

You remember last week as they were ministering there in the church in Antioch, the Spirit of God separated Paul and Barnabas for a special missionary journey. The first outreach of the church into the uttermost parts of the world. Jesus said, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. You will be witnesses of Me both in Jerusalem and Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. And as we look at the Book of Acts we find that this is exactly what is happening. They began their ministry in Jerusalem. They spread out through Judea. Philip went to Samaria. And now beginning with chapter thirteen we have the witness of the church to the uttermost parts of the earth. So they went first to the island of Cypress and then over to the area of Antioch in Pisidia, which is present day Turkey.

Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. Now as they are coming to the area of Iconium, we mentioned last week that they have left the coastal plains and they've headed up to the high plateau, the region of Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, which were in the area of Galatia. So when Paul wrote his Galatian epistle, he was writing it to these people. Now he is moving away from you might say, advanced civilization, where there was great Roman power and into the rural areas where they did not have the same kind of rule that Rome did exercise in the major areas. So you are getting into sort of "wild west" country, although it is "wild east" over there. You are getting into more of a ungoverned territory as far as Roman influence and government are concerned. But as they come to Iconium, in the synagogue, great multitudes both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.
³*Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.* Now it's interesting to me as the opposition was stirred, rather than leaving and saying "Well, you know—it's getting rough around here." They just stayed and in the face of the opposition they remained. The interesting thing to me is that as they were there, this third verse, the Lord granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands, which gave testimony to the word of grace that they were sharing. In the book of Mark (Mark 16:17) as Jesus commanded the disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, He said that certain signs would follow those that believed. And then Mark's gospel closes, they went everywhere preaching the word, the Lord confirming the word with signs following. In other words, the miraculous signs were done in order to prove the word of God to the people. I think that in the present time there is a serious mistake that has been made and is being made by the church and that is that endeavor to sort of promote the signs and wonders within the church. To try to attract people with signs and wonders. There is quite a move at the present time and quite an emphasis upon signs and wonders, hoping that they will attract the unconverted. That is not how it happened in the early church. They were teaching and preaching the word of God and that was the chief emphasis of their ministry was the teaching of the word of God. The signs and wonders followed the teaching of the Word to confirm the Word of God in the hearts of the people. Here we find in Iconium as they were teaching, the Lord gave witness to the truth of what they were saying with the signs and the wonders that were done by their hands.

⁴*But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.* ⁵*And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them,* ⁶*they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.* So as we said, this is not an area this is really under the strict rule of the Roman government. This is more of the mob rule. In fact, this was a lynch mob that gathered together to get rid of Paul and Barnabas. They were plotting to lynch them. So when they heard of this plot, they fled on a little deeper

into the land, into Derbe and Lystra. Now this is the area, Derbe, where Timothy originated. It was, no doubt, on this journey that Paul first met Timothy.

⁷*And they were preaching the gospel there.* ⁸*And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.* ⁹*This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed,* ¹⁰*said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.* Now here no doubt is a combination of gifts of the Spirit being exercised by Paul. The gift of prophecy as he is preaching the word. The gift of discernment, for as he is preaching, he notices that there is this lame man over here. Paul began to stare at him, observing him intently. And as he did he perceived that God gave to this man, faith to be healed. So that's the gift of discernment, realizing that this man has the faith to be healed. So he said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" I think that probably the gift of faith was operating then. You know if you are in a strange area preaching on the street. You have a crowd there listening and there's a guy over here who has never walked. He's about forty years old. For you to say, stand up straight on your feet! That would take a lot of faith. Then the gift of miracles because the man began to leap and walk.

¹¹*Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"* The gods are here! ¹²*And Barnabas they called Zeus (Jupiter), and Paul, Hermes (Mercurius), because he was the chief speaker.* The names Jupiter and Mercurius are Latin for the Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes. Now in Lycaonia, there was a legend or a myth that at one time, Zeus and Hermes came down to visit the people, incognito. And they went throughout Lycaonia and no one showed them any hospitality. They were treated very poorly by the people, except for one old couple, Philemon and his wife. And so because of their mistreatment because the people didn't recognize them because they were incognito, they cursed the area and the whole area was destroyed with the exception of Philemon and his wife. So this was sort of a legend in that area so the people didn't want to miss it if this is Zeus and Hermes again, then you know, we want to recognize them so that we won't be cursed. So they said that because Barnabas was the taller of the two, he must be Zeus and the little short guy with the squinty eyes and the crooked nose must be Hermes.

¹³*Then the priest of Zeus (Jupiter), whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.* The gods are here! And so the priest of Jupiter, probably someone ran out to the temple of Jupiter and said, hey, man, your gods are down here. So he came dragging an ox up the street to the gate of the city and was going to offer a sacrifice to Barnabas and to Paul. I believe that at this point they were facing the gravest danger in their ministry. Not when they were in Iconium and there was a plot to stone them. Not later on in Lystra when they did stone Paul, but right now is the greatest threat to the success of their ministry as the people are ready to worship them as gods because of God's working through their lives. I think that there is an incumbent danger with the gifts of the Spirit that we all need to be wary of. All of us desire to have the power of God working in our lives. All of us desire to have Spiritual gifting. As Paul said (1 Corinthians 12:31), covet earnestly the best gifts. And we do desire to see the power of God. We would love to see answers to prayer. We would love to see God's power manifested in our lives and through our lives. But, whenever this happens, people have a tendency to get their eyes on the instrument that God is using and to elevate and glorify that instrument.

You remember earlier in the book of Acts (Acts 3:1-11) when Peter and John were going into the temple at the hour of prayer in the afternoon and there was a lame man there, also about forty years old, also who had never walked. A common figure for he had been there for years begging at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. When he saw Peter and John going in, he sought alms of them and Peter said look on us. And he reached out his hand and all. Peter said, oh, I don't have any silver or gold, but what I do have, that I will give unto you. In the name of Jesus Christ rise to your feet and walk. And he took him and lifted him to his feet and immediately he was healed. He began to walk and leap and praise God. It created quite a sensation. Hundreds, thousands of people began to crowd around Peter and the lame man

who was hugging Peter and jumping up and down. People said isn't that the lame man? Another said, it sure looks like him. Well, how come he can walk? We don't know! And then Peter looking at the crowd said, men and brethren, you men of Israel, why marvel you at this? Why look on us as though we through our own righteousness have done this good deed to the lame man? Be it known unto you that it's by the name of Jesus Christ this man stands here before you whole. But this is a common tendency. When God uses an individual in a work of God, bringing healing or supernatural signs, people usually get their eyes on the instrument that God used. And they are ready to glorify man! They are ready to glorify the instrument. Jesus said (Matthew 5:16), "Let your light so shine before men that when they see your good works they will glorify your Father, which is in heaven." Now the danger is taking the glory. You can sort of rationalize it and say, well, I'll let them think I'm Zeus and that will give me a chance then to really, you know, and then I can lead them around to Jesus. And there is a temptation to enjoy and to sort of savor that adoration and adulation. But it'll be the end of your ministry. God will not share his glory with man. And so Paul and Barnabas were in great danger as the priest of Jupiter was ready to offer a sacrifice to them. And so when Paul and Barnabas realized what was going on. Suddenly they saw the priest. They saw the ox. They put things together and they realized what was happening here.

¹⁴*But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out* ¹⁵*and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, Notice they did not take the adulation of the people! And they turned them. We've come here to tell you that you're not to follow these empty things. You are to serve the living God, who is the Creator of the whole universe. It was important that they turn these people away from themselves and to the Lord! We are men of like passions or we are men with the same nature as you. That is hard for us to believe, isn't it? When we read in the Old Testament of Elijah (1 Kings 18:20-40), we read the fire coming down from heaven. We read of the miracles that Elijah did. Don't you believe that Elijah was some kind of a super saint? I mean look at the power that this man had! But the Bible says (James 5:17) Elijah was a man of like passions, like unto us.*

When you read of Paul and the ministry of Paul and the exploits of this servant of God, when you read of him saying to the man, "Stand up on your feet" and this lame man, thirty eight years old, never walked before, born with this impediment, and you see him walking and leaping. And you say my, Paul is something super! But he is saying, no. We are men with like passions (the same nature). What's he saying? God uses common people. God uses ordinary people to accomplish His work. God wants to use you! You say, oh no, not me! Yes, you! It's interesting how men that God has used have always felt that somehow they weren't usable.

Look what God had to go through to get Moses to go to the Pharaoh? (Exodus chapter 3) Lord, I'm—stuttering—not eloquent. I can't really speak, God. Well all right I'll give you Aaron to speak. But Lord they won't believe that You sent me! Well, what's in your hand. This old stick. Throw it on the ground! It became a serpent. Grab it by the tail. It became a stick again. I'll be with you. I'll work with you. Oh, Lord, why don't You get someone else?

God said to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5). Before you were ever conceived in the womb, I knew you. While you were being formed in your mother's womb, I ordained that you should go and stand before kings and speak My word and all. Oh, Lord, you've got to be kidding, I'm just a teenager. Who is going to listen to me? You see, those people that God used always felt, well, Lord you can't mean me.

When God came to Gideon (Judges 6:11), as he was hiding in the cave, threshing the wheat of his father's, He said, thou mighty man of valor, go in this thy might and deliver the children of Israel from the Midianites. Gideon said, check Your papers, man. You've got the wrong address! You've got the wrong man! I'm from the least tribe. My father is the least in the tribe and I'm the least in my father's house. You've got the bottom of the barrel!

Men that God uses are men who always are surprised that God would use them. God wants to use you. Who knows what God would do through your life if you fully yielded yourself to Him? Someone once

said the world has yet to see what God can do through a man who is totally yielded unto God. Moody heard that and said, I want to be that man! And we see what God did through Dwight Moody. But yet, I'm sure he wasn't totally yielded. I believe the world has yet to see what God could do through a man that is totally yielded to Him.

So Paul and Barnabas said we're men of like passions. We're not gods. We're just men, ordinary men! And we've come to tell you to turn away from these kind of vanities. These things are empty! The worship of false gods is empty. There is a true and a living God, who is the Creator. He is the One that you are to worship. We've come to tell you about Him!

And he said, ¹⁶*who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.*" And so they are showing to the people that the true and the living God has revealed Himself, His goodness in nature. The Psalmist said (Psalms 19:1-2) the heavens declare the glory of God! The earth shows forth His handiwork and day unto day they are speaking unto us. Night after night their voice is speaking. And it is universal language. There is not a speech nor a language where His voice is not heard. Paul tells the Romans (Romans 1:19-20) that even the heathen are without excuse because of God's revelation of Himself in nature. So they are going to the basic revelation of God. The true and living God, who created the universe! He is the One who gives us rain, the fruitful seasons and fills our hearts with food and gladness.

¹⁸*And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.*

¹⁹*Then Jews from Antioch (that's where they started out, toward the coastal region) and Iconium (that's where they were going to stone them and lynch them) came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.* How fickle is the worship of the crowd! How many people give their life to receive the worship of the crowd? As Paul talks (1 Corinthians 9:25) about those who are in the Olympics and in wrestling competition. He said they train. They discipline their bodies. They go through all types of sacrifice. And they do it for a corruptible crown. That they might enter the Olympics and win the wrestling championship in the Olympics to stand before the judges as the world champion wrestler and have a laurel wreath placed on your head and stand there as they play your national anthem. He talks about all of the sacrifice, all of the disciplining of the body that they go through for this corruptible crown. For the glory of man to stand there and be applauded as the greatest. But oh, how fickle is the crowd. You may train. You might spend hours in the batting cage. And you might have your trainers and all. Where you are really able to keep your eye on that ball and knock it out of the park. You might be the home run hero of the year with the most runs batted in and the whole bit. But go into a batting slump for a week or two and see what happens. It could be that every time you come up to bat, people are cheering, yelling, and whistling, stomping in the stadiums, you know, because wow, looking for a home run. But a two week slump without a hit. They announce your name. You step up to bat and you hear all the boo birds. Oh how fickle is the glory of the world. And here they are ready to offer sacrifices and claim them as gods, but the next thing is they are stoning them. Paul is stoned and drug out of the city. They think he is dead.

Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 12:2-10) about fourteen years after this event. In chapter twelve, he said there was a man about fourteen years ago and whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know, but such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And there I heard things that were so fantastic that it would be a crime and try to describe them in human language. There are no words that have yet been devised or created that can describe the beauty of the things I heard. It would be a crime to try and describe them with human language. Now many believe that Paul is referring to this experience in Lystra, when he was stoned. And then they drug him out of the city, figuring he was dead. Paul is saying I don't know if I was dead or not. I don't know if I was dead or alive. What I do know, I was caught up into heaven. Maybe I was dead. Maybe I went up into heaven. I don't know, maybe I was alive and just had a vision. They thought he was dead, but Paul says I really can't tell you. I don't know if I was dead or alive, but I do know that I was there in the third heaven and it was glorious.

And because of the abundance of revelations that was given to me, this heavenly visitation, this visit into heaven. He said there was also given unto me a thorn in the flesh, a minister of Satan to buffet me, lest I would be exalted above measure because of the abundance of the revelations that I received. And it could be that this thorn in the flesh was a result of the stoning. It could be that there was some injury that he never fully recovered from.

So as his body was there, they left, figured that he was dead. ²⁰*However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city.* His friends has gathered around him. *And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.* He went back into the city where they had just stoned him. Then the next day he takes off.

²¹*And when they had preached the gospel to that city (that is, Derbe) and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,* ²²*strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."* They had seen what it cost Paul. So they encouraged them. They said, look, it's not going to be an easy road! It's going to be tough. It's through much tribulation. In this world, Jesus said (John 16:13), you will have tribulation.

²³*So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.* So this was their first thrust into this area of Asia, which is present day, Turkey. They are encouraging them to stay with the Lord.

²⁴*And after they had passed through Pisidia (back to the coast), they came to Pamphylia.* ²⁵*Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.* Which is the port from which they first arrived and from which they left. ²⁶*From there they sailed to Antioch, (Antioch of Syria, from whence they began this journey, having been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.) where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.* They had accomplished their first mission.

²⁷*Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.* ²⁸*So they stayed there (in Antioch) a long time with the disciples.* Back in their home church, ministering again. But it's like the missionaries who go out and then they come back. They share with us how that God used them! It's always exciting to have our young people return and tell of the grace of God working in their lives as they've shared the gospel of Christ in the various places throughout the world. So the early church of Antioch was the center for world missions even as this church has become a center for world missions. And it's thrilling always to hear what God is doing.

So we find in the next chapter the first church council and the reason for the calling of the first church council, the issues that needed to be resolved. Read on! It's exciting as we continue the story of Jesus Christ as He continues His ministry upon the earth, now through men, apostles, who have been anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Father, we thank You for the record. For the things that we can learn from it. For the admonition. For the encouragement and the warning. Lord, we do desire that You would use us and we thank You that You used just plain, ordinary people. But Father, help us to be on guard that when people begin to look at us, to hold us up in high esteem, that we not be guilty of trying to receive that adulation. But we as Paul, and Peter, turned them to You, Lord, the great Creator! Now Lord, we are facing a new week. We need Your strength. We need Your help. And so Lord, we ask that You would guide us, give us opportunities, sharing our faith with others. Open the doors for us, Lord, that we might be able to declare the glorious gospel that we have received to those that we will meet during the week. And Lord, we would like to be that person through which You might accomplish all of Your purposes. We want to be totally dedicated to You. To Your will, to do Your work. So guide us, direct us, empower us, use us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.