

✠ Puny god

- **Marvel Analogy! Hulk/Loki- Avengers- “Puny God’**
- **Why do I show that? Because we live in a world of PUNY GODS. A defining trait of what we call the ‘human condition’ is that we are prone to IDOLATRY. We like to create our own gods. NOW, not necessarily Idols like a statue we worship and think have power, although people do this-**
- **Rather, THINGS... People... ideologies... that we look to as a source of LIFE. Source of identity, meaning, influence, purpose, validation... and from which we try to extract hope, peace, joy, belonging. Even though we might not use the word, things that we WORSHIP- with our time, energy, resources. “This is what I must have, understand, do, or belong to... to be COMPLETE.” This is my idol.**
- **The thing all our idols have in common is that they DON’T MEASURE UP... they never meet our true needs... they are PUNY GODS.**
- **TODAY- ACTS 14- continuing with Paul and Barnabas on ORIGINAL ROAD TRIP, as they travel to the next city on their journey through what is now modern day Turkey, bringing with them the message of God’s grace- salvation/ new life in Jesus Christ.**
- **LETS RECAP OUR JOURNEY SO FAR**
- **Started on Cyprus/Island. Went first to Synagogue. Then, had dust up with a sorcerer who tried- and failed- to block their message.**
- **Pisidian Antioch. They go first to Synagogue. HERE Paul preaches a sermon where he proclaimed “IN CHRIST you have complete forgiveness, and a freedom the LAW could never give.**

That message – and fact entire city showed up week later to hear more- was existential threat to these Religious leaders powerbase, and with threat of great harm they drove Paul and Barnabas from the region.

- **THIS took them to ICONIUM, where again first go to Synagogue. Many believe- again response of threats and persecution against PB and new believers. When faced with immediate threat to their life, they flee city, head to nearby region of LYCAONIA.**
- **BACKGROUND. First place where P&B don’t first go to a synagogue...most likely there was no Jewish community here. Historical sources describe region as being ‘rustic’ (polite term) lacking sophistication of Roman culture. In addition to speaking Greek they retained a native local dialect, and were highly superstitious. They worshipped the Greek deities Zeus and Hermes. The first city where P&B arrive is LYSTRA, where there was a temple to Zeus.**
- **HERE Paul begins to speak, and as he does so he notices a crippled man watching him intently... a man, Luke tells us, who had FAITH....**

✠ Faith to be healed

Acts 14:8-10 *In 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.*

- **A few important things:**

- *First- over the centuries parts of the church have mistakenly taken the phrase “he had faith to be healed”, and said “well, if we can teach people to have faith to be healed, then that can happen anywhere”... or, even further from scripture “you can be healed if you just have enough faith”.*
- *This is to miss the point of what is happening here, and of Luke’s greater emphasis throughout Acts.*
- *Greater point- more important than mans need for healing is God’s purpose for his healing. God loved this man, cared for him- but God’s chief expression of love wasn’t to provide temporary physical healing- because in this life, any physical healing is ultimately temporary. This man’s greatest need wasn’t to walk!*
- *His greatest need was spiritual- he lived in a culture absent of freedom, goodness, and grace of God. He lived in physical bondage, but even more, and along with all those around him, lived in spiritual bondage.*
- *You see- God’s greater act of love for this man was the Love Christ poured out on the cross, through his death, burial, and resurrection, so this man could receive ETERNAL healing- that he could be made alive. IN EPHESIANS 2:4... Paul wrote...*

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in sin—it is by grace you have been saved.

- *When Paul realized the man was listening with EARS TO HEAR, FAITH TO BE MADE WELL- he recognized that GOD WAS ALREADY AT WORK. And in this unique instance, the Spirit led Paul to invite the man to STAND UP, to walk, to receive physical healing.*
- *Theme Luke has been building through entire story.*
- *GOD is taking initiative here! Spirit is directing Paul to extend invitation into faith-- AND the Spirit opens this man’s heart by giving him the GIFT OF FAITH.*
- *FRIEND- if you find yourself looking to God, it is because GOD IS TAKING THE INITIATIVE in your heart- he is giving you gift of faith, as he has done for all who believe. CONSIDER EPHESIANS 2:8-9*

Ephesians 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.*

- *The gift of God, which is not of ourselves, is FAITH.*
- *The notion that if we just somehow bring enough faith to the table, that we can move God to do what we ask – often is a doorway into either spiritual pride or spiritual confusion and disillusionment.*
- *In contrast- miracle we find in New Covenant is God’s grace, working together with our faith, which God also gives us, to lead us to experience what GOD IS DOING.*
- *THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED HERE, but it is NOT what the people of the town thought happened.*
- *Rather than seeing the evidence of this man’s healing and hearing the Truth of God’s message, they instead did what humanity still does today. They saw something- someone they thought could meet their temporary needs, and decided to make that their God- tried to make gods in their own image.*

† Making god in our image

Acts 14:11-13 *When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!”*¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.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.

- **What’s going on here! As we saw, the Lycaonian’s were superstitious, and there was a long history regarding worship of Zeus and Hermes.**
- **In fact, part of mythology was story where Jupiter and Mercury (Roman Zeus and Hermes) come from heaven disguised as humans.**
- **They go to town where everyone mistreats them, until a kind elderly couple who take them in and care for them. In response, the two God’s destroy the town and greatly reward the couple.**
- **Kicker- in local legend, event happened right there**
- **For Lycaonians... “God’s are here again! We can’t screw up like we did last time, we have to worship these men, and then maybe they will reward us”**
- **SO, they put together the preparations for a sacrifice according to their cult, and looked for B&P.**
- **ZOOM OUT. Easy to judge these people as superstitious and gullible. But in fact they are expressing core attributes of fallen humanity. In Romans 1 Paul is describing what society looks like when it rejects God, and in one of the greatest indictments of the human condition, we read this...**

Rom 1:21-25 *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

- **It is in our nature to worship what we create, what we think we can control. But to do so- as scripture proclaims- is futile, and foolish. There are many things in life that are good and to be enjoyed, but not worshipped- not to be our God. I wonder if when Paul wrote that paragraph in Romans, if he was remembering this day in Lystra.**
- **IN ANY CASE, back in story, P&B aren’t aware of what is going on. When people started shouting they did so in their local dialect, which P&B didn’t understand. But then, it becomes clear what is happening and B&P are horrified...**

✠ Only human **Acts 14:14-17** *But 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.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.”

- **Spirit is at work in P&B, this time through expression of humility. When people praise us- OH- WE LIKE THAT. So easy to let that go to our head. But not P&B. They cry out, WE ARE ONLY HUMAN- and they direct the GLORY BACK TO GOD.**
- **Ps 115 (read earlier) warning against Idols- begins**

Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

- **Let's look at this a little closer. Few big things**
- **Famous song by Fleetwood Mac- You can go your own way. Paul says- Well, actually, you can't go your own way... at least not without consequence.**

✠ **You can't go your own way**

¹⁶*In the past, he let all nations go their own way.*

- **This is idea that for a portion of human history, God allowed nations of humanity to 'go their own way' in relationship to God- God had revealed himself GENERALLY, through creation, but he had not yet revealed his plan for redemption SPECIFICALLY UNTIL the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.**
- **NOW, however, God HAS revealed himself in Christ, and he calls all people to turn to him.**
- **In Acts 17, when Paul is speaking in Athens, he'll say**

Acts 17:30 *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.*

- **We will push more into this when we get to Acts 17... BUT NOW, we get to the essence of Paul and Barnabas' plea to the people of Lystra- AND to us.**
- **From a place of deep compassion and emotion, the people are implored to TURN...**

✠ **From worthless things to the Living God**

- **Worthless things here are literal idols. Their hope was in little gods- things they had created that had NO VALUE, NO POWER to bring life.**
- **As disciples of Jesus, idol worship should break our hearts. Be it Hinduism or New age mysticism, millions of people around world invest their lives and resources seeking to find life in DEAD THINGS. Result isn't just different cultures- it is a broken world filled with hopelessness.**
- **But this speaks to us as well. We are people of faith, but face temptation ALL DAY LONG to put our trust and hope in little gods. These may be things that DO have value- that are important parts of life, or things that please God for us to enjoy- but NOT TO BE OUR GODS- NOT to be our source of life. Examples?**
- **Any number of possessions and activities. If I can do this, have this, then I'll be complete. Little God.**
- **POLITICS. Many important political issues in our country. But Jesus didn't come to change the world through politics. Jesus stayed remarkably distant from the political issues of his day.**
- **Rather, Jesus came to change lives through Spiritual transformation.**
- **Significant trend in America right now that seeks to conflate political perspectives with Jesus and the Kingdom of God, and this is not biblical. Friendships and family relationships have been sacrificed on the alter of politics... Politics can be a little God.**
- **Control. Certainty. Demand for fairness on my terms. Addictions. Social media....**
- **ANYTHING we place above the wellness and life that comes from our relationship with Christ... little God.**
- **BUT FOCUS of Paul's message isn't just turning FROM our little gods- TURNING TO THE LIVING GOD.**

✠ **From worthless things to the Living God!**

¹⁵We 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.”

- **Here P&B give the simple but inescapable evidence rooted deeply in Hebrew thought. The REALITY, POWER, and GOODNESS of God toward ALL OF HUMANITY is made manifest in creation.**

Psalm 19:1-4 *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ²Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. ³They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. ⁴Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*

- **P&B are making an appeal to the observable evidence of nature that there is A GOD, A CREATOR.**
- **Luke doesn't tell us rest of Paul's message, but it doubtless was message of reconciliation to God through Grace and Freedom found in Jesus Christ.**
- **I can imagine Paul proclaiming- YES, GOD HAS COME DOWN IN HUMAN FORM... and his name is Jesus. NOT US, NOT THESE IDOLS that have no power to do anything for you... it is through Jesus Christ that the Life of God has come to you.**
- **But P&B's message was not effective. Here we see the reality that when we allow ourselves to become addicted to our idols, they are a HARD...**

✠ A hard habit to break

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

- **Church. Staying free from the temptation of all our little God's doesn't happen by accident. It is a choice. And that is the choice to TURN TO GOD. Each day, in our outlook, our perspective, how we SET OUR MIND and what we allow into our heart.**
- **As we consider this story...**
- **If you are wrestling with God's work in your life, know that this is God taking the initiative. How will you respond?**
- **What are the little god's you are allowing to take a place of dominance? This isn't a thing of legalism or fear, just an awareness. Is there a place of spiritual or emotional un-health where you're making an agreement- "This is okay, I need this"... OR, something that may be completely fine, but you're allowing it to take on a place of authority.**
- **If so, God's invitation is to turn to HIM. HE is the source of Life that does not fail. NOT religion. JESUS. His word. His presence, which he calls us to experience together as a family of faith.**
- **What does this look like for you? How is God calling you to turn to him... how will you respond?**