous healing from the sin disease that affects all humanity! How is it that people miss the message? Let's look at some of the ways people miss the message.

1. They misunderstood the purpose of the miracle.

The purpose of the miracle was not simply to amaze them, but to bring healing to a man who had been crippled from birth and had never been able to walk.

Acts 14:8 In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.

The miracle was verifiable - Cripple from birth

This was not an old fashioned set up of someone pretending to be cripple. They knew the man who was healed and knew he had been lame from birth. Sadly, they were more excited about the power Paul had than the fact that a man lame from birth had been healed! Don't miss the real miracle

Luke 10:19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

Luke 10:20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

The purpose of the miracle was to point them to the One True God, who had the power to heal spiritually and physically, not their false, pagan gods who had no power at all.

Psa 103:2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits--
Psa 103:3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
Psa 103:4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,
Psa 103:5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
Psa 103:6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.
Psa 103:7 He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:
Psa 103:8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

The purpose of this miracle being in Holy Scripture is to remind us that God knows our needs and He will work miracles in our lives if we will trust Him to do so!

Does this mean that we will always be healed of any disease or sickness instantaneously? No. But it does mean that God will grant a miracle! Don't miss the message of the Bible concerning miracles. God sometimes grants a miraculous, unexplainable healing, but sometimes the miraculous healing comes via modern medicines, technology and through the skilled hands of highly trained surgeons. But sometimes He may choose to give a miracle of His grace and strength to help you endure something for a greater good that we may not be able to see. Remember Paul the Apostle's experience?

2 Corinthians 12:7 ...Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

2 Corinthians 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

And of course, sometimes God works the miracle of eternal healing by allowing someone to come on home to glory! No matter what you are going through here's the miracle that is available to each one of us:

God hears our Prayers!!

If we are willing to pray! The Psalmist says...

Psa 116:1 I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy.

Psa 116:2 Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

Psa 116:3 The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.

Psa 116:4 Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!"

Psa 116:5 The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.

But in our story we find that the people in Lystra not only misunderstood the purpose of the miracle...

2. They misunderstood the purpose of the messengers

Acts 14:11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"

Acts 14:12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.

Acts 14:13 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.

Acts 14:14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:

Acts 14:15 "Men, why are you doing this?"

The Purpose of the messengers is to be vessels used by God to deliver His message!

Messengers are never to be worshiped! We must look beyond the messenger to see the message! Still today people get caught up in the messenger. This is not only wrong, it is extremely dangerous! When you glorify a man you do so at great peril to yourself and to him. You set yourself up to be sadly disappointed because there are no perfect people, only sinners saved by God's amazing grace, and when you put a human being on a pedestal, you create an environment that could cause that person to be destroyed by false pride. It's not that it's wrong to have a spiritual mentor or a spiritual leader, but you must remember that they are merely a representative of God, one of God's ambassadors. So remember Paul's advice to the people he led...

1 Corinthians 10:32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—

1 Corinthians 10:33 even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

The Purpose of the messengers is to be examples pointing to Christ Jesus!

Paul knew the temptation for people to want an earthly king, and he wanted to make it clear that he was just a servant of Christ and that people needed to keep their eyes on Jesus! Churches that are built around the messenger fall apart when something happens to the messenger! Churches that are built around the message and the One that message proclaims, grow stronger no matter the circumstances. So what about the messenger? Pray daily for them! Encourage them! Ask God how you can help them get the message out! I shared this with one of our church members just the other day...

"I hope everyone will give our next pastor the same love and support y'all have given me! I have appreciated it so much and God has used it greatly in my life!"

I want to share with you something that happened at my home church years ago. My pastor, the one who was preaching when I got saved and when I was called to preach, started his message with the following statements. He said... "When I get to heaven, at the awards banquet, I want to get a big crown! In fact, I want the biggest crown in heaven! I want one so big I have to tote it in a wheelbarrow!" We were thinking, "What has happened to our pastor? The pressure has gotten to him, he's finally lost it! This is not good!" But then he said... "I want the biggest crown, the nicest crown, the one with the most jewels, because I'm going to wheel it up to the throne where Jesus is and dump it out at His feet and then fall on my face and say to Him, 'It is only because of what you did for me on that old rugged cross and the power of Your Spirit in my life that any of this was possible! You alone deserve the glory! This crown belongs to You and You deserve the biggest and the best!'"

We were all so relieved. He really had us going! I want to ask you a question: Are you living your life for Jesus in such a way that you will have a reward to place at His feet? Remember, when it comes to the messenger and the message of the gospel...

The Purpose of the messengers is to bring glory to God!

Rev 4:9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever,

Rev 4:10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

Rev 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

And moments later this happens...

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

But the people of Lystra not only misunderstood the miracle, and the messengers...

3. They misunderstood the purpose of the message

And it wasn't because Paul's presentation of the message wasn't clear, it was...

Acts 14:14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:

Acts 14:15 "...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.

Folks that's the gospel in a nutshell...

The Purpose of the message was to turn the people from worthless things!

Turn from things that are lies! Turn from things that will hurt you and others! Turn from things that can never really satisfy! They may bring momentary pleasure, but then there's the lasting consequences! Turn from things that will only bring you down and discourage you! Turn from the sinful things that will ultimately destroy and bring death! Remember that Jesus said...

Luke 13:3 ...But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

And we read about repentance in the Old Testament book of Ezekial in two places...

Ezek 18:30 "Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall.

Ezek 18:31 Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?

Ezek 18:32 For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

And in Ezekial 33...

Ezek 33:10 "Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?"'

Ezek 33:11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

People that think God is just waiting for someone to mess up so He can zap them down, just don't know the heart of God! God warns us about sin and tells us to turn away from it because He loves and cares for us!! That's why we should follow Paul's advice in our text and...

The Purpose of the message was to turn people to the living God!

Turn to the One who is truth and would never lie to you! Turn to the One who wants to heal your life from the hurts you've experienced! Turn to the One who satisfies your life in ways the world never could! Turn to the One who lifts you up instead of bringing you down and who will bring encouragement into your life even in the midst of the storms like so many in our town experienced this week. Turn to the One who gives life in this world and the world to come!

Turn to the One who loves you so much that He would send His One and Only Begotten Son to die for you! Turn to the Living God who is the real God of the universe and not a man made god or idol! Listen to Isaiah's description of idols...

Isaiah 40:18 With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?

Isaiah 40:19 As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

Isaiah 40:20 A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot; they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple.

Now listen to the description of the living God...

Isaiah 40:10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

Isaiah 40:11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

And for those of you who have faced nature's fury this week, or those of you who have faced or are facing other kinds of storms in your life, don't miss this message also found in Isaiah...

Isaiah 54:10 Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

So the people of Lystra missed the purpose of the miracle, the purpose of the messengers, the purpose of the message and...

4. They misunderstood the miracle of the message

Three things

A. One miracle of the message is that our all powerful God gives us the freedom to accept or reject the message

Paul said...

Acts 14:16 In the past, he let all nations go their own way.

He didn't force all nations to do the right thing. They had choices. God is God and could set things up any way He wanted, but in His sovereignty He chose to make humankind in His image and as such allow us to have choices. John puts it this way in his gospel...

John 1:9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

John 1:10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

John 1:11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

John 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--

John 1:13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

As I've said many times, God won't force you to do the right things and you have the right to reject Him, but there are consequences we have to reckon with when we choose to live in sin and reject the only one who could save us from our sin! And if you are in the midst of those consequences right now, I've got good news for you! It's never too late to turn to Jesus because He is standing there with arms outstretched to receive you and you won't hear Him say, "Sorry you made your bed now you're going to have to sleep in it!" While there are some consequences in this life that can't be undone, God is so gracious that He will help you deal with those things and He will help you begin to change the consequences that can be changed for the better! He loves you that much. He's all about forgiveness! That's the whole reason Jesus came to die on the Cross! So He could forgive anyone who is truly sorrowful for their sins and simply asks Him for forgiveness! And guess what? He's already reaching out to you before you even turn to Him. Our text reveals this...

B. Another miracle is that He has shown kindness even to those who have yet to receive the message.

Paul said in our text...

Acts 14:17 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."

And listen to what Jesus said...

Mat 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

Mat 5:44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Mat 5:45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

So God is reaching out to people with His love, even through the natural revelation of His provision in nature!!

C. Another miracle of the message is that those who embrace the message of the gospel are in God's hands and will fulfill their purpose no matter what the circumstances of life!

Acts 14:19 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.

Acts 14:20 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.

Wow! As long as God has a purpose for you and you are willing to fulfill that purpose, nothing can take you out before He is ready for you. Not accidents, disease, or even acts of violence like stoning! Nothing!

So if you choose not to miss the message today, and choose to receive it, here's what God will do for you...

God will forgive you

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

God will embrace you

Isaiah 40:11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart...

God will protect you

Psalms 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?

God will empower you

2 Corinthians 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

God will provide for you

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
Phil 4:20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Let's pray!