

Acts Chapter 14a

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Date: 22 December 2012

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Father, for this new day and for what it holds for us because we know you are in charge of it and you are sufficient for everything that comes our way. We ask your blessing upon our study this morning, the understanding of it, the meal that will follow, and the day that lies ahead.

We give it all to you in Christ's name. Amen. All right, if you will turn to page 526 up in the left-hand corner. We are dealing with this man who is lame at Lystra, and the Apostle Paul has been used of God to provide physical healing for this man.

And I want you to note the importance of understanding what is behind this. And that is simply to authenticate the message that Paul is going to be delivering.

It goes without saying that there were all kinds of people who needed healing during the earthly life of our Lord, and great multitudes came to him, and we are told in the Gospels that he healed them all.

And they had all kinds of afflictions, diseases, etc. And Christ gave this miraculous healing authority to the Apostles.

[1 : 20] And perhaps one of the most obvious accounts of that is in Matthew 10, when we are told that he called the twelve unto him, and he gave them authority.

They didn't possess it themselves, but he did. And he delegated authority to them to duplicate what he was doing, and then he sent them out in teams of two.

So there were six teams going out, multiplying the work of the Lord throughout the nation of Israel. And this same kind of power was extended to the Apostle Paul, who was not one of the original twelve, not to be confused with the twelve who had a ministry exclusively to Israel, because Paul was raised up for the previously unheard of idea of being the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Whoa, what is this? That is completely new. He was not an add-on to the twelve. He was the Apostle to the Gentiles.

And that is an entirely different ballgame. In fact, it was absolutely unheard of among the Jews. And many of them never considered Paul a bona fide Apostle, because the idea that God would send somebody to the Gentiles was just unthinkable.

[2 : 49] And yet, that is precisely what he did. And Paul, as an Apostle, was also given this kind of authority. But I want you to note something, guys, and this is really important.

He used that apostolic authority frequently. We're going to see him use it here at Lystra with this man, or Iconium, with this man who was laying from his feet.

But as Paul's ministry continues on, this healing, physical healing thing, seems to diminish.

In fact, the miraculous seems to diminish. And we do not find the abundance of miracles that are there in the Gospels or in the early Acts.

Something is going on, and it's really important to understand that. And what's going on is there is a shift that is being made away from an exclusively Jewish Gospel, which the Twelve were preaching, to a Gentile Gospel.

[3 : 52] And that didn't include circumcision. Didn't include abstaining from certain foods. It's a time of confusion. And as Paul, early on in his ministry, is going to be demonstrating and authenticating his message with miracles, they are going to start to wane.

They are going to begin to diminish. And the time is going to come when Paul will say something like, Trophimus, I left sick at Miletus.

Well, what's that about? Why didn't he heal him? This, I think, is something that Paul wrote to Timothy. And why didn't he heal Trophimus so he could take him with him?

He left him there sick. Obviously, too sick to travel. And then he says things like, Take a little wine for your stomach's sake and you're off in infirmities.

And we know that Paul is going to be released from prison or released from house arrest. And you'll have a couple of years of freedom.

[5 : 07] But then he's going to be executed. Where is the divine deliverance? Peter was rescued by an angel when he was imprisoned by Herod.

But later, he's not going to be rescued. He's going to be executed. So what's going on? What's going on is this. As the gospel and the emphasis on the age of Israel and the gospel of the kingdom is fading, fast fading, what is coming into view is a whole new order.

And it is called the church, the body of Christ. It is going to be the emphasis from about mid-Acts on with the raising up of the Apostle Paul.

And, fellas, this is what makes the book of Acts so confusing. And this is what makes it so controversial among Christians. Because in Acts, you've got doctrine on the move.

Doctrine that is diminishing in the emphasis to Israel and doctrine that is increasing in the emphasis to the church. So it is a very, very curious thing.

[6 : 20] And nothing, perhaps, divides Christendom more than an understanding of the book of Acts or the disagreement about it. We've got one fading out and another fading in.

So you've got both programs, the program to Israel and the program to the Gentiles, continuing on separate tracks but at the same time running side by side.

And the twelve are preaching one thing to the Jews, which is called the gospel to the circumcision. And Paul is preaching something else, which does not contain Jewish requirements to the Gentiles.

And we will see upcoming in chapter 15, which is next on track, the controversy that arises over, Well, it's great that these Gentiles are coming to faith in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, but don't they then have to be circumcised in order to be bona fide?

And they're going to hold a big conference at Jerusalem in chapter 15, upcoming, to decide this issue. So what we've got is a phasing out of the physical, obvious, material miracles, and a phasing in of that which is purely spiritual.

[7 : 49] And this is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians and said, For we, to the Corinthians, Gentiles, now in the church age, He said, We walk by faith, not by sight.

That is monumental. What does that mean? It means our walk and the ordering of our life is no longer dependent upon visible, obvious, outward miracles.

That time is past. Remember when he said, The Jew seeks a sign. Another word for sign is a miracle. Jew seeks a sign.

But we walk by faith, not by sight. That means we are not to require outward, obvious, physical miracles in order to believe.

We are to believe by faith. That means we are to believe because God said it. That's it. You don't need miracles. You don't need physical manifestations.

[8 : 55] And some still today think you do. And this is where many of our charismatic brethren put their emphasis on the healing miracles, etc. And what we are learning from the book of Acts is that that was in vogue at one time, but it faded out.

And I'm not limiting God in saying he doesn't do miracles today or that he doesn't physically heal people today. God can do anything he wants, anytime he wants. But the emphasis is not on the physical and the material.

It is on the spiritual. So we move from an emphasis on physical, water, baptism, which was part and parcel of the Jewish economy, into baptism that is spiritual.

That is, Paul said, for by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female.

And what he's talking about there is not water baptism. It's not physical baptism. It is spirit baptism. And spirit baptism is what you experienced when you received Christ as your Savior.

[10 : 09] You were placed into union with Jesus Christ, identified with him by the Holy Spirit.

Remember, John the Baptist said, I indeed baptize you with water, but one comes after me who is mightier than I.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And I think Christ did that on the day of Pentecost.

Those Jewish people there, 3,000 of them at least, were baptized by the Holy Spirit. And Jesus Christ was the baptizer.

But when you come over to the church, the body of Christ, the role is reversed. We are not baptized by Christ with the Holy Spirit.

Paul said in 12:13 of Corinthians, and I just quoted, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. That's for Gentiles.

[11:15] That's for non-Jews. The first was for the Jew. So there is a difference there. And, fellas, we can't just disregard that and say, well, it doesn't make any difference who baptizes you. It does. It makes a lot of difference.

So as believers, we are baptized or identified with Jesus Christ in the spiritual body of Christ, a la Ephesians and Colossians. And the Holy Spirit is the one who baptizes us without water into the body of Christ.

So now we've got another physical miracle here that Paul is going to use to authenticate his message. And he's performing these miracles for the same reason that Christ did.

The Jew, when Christ came to Israel, the Jew had every right to say, okay, you say you are the Messiah? Show us.

Prove it. Do something. That was the basis for Christ's miracles. And Nicodemus, who was one of the Pharisees, you remember in John chapter 3, he put two and two together.

[12:16] Nicodemus started connecting the dots. And he said to Jesus, we know that no one can do these mighty miracles that you have done except God be with him.

Nicodemus was coming to the conclusion that Jesus was who he claimed to be. He was the Messiah. And another by the name of Joseph of Arimathea.

They were both on board. And they are the ones who claimed the body of our Lord when he was crucified, you'll recall. So now we've got another incident of a miracle. In verse 8 of chapter 14, There sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked.

And the same heard Paul speak, who steadfastly beholding him and perceiving that he had faith to be healed. That is, Paul was steadfastly beholding this man and perceived that this man had faith to be healed.

And as I said before, I could only conclude that he knew that this man was really listening to what he was saying. Paul could see that this guy who was sitting there, because he couldn't stand, was really plugged in to what Paul was saying.

[13:41] And Paul noted his attentiveness. And I think on that basis, he had confidence that the man had confidence to be healed. And he said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet.

And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, You see, when the people saw, Seeing is believing.

Christ is going to say to Thomas, After his resurrection. Thomas, because you have seen me, You have believed. Blessed are they who, having not seen, Will believe.

That's you. That's me. I've never seen the risen Christ. I've never seen any of his miracles. On what basis do you believe? You believe on the basis of faith.

That means you believe it, Because that's what God says in the record. We cannot replicate a miracle. We cannot replicate anything that is historical.

[14:51] We are limited to accepting or denying the testimony of credible witnesses who were there at the time and place. So, we've got this man who is healed.

And I'm convinced that it too is designed to be the backup material. To give credibility to what Paul is saying. And boy, it is never a mixed bag when people believe something.

We're going to see the fickleness of the public here. And when the people saw what Paul had done, Here's their conclusion. They lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lyconia, Which was obviously a foreign language, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

Well, here they reached what to them was a very logical conclusion, Because they had no other possible explanation for this miracle being done, Other than the fact that somebody, superhuman, would be required to do it.

And who is it? But these two guys who are standing here, Looking like men, But they can't be men. They are obviously deity.

[16:04] They are obviously God. And I don't know, It may have only taken one person in the crowd to suggest that. Perhaps one of the people of influence, And others picked up on it.

And it became almost like a mantra. These are the gods that have come down to us. And they called Barnabas Jupiter, Probably because he was bigger in physical stature. And they called Paul Mercurius, Because he was the chief speaker. This is named after the Roman god Mercury.

Ford Motor Company named one of their cars after this deity. The Mercury. And you see on the FTD florist, The guy wearing the helmet with the wings on it.

And that is representative of the Roman god Mercury. And some translations render this Hermes. Hermes is the Greek equivalent of the Roman god Mercury.

[17 : 12] He is called Hermes. And if you know something about hermeneutics, Which is the art and science of interpreting the Bible, That word hermeneutics is taken from the name of the Greek god Hermes.

Because Hermes was to the Greeks what Mercury was to the Romans. They are regarded as the messenger gods. So, in the interpretation of scripture, It has to do with interpreting or making clear the message that is given.

In the case of Mercury, For the Romans, Or Hermes for the Greeks. So, they automatically just came to that conclusion that these are these deities. And then the priest of Jupiter, Which was before their city.

You see, You've got to recognize, guys, That this is a typical pagan community. I'm sure there were Jews there, But as always, The Jews were in a minority. And the vast majority of these people Were just pagans, Who worshipped many gods.

They had a god who was in control of the hunt, A god who was in control, Or a goddess who was in control of love, A god who was in control of the sea, Neptune or Poseidon, A god who was in control of all of this.

[18 : 29] They had all of these deities. And here, They've got a religion established, That recognized Jupiter as one of the chief gods, And they actually thought that that's who Barnabas was.

Barnabas is Jupiter incarnated. And, We are told that they brought oxen, And garlands into the gates, And would have done sacrifice with the people.

They are really caught up in this. I mean, These are obviously deities. And what we need to do is honor their presence, By making sacrifice to them. And this would have been a logical conclusion for them.

And when Paul and Barnabas heard about this, They just lost it. They thought, Oh, Here is a perfect example. Here is a perfect example, Of a preacher delivering a message, And the people get the completely wrong ideas.

And it's a frustrating thing, When you can't make your message clear enough, That what they are actually hearing, Is the opposite of what you're trying to tell them. This is a great frustration, I think, That any preacher has.

[19 : 33] They would have done sacrifice with the people, And when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul heard of it, They rent their clothes. In other words, Oh, No, No, You guys have got it all wrong. And they run up to the people, And they run in among the people, And crying out, And yelling, Hey, Stop it, Stop it, This isn't right.

Sirs, Why do you do these things? We also are men, Of like passions with you. We're not deities. We're just people like you, And we are here to deliver, A terribly important message.

And you got it all wrong. That you should turn from these vanities. That's what we're preaching unto you.

Turn from these vanities, These follies, These futile ways, These empty things, These foolish things, These superstitions. Fellows, Tradition dies hard.

Religious tradition, Religious tradition, Dies hardest of all. Because people attach, A significance, To religious traditions, That they don't to anything else.

[20 : 51] Religious traditions, Are so powerful, God has to use, His veritable two by fours, To knock it out of people. And sometimes, Even then, It persists.

It is a tough taskmaster. These vanities, These empty things, Unto the living God, Which made heaven, And earth, And the sea, You've got a God, For each of these things.

Well, Let me tell you something. The God we serve, And the God we are proclaiming, Is the God who created, All of these things. He is a singular deity.

And, I'm past my sheet here. Unto the living God, Which made heaven, And earth, And the sea. And you don't have page 528, Do you?

Okay, Well, Let's keep right on ruling then. Okay. And all things that are therein, Who in times past, Suffered, Or allowed, All nations, To walk in their own ways.

[22 : 01] Nevertheless, He left not himself without witness, In that he did good. God did good, And gave us rain from heaven, And fruitful seasons, Filling our hearts with food, And gladness.

And with these sayings, Scarce restrained they the people, That they had not done sacrifice unto them.

So, They're finally starting to get things straightened out. But, The tide is going to turn very quickly. Because in verse 19, These certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, They are the same crowd, That ran Paul and Barnabas out of town, Earlier on.

That we've considered a few sessions ago. And these are, Jews, On a mission. And they see, They see this renegade Jew, The apostle Paul, And his accomplice Barnabas, As teaching against Moses.

Because what are they doing? They are teaching Gentiles. But you are not going to satisfy Jews, With the Gentile gospel.

[23 : 14] No way. So, They are going to label these guys, As phonies. And they are going to incite the crowd against them. And they will actually succeed, In turning these people, Who were earlier, Ready to worship them, Into persecuting them.

And that just shows you, The power and influence, Of a small body, To turn a larger body. And we'll be talking about that, Next week. And this has tremendous implications, Not only religiously, But politically, Economically, And every other way.

It is the influence, The ability of a smaller group, To influence and impact, A larger group, And cause them to endorse that position.

It is a phenomenal thing. We will take it up next week. The food is here, But if there is a question, Or comment, We will entertain it for a moment. Anybody? Dave?

I had a discussion about, The gods that had got to believe, Invisible gods, Or just, I mean, What did they come up with, All these gods, Like, Weren't bringing demons? Well, They were, They were purely, Concocted, From the, Fallen, Warped, Logic, And thinking of men.

[24 : 30] When they looked upon creation, Instead of, Instead of concluding, That there was one god, Who created all of this, Their thinking was, Well, No god could possibly be, Because you see, Their view, Of a god, Was that it was simply, A deity, Was simply, An extension of humanity.

A god, Was someone, Who was, Just, Stronger, And wiser, Etc., Than, Than, Than, Than men were. But that was the extent of it.

They had no idea of an infinite god. And the concept, That one god, Could be responsible, For having created everything, And was in charge of everything, Just seemed to them, Unreasonable. Because, They all knew, As human beings, What limitations, What limitations, They had. And they just, Assigned limitations, To the deity, Only, Less limitations, Than what they had.

But they couldn't conceive, Of one god, Being in charge of everything. And that's what, Paul is going to say, When he goes to, Athens, And he's going to say, I see, Your statuary, And your idols, You've got them, All over town, There's one on every street corner, And you've even got a statue, That doesn't have the name, Of a god on it, Zeus, Mercury, Athena, And so on, But it's got, To the unknown god, And that's, They reasoned that, You know what, We've named all of these gods, And we worship them, But, It occurred to us, That if there is a god, That we are leaving out, And not giving proper honor, And worship to, He's going to really be ticked, So, Whoever you are, Out there, Wherever you are, This is for you, We don't know what your name is, But we don't want to leave you out, So, To the unknown god, This is, This is the folly of man, And this is what Paul is talking about, In Romans chapter 1,

[26 : 33] What man speaks to, So, It's a fascinating subject, Thank you for being here this morning, We'll continue this next week,