

⁸In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. ⁹He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

¹¹When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!”¹²Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³The 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.

¹⁴But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵“Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. ¹⁶In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷Yet 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.” ¹⁸Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

¹⁹Then 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. ²⁰But 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.

Minor Misunderstanding

On September 23, 1999 NASA lost a \$125 million space probe that was supposed to orbit Mars. After a 286 day journey to Mars the probe crashed catastrophically into Mars. The cause was lost in translation between imperial and metric measurements. After all, Lockheed is an American company and NASA is American company – let’s just assume they both use the same good ol’ American units... but nobody told NASA and they kept doing business in a goofy metric system. It was just a little misunderstanding. After all the metric system got them close, 60 miles too close to the Martian atmosphere or at least that was the last time anyone saw it. Just a little misunderstanding and yet it had some serious consequences.

That’s not the only time something like this has happened. I’m sure you can think of a bad day at work but at least you didn’t lose \$125 million. But we make minor mistakes on a regular basis. Sometimes it’s because we don’t check the details. Sometimes it’s because don’t say anything about problems we notice. And then those little misunderstandings turn into major problems or even go without notice. We’ve been there and most of the time I pray my minor problems end without consequence.

Paul and Barnabas had a minor misunderstanding that landed like the Martian Orbiter and it wasn’t because they used the metric system. No but a minor misunderstanding blew up and became a major problem. But then again Paul didn’t think this was a minor misunderstanding...

Still on their first missionary journey after having been driven out of the last two cities and now they make it to Lystra. There is no mention of a synagogue. This time they really have gone to the Gentiles. Paul is street preaching and talking to those who will listen. He's found a captive audience among one who can't walk away from him. This guy has been crippled from birth yet he listened. The Holy Spirit worked through that word and he believed that Jesus could heal him. The purpose of miracles is not only to meet the needs of someone, but more importantly to authenticate a message and draw attention to Jesus. Paul calls out with a loud voice, "*Stand up on your feet!*" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. It works.

Paul's message about Jesus is given the stamp of approval from above. The people are excited. They revert back to the metric system, "*They shouted in 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." They were so close, but too close because God did come down but not in Paul and Barnabas. Meanwhile everyone is excited and the Priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside of the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because the people wanted to offer sacrifices to them. Paul and Barnabas are lost in translation.

They don't know what is going on. What Paul and Barnabas might not have understood was the influence of a certain writer Ovid. This myth states that Zeus and Hermes came down to earth as normal poor, tired travelers. They went to the area around Lystra looking for food and a place to sleep. They went to 1000 houses and only one family in a small house welcomed them in. Those who welcomed Zeus and Hermes disguised as beggars were poor but they washed their feet, they cooked what they had and gave to these strangers. They even tried to run after a chicken or a goose but they were too old. After leaving Zeus was enraged because only one out of a thousand welcomed him. Zeus and Hermes destroyed the houses and the people of those who were inhospitable but transformed this little shed into a great temple.

The people of Lystra may have had this myth in mind and thought, "The gods have come back. Let's not make this same mistake again." Paul did something that only God can do but instead of worshiping God they worship Paul and Barnabas. So close but like inches and not centimeters. The one who healed this crippled man was completely ignored and left out for the one through whom this miracle was performed. They could have said nothing and accepted the honor but at stake was more than \$125 million. Souls were at stake. This is more than a little misunderstanding. Paul and Barnabas rush in to stop this. They people of Lystra don't want to believe anything different. They don't want to use the imperial system of measurement – which is easier to divide, based on the body, and not some arbitrarily defined unit which is either too big or too small. They try to kill Paul.

Now we can imagine that something like that would never happen here in America after all we still a superior system of measurement. We may even practice what C.S. Lewis calls, "Chronological snobbery." After all we've progressed; we're beyond the French Revolution and the

destruction of all things ancient (because they're foolish: sarcasm). We're more civilized and scientific. How could we possibly fall into the same trap of wanting to slaughter bulls to honor the preacher? We might not do that. Then again we may end up making idols out of the past, the good old days, or even pastors and church leaders. We may elevate them to positions they never should occupy. You're probably thinking, "Yeah right, like we would ever idolize you." You're probably right and yet what often happens is we mistake the message and the messenger - either listening to the message because of who he is or ignoring the message because of who he isn't. We listen to a person based on political preferences, skin color, or race rather than the content of their message.

When that happens we find ourselves in Lystra. Our hearts are miniature idol factories always looking for something to give our attention, time, money, and praise. Luther writes, "An idol is anything we look to for all good and in which we find refuge in all need." There may not be a certain deity that we worship but there are other things that occupy that space. When we cheat on our taxes we do so not just because we are sinners but also because we often make money, possessions, status, and comfort of having more money more important than God and obedience to him. Thinking that we can appease God by our mediocre efforts, wreaths, bulls, sacrifices...

Those in Lystra don't want to change their belief system and it took Paul and Barnabas a great deal of effort to get them to stop and when they do they react against Paul that's because Paul attacked their culture, their life, and their gods. The same thing happens to us when we point out the true God, not as a generic g-o-d in which we say our nation trusts, but as he reveals himself in scripture.

We may make the major mistake of thinking we're using the same unit of measurement but we're fooling ourselves and the consequences are worse than \$125 million missile, but like Lystra not everyone will like it.

Paul rushes in among them. Don't go there. Why? *We are human just like you?* Turn away from this idolatry to the living God. Paul and Barnabas redirect them, *"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... and by providing you with food... and filling your hearts with joy."* In the past God confined his power to Israel but this side of the cross he has given the good news not only to those in Jerusalem but to the ends of the earth. But he has not left them without witness. God declares something to them through nature that there is a God but what they can't discover through nature and that was what Paul was about to declare to them, the forgiveness freely won for them at the cross but, sadly, Paul's sermon was cut short.

The one true God is unlike the man-made gods of Zeus and Hermes. Unlike them God did not come to see who would welcome him or to find out what kind of character his creation had become. God came to rescue them because he already knew what kind of failures we were. That's

why he came to earth. He came to rescue us and give us peace. He came down to earth and revealed himself to the world.

Instead of condemning the 999, the one innocent one suffered and died in their place. He gave the world his word and lets all know who he is. Then God sends out messengers, Christians, like Paul and Barnabas who point not to themselves but to God. In Zeus' territory Paul throws down the gauntlet and they pick up rocks. They stone him with rocks, drag him outside of the city of Lystra, and leave him for dead. But then Paul gets back up and heads back into the city.

It's never been about Paul just as the message is never about you either. It's always about Jesus. All of us need Jesus. I need the same savior that you do. My salvation is the same as yours. Don't focus on me. If you do, you will find out that I'm far from perfect. Keep your focus on Christ. I hope that you see Jesus, not me. The church will have people we praise and thank because they clearly point to Christ. We honor them and give them credit but let's not turn into the crowd at Lystra who made idols out of leaders.

Then listen to their message not because it is their own but because it is based on God's Word. Let God continually challenge and change you. God saves you, forgives you for cheating on taxes, making idols out of everything, and yes even for those times when you've used the metric system. (Yes my bias is showing). You are forgiven, me too, freely, for Christ's sake and not your own.

You have a Savior who is powerful outside of Jerusalem, who creates, preserves, and forgives minor misunderstanding as well as our major ones. You may not be mixing up metric or imperial measurements while make a \$125 million missile. But even if you do and your minor mistakes... sin, rebellion, outright defiance... leads to major consequences – we have a savior who wants us to understand. You haven't measured up but Jesus has in you place. Amen.