**A Gentile Walks the Walk**

(Acts 14:8-18)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 A man went to one of those healing-type churches one day, and the pastor said to him: “You will walk today.” The man replied, “Thanks, but I’m not handicapped.” But the pastor *leaned in,* and got in his face, and said again: *“You will walk today.”* The man just nodded. After the service, he went to the parking lot and found that his car had been stolen. And he had to walk that day!

 Speaking of *walking,* here in our text in Acts 14, the Apostle Paul is about to run into a man who *was* handicapped, and *couldn’t* walk:

 **“And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked**

**“The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,**

 **“Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.” (Acts 14:8-10).**

Now to begin with, I remind you that the stories in the Book of Acts aren’t recorded in the Bible just to *entertain* us. They are *symbolic* of things that God wants to *teach* us. And since this man shows up at the beginning of Paul’s new ministry among the Gentiles, he’s a *type* of Paul’s new ministry among the Gentiles. You see, before Paul was made an apostle, Gentiles were unable to do what Paul told the Thessalonians to do when he wrote,

 **“…ye ought to *walk and to please God…”* (I Thessalonians 4:1).**

Before Paul came along, only *Jews* could walk in ways that pleased God, because only Jews could be saved. But now, Paul was out telling *Gentiles* how *they too* could be saved and please God by walking in His ways.

 So when this man who couldn’t walk heard Paul speak, and got healed, he was a type of how *all* Gentiles could now hear Paul speak and get healed *spiritually* from their sins. Back in the Old Testament, if a *Jew* wanted to walk and please God, he had to hear *Moses* speak, as Moses said when he wrote:

**“…keep all these commandments *which I command you…*to love the LORD your God, *to walk in all His ways*…” (Deuteronomy 11:22).**

To walk in God’s ways in the past, you had to hear and keep the words of Moses. But if Gentiles today want to walk and please God, as Paul says we ought, they have to hear and keep the words of the Apostle Paul, as we’re seeing pictured here with this lame man.

 Now I want you to compare this healing to one that *the Lord* did to begin *His* ministry to the Jews, because *He too* healed a lame man to symbolize *His* ministry. At the end of the Lord’s first year of ministry, the Apostle John set the scene for this miracle in John 5:2,3:

**“…at Jerusalem…lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt…”**

Now let’s think this through. If these impotent folk were in Jerusalem, they were Jews, right? And those impotent Jews were types of the *nation* of the Jews, the nation Israel. So they illustrated how the nation was blind *to the truth the Lord had been sharing with them.* That meant they were also “halt,” which means they were unable to *walk* in the truth that the Lord was giving them. That word “halt” *means* to be unable to walk.

 Now the Lord probably healed more than one halt man that day, but John is only going to tell us about *one of them,* because only one of them illustrates what God was teaching with his healing. As John says,

**“…a *certain* man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw *him* lie, *and knew that he had been now a long time in that case,* He saith *unto him*…Rise, take up thy bed, *and walk.* And immediately the man…*walked”* (John 5:5-9).**

John seems to be telling us that the reason the Lord healed this man *first* is that he knew the guy had been impotent *for 38 years.* If you’re a really, really sharp student of the Old Testament, that reference to 38 years will remind you of what happened to Israel when they left Egypt. Speaking for the people of Israel, Moses wrote:

**“…we turned, and took our journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea….And the space in which we came from Kadeshbarnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, *was thirty and eight years;* until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them” (Deuteronomy 2:1,14).**

Now here you might be thinking, “Wait a minute! I thought God waited *40* years for that generation to die out in the wilderness. If so, you’d be right! Moses *also* wrote,

**“…the LORD'S anger was kindled against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness *forty* years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed” (Numbers 32:13).**

So why did Moses focus in on *38* of those 40 years in that other reference?

 Well, the 40 years the Jews had to wait in the wilderness to enter the Promised Land was a type of the 40 *generations* they had to wait to enter the *kingdom.* Matthew wrote,

**“So all the generations from Abraham to David *are fourteen generations;* and from David until the carrying away into Babylon *are fourteen generations;* and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ *are fourteen generations”* (Matthew 1:17).**

If you’re good at math, you have probably already tallied those generations and found that it amounts to *42,* and not 40. But here it helps to remember that the first *2* generations of the history of Israel consisted of Abraham and his son Isaac. The nation of “Israel” didn’t exist until *Jacob* came along, and God renamed him Israel.

 So the Lord’s generation was Israel’s *40th* generation, and the Jews were supposed to enter the kingdom after 40 generations, as typified when they entered the Promised Land after 40 years. But instead of receiving the kingdom the Lord offered them, they crucified Him instead.

 At that point, God the Father was ready to cut the tree of Israel down, as per the parable the Lord told in Luke 13:6-9, where we see Him depicted as looking for spiritual fruit in Israel during the course of the Lord’s three-year ministry to Israel. But the Lord talked Him out of it, saying,

**“Lord, let it alone *this year also…”* (Luke 13:8).**

When the Lord’s Father was about to cut the tree of Israel down for killing His Son, the Son asked His Father *for one more year* for Israel to receive Him. God granted that year, and the offer of the kingdom that Peter proffered the Jews during the course of that year is described in the first 7 chapters of the Book of Acts. Bishop Ussher’s dates state that those 7 chapters cover one year, a year that ended with Israel’s violent *rejection* of Peter’s offer of the kingdom when they stoned Stephen.

 And at the *beginning* of that extra year, *Peter* healed a lame man to introduce *his* ministry to the nation Israel, as we see in Acts 3:2-8:

 **“…a *certain* man lame from his mother's womb was…laid daily at the gate of the temple….Then *Peter* said…rise up and walk….And he *leaping up* stood, *and walked…walking, and leaping, and praising God”* (Acts 3:2,6,8).**

The lame man that *Peter* healed there was a type of how the people of Israel were *still* spiritually lame, even after the Lord’s three-year ministry among them. But when Peter healed the man, it showed that God was still willing to heal Israel through *Peter’s* ministry, as we see pictured there with the healing of *that* lame man.

 And you’ll never guess how old that lame man was. Speaking of him, we learn in the very next chapter in Acts that

***“the man was* *above forty years old,* on whom this miracle of healing was shewed” (Acts 4:22).**

Well, what number is *above* the number 40? *41!* And that would account for the extra year God gave Israel to enter her kingdom!

But a year after Peter offered the Jews their kingdom, they stoned Stephen, so they had to *remain* spiritually blind and halt. So God raised up the Apostle Paul, and started *his* new ministry among the Gentiles by healing a lame man, a healing that symbolized *his* new ministry!

So let’s read on to see what happens next in our text:

 **“And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.**

 **“And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker” (Acts 14:11,12).**

Now this tells us that those Gentiles in Lystra were *idolaters* who worshipped the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the planets, an area the Bible calls *the host of heaven* in a number of places. II Kings 23:5, for example, reads:

**“…the sun…the moon…the planets…*all the host of heaven.”***

The idolatrous worship of the host of heaven was something the Gentiles started doing nearly 4,000 years ago, when they said to each other,

**“Let us build us a city and a tower, *whose top may reach unto heaven”* (Genesis 11:4).**

As I’m sure I don’t have to tell you, people often read that story and say, “Oh, how quaint! Those ignorant ancients thought they could build a tower tall enough to climb into heaven, the way we used to climb trees when we were kids!”

 But what they *really* built was a tower that was a *religion* that they thought would help them “reach” heaven *when they died.* The top of the tower was probably similar to the tops of the temples in found in the Egyptian cities of Esneh and Dendereh. The temples there had *the zodiac* painted on the ceiling.

And the zodiac is nothing more than a worship of the host of heaven. I mean, think about it. The zodiac lets *the stars* tell you what to do. That’s worship! Just ask any single man who has ever worshipped a woman, and let her tell him what to do!

But the zodiac is nothing more than a *perversion* of the way that God used to *talk* to the Gentiles before the Bible was written, during the 2500 years of human history that we read about in the ten chapters of Genesis that come *before* Genesis 11’s description of the Tower of Babel. If you know how to read the stars, the circle of stars in the zodiac teaches the story of the coming of Christ, and all that He would do!

But the problem with trying to read a story that is written in a continuous circle is: it’s hard to know where to *start* reading a story written in a continuous circle! So somebody in Egypt built some *sphynxes* to help men remember where to start. And Egypt was where the Jews lived. And the Jews certainly remembered where to start reading the circles of the stars, even though the Gentiles had long forgotten.

The sphynx has the head of a woman and the body of a lion. That tells you should begin reading that the story of the life of Christ that God put in that circle of stars with Virgo, because the Lord was born of the virgin Mary. It’s no coincidence that the sign of Virgo ends in September, and the Lord was actually *born* in September, having been conceived on December 25.

And the story of the Lord’s life in the stars should conclude with Leo, to symbolize what the Lord is called in Revelation 5:5:

**“…*the Lion of the tribe of Judah,* the Root of David…”**

And the astrological sign of Leo is symbolized by *a lion.*

Lions have always been associated with *kings.* Do you know why? It is because they were *first* associated with kings *in the Bible,* in places like:

**“The king's wrath *is as the roaring of a lion*….The fear of a king *is as the roaring of a lion”* (Proverbs 19:12; 20:2).**

And to get to the point, someday the Christ that was born of a virgin will come full circle, so to speak, and be a king *in the kingdom of heaven on earth.*

But the Gentiles *corrupted* God’s story into the zodiac, and here in Acts 14, thousands of years later, these Gentiles were *still* worshipping the stars, and planets like Jupiter and Mercury.

 Of course, after the Gentiles forgot how to read the stars, the host of heaven couldn’t do any *talking* to them. So the Gentiles who worshipped the host of heaven made themselves *priests* to *speak* for the stars, as we see as we read on in our text:

 **“Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people” (Acts 14:13).**

The priest of Jupiter was going to offer *animal sacrifices* to Paul and Barnabas, like he *usually* did for the gods of Jupiter and Mercury. That was *another* perversion of the religion that God gave the Gentiles, going as far back as a Gentile named Adam, and another one named Abel. God told Gentiles like them, and Noah, to bring Him sacrifices *long* before He told the Jews to do it. God told them to offer sacrifices to Him, and then look to the stars to learn about *Christ* from them.

 But the Gentiles had perverted all that into offering sacrifices to the planets Jupiter and Mercury, and then looking to the stars to learn *nonsense* from them! So this priest here in our text sacrificed to Jupiter, and then taught them from the zodiac, saying things like: When the moon is in the 7th house, and Jupiter aligns with Mars, that means you’re going to have a good day. You’ll make lots of money, and when you do, don’t forget to give your priest some!”

 And that’s how these Gentiles in Lystra got messages from their gods! They wouldn’t listen to any preacher who *didn’t* point to the zodiac as he told them what the gods wanted them to do. So when Paul came along and started speaking for God by pointing *to a Bible,* most of the Gentiles in Lystra put him on the pay-no-mind list.

 All except this lame man. He *listened* as Paul read the Bible to speak for his God. And that just might be how Paul “perceived” that he had the faith to be healed back up in verse 9. Paul was a prophet, and as we’ve seen in some of our past studies, prophets just knew stuff that couldn’t be known by natural means. So it is possible that he was able to perceive the lame man’s faith in that way. But faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom.10:17), so it is *equally* possible that Paul perceived the man’s faith when he saw that he was *listening* to the Word of God, and not turning away, as the others did.

 Speaking of perverting the religion that God gave the Gentiles, did you notice back up in verse 11 that these Gentiles said, “the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.” *That too* was a perversion of the story of the Lord that God gave the Gentiles in the stars, for they told how the *true* God *did* come down to earth in the likeness of men. Paul wrote to the Philippians about “Christ Jesus” (Phil.2:5), and then said:

 **“who being in the form of God…*was made in the likeness of men”* (Philippians 2:7).**

And that message of the Lord’s incarnation could be read in the stars. But once the Gentiles *rejected* that message, they wound up making a *perversion* of it here with Paul and Barnabas, saying that *they* were gods come down in the likeness of men.

 Did you also notice back up in verse 8 of our text that the lame man couldn’t walk “from his mother’s womb”? What do we learn about *Paul’s* mother’s womb in Galatians 1:13-15?

 **“…I…profited *in the Jews' religion*…But…God…separated me *from my mother's womb”* (Galatians 1:13-15).**

Paul’s mother’s womb was *the Jews religion,* i.e., the perversion of the religion that God gave them. He felt as warm and as safe in that religion as a baby felt in his mother’s womb.

So when verse 8 says that this lame man couldn’t walk from *his* mother’s womb, that symbolizes how *the Gentiles* couldn’t walk in ways that please God going all the way back to when *they* perverted the religion that God gave *them* in the stars!

 But why would they call Barnabas *Jupiter?* Well, Jupiter is the biggest of the planets, so the Romans named the biggest god in their religion Jupiter. Jupiter was the Roman version of the Greek god *Zeus,* who was the biggest of the gods in *their* false religion.

 And Barnabas was probably named after the bigger of the planets Jupiter and Mercury because he was bigger than Paul. The name “Paul” means *small,* so we believe Paul was a vertically-challenged man of short stature.

 And the Gentiles in Lystra called Paul *Mercurius,* after *Mercury,* the *messenger* of the gods. Mercury is usually depicted with wings on his feet, because he was the god who was in charge of carrying messages from the gods down to people on earth. And that’s what they thought Paul was doing here, bringing a message from his god to them.

 Now when verse 13 says that they brought Paul and Barnabas “garlands,” a *garland* was a little wreath of leaves that a man would wear on his head *like a crown.* Google pictures of ancient Roman emperors like Nero, or Julius Caesar, and you’ll find that they are usually depicted as wearing a garland crown.

 So why did they bring *garlands* to Paul and Barnabas along with their animal sacrifices? Why would they bring something that was fit for *a king* to men whom they considered to be their *gods?*

Well, don’t forget, the story that God wrote in the stars said that when God came down in the likeness of men that He’d be *a lion-like king,* as we see in the sign of astrological sign of Leo. So those garlands were yet *another* perversion of the religion that God gave them in the stars, when they tried to make kings out of their gods, Paul and Barnabas, by giving them those garlands.

 Well, what would you do if people were lining up to worship and adore you by burning an ox in front of you? As we read on in our text, we learn what Paul and Barnabas did:

 **“Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,**

**“And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (Acts 14:14,15).**

Now the first definition of the word “passion” in a good dictionary defines it as referring to the ability to be affected by an external influence. Do you know why, at Easter time, churches put on what they call *passion plays,* depicting the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ? It’s because the Lord allowed Himself to be affected by the external influence of *the Romans.* Churches get that word from what it says in Acts 1:3, where we read that

**“…Jesus…shewed Himself alive *after His passion…”* (Acts 1:1,3).**

The Lord was God in the flesh, so He certainly didn’t have to let *any* external influence have *any* affect on Him. When He did, it was called His passion.

 So when Paul told the Gentiles in Lystra that he and Barnabas were men of like passions with them, he was saying, as it were, “We’re not gods! Gods can’t be affected by others. Gods don’t take no guff from anybody. But we’re men of like passions like you! If you prick us, will we not bleed?” (as Shakespeare put it in *The Merchant of Venice.*)

 And in verse 15, when Paul told them to turn from “these vanities,” that’s a word that’s associated with *idolatry* throughout the Bible. For instance, Isaiah said:

**“They that make a graven image *are all of them vanity…”* (Isaiah 44:9).**

So Paul was telling them to turn away from the vanity of making gods out of mere men, and worship the God who *made* men, and everything *else* in heaven and earth.

 That’s kind of what the prophet Jeremiah told the Jews when *they* fell into idolatry, when he wrote:

**“Are there any among *the vanities of the Gentiles* that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not Thou He, O LORD our God?...Thou hast made all these things” (Jeremiah 14:22).**

You say, “But why did God let Gentiles worship idols for 2,000 years without telling them about Himself?” That’s a question Paul answers in verse 16 of our text, where he said of God,

 **“Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16).**

That word “suffered” means *allowed.* So when it says God suffered the Gentiles to walk in their *own* ways, that means they must have rejected *God’s* way. We’ve already seen that they did just that at the Tower of Babel. God never makes anyone worship Him if they don’t want to—not even His own people in Israel! God told the prophet Hosea,

 **“*Israel* slideth back as a backsliding heifer…*Ephraim* is joined to idols: *let him alone”* (Hosea 4:16,17).**

God told His prophet, as it were, “If My people want to worship idols like the Gentiles did, then I’ll let them—just like I let the Gentiles do it.”

 Of course, God didn’t leave the Gentiles *completely* in the dark. Just because He stopped *talking* to them didn’t mean He stopped *witnessing* to them, as we see in verse 17 of Acts 14:

 **“Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”**

God kept witnessing to the Gentiles through the witness of His creation. The psalmist wrote,

**“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork” (Psalm 19:1).**

You say, “But witnessing to people in that way isn’t as good as *talking* to them.” But God otherwise! The psalmist went on to say of the stars of the firmament,

**“Day unto day *uttereth speech,* and night unto night sheweth knowledge. *There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard”* (Psalm 19:2,3).**

You say, “Rain and fruitful seasons won’t make men come to God.” But God says otherwise! In Psalm 36:6,7, the psalmist prayed,

**“O LORD, *Thou preservest man and beast.* How excellent is *Thy lovingkindness,* O God! *therefore* the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.”**

Now it’s true, the *majority* of Gentiles didn’t get saved by seeing rain and fruitful seasons. But hey, the majority of the Gentiles didn’t get saved by reading the story of the gospel in the stars either.

And it’s true that idolaters often think that *the god they worship* is the god giving them rain and fruitful seasons. But that was even true among the Jews when *they* fell into idolatry. They told Jeremiah in Jeremiah 44:27:

**“we will certainly…*burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her,* as we have done…*for then had we plenty of victuals,* and were well, and saw no evil.”**

 All the time God was putting up with their idolatry and continuing to give them rain to grow their vittles, they thought the rain was coming from the queen of heaven, a false deity worshipped in ancient times among the Jews as well as the Gentiles.

 But there were always a *few—*a *very* few—who believed and got saved both among Jews *and* Gentiles alike.

 Aren’t you glad you’re one of them?