

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

¹¹ *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.*

¹⁴ *But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and 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.” ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. (NIV84)*

IN THE PRESENCE OF GREATNESS

It's what the people thought
It's what the preachers taught

Who is the most famous person you have ever met? Maybe a movie star, a politician, an athlete. Someone that you recognize from TV or from the movies and then you get to see them up close. It's kind of cool to see those people who seem larger than life on the Big Screen are really just people like you and me! People line up for hours to see the President or the Pope when he comes to town – just to get a glimpse, maybe for a second or two – just to be able to say they saw him!!

There's a picture hanging in my hallway of me as a young boy! I don't remember this happening, but I think it's pretty cool that it did! Our family and our friends' family would pick 5 or 6 days to go together to see our hometown team – the Milwaukee Brewers – play a baseball game. Before one of those games they had a fan promotion where the fans could go out on the field and get autographs, take pictures, shake hands with the players. That picture is of a 6 year-old me sitting on the lap of a player that would become one of my favorites and one of the best players to ever put on a Brewers uniform. He went on from that night to be one of our team's best pitchers, even going to 3 All-Star games. I didn't know it at the time, but I was in the presence of greatness!!

The people of Lystra had a reaction to what they saw! They were in the presence of greatness, they were just a little confused about what the greatness really was! Paul and Barnabas cleared up their confusion and many came to faith as a result of their work! May God grant us today and every day to see the greatness of the Word of Jesus and to strive to be **In the Presence of that Greatness** everyday!!

1. It's what the people thought!

This morning we pick it up again with Paul and Barnabas. They are touring around Asia Minor – which is present day Turkey. They are looking for ways to share the Word of Life with souls that they know need to hear! Perhaps you remember last week's message. The missionaries were in a town called Antioch preaching Jesus. They spent two weeks there and on the second Sabbath almost the whole town gathered. Many believed, but the many that did not made life very difficult for the Mission Team. They began organized persecution and chased Paul and Barnabas from the town. So from Antioch they traveled to Iconium and it was a pretty similar story there. They won a great number of people through the gospel, but ended up being chased from that town as well. Yet they never grew anxious! Instead they rejoiced in the opportunity to share the precious gospel and celebrated the victories that Jesus was winning for his kingdom through them!!

It's kind of ironic if you think about it! The enemies of the Church were expediting its growth. The more persecution that the church experienced the faster it grew. As missionaries were chased from towns they carried the gospel with them to the next place. As the Romans began to persecute the Christians in Jerusalem, they packed up and moved to other parts of the empire and took their gospel with them. Before you know it, there were large pockets of Christians in Africa, and Asia Minor, even Rome itself!! The devil was trying to crush the church through persecution, but God was causing it to grow!! It's almost like God is in control of everything!! It's almost like he meant it when he said that he will turn even bad things into good for our benefit!!!

So Paul and Barnabas left Iconium and arrived in Lystra. There probably wasn't a Jewish synagogue there, since they didn't go there at all. The plan was instead to just meet people and share the gospel with them. And something remarkable happened as they did just that:

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

The gospel was working again – working faith in a Gentile man. The gospel cured his first ailment of sin and then Lord's power cured his disability as well! The Word of Life brought life to a dead heart and then to dead legs! Both amazing miracles!!

The people of Lystra didn't really see the first miracle, but they sat up and took notice of the second!! The crippled man that everyone in that small town knew – only he's not crippled anymore. The man who needed help to get from place to place jumping and walking!! It was a miracle!! They were **In the Presence of Greatness.**

The people were close but yet very far away! They saw what had happened had to be divine, but they were mistaken in their conclusion.

¹¹ 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.

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Their idolatry is remarkable? That they would believe that Paul and Barnabas were gods. They obviously weren't listening to their message. They obviously were overwhelmed at the greatness of what they saw!

But we slip into that very same idolatry as well! Maybe you don't worship the pastor who preaches to you, but we all often respond more to what we see than what we hear! When things look bleak in life, we grow weary and upset at life even upset at God! When it looks and feels like the world is crashing in around us – we get angry, we might even blame God or tell him how unfair it is that he would allow us to suffer! We too often ignore his promise of blessing and are paralyzed by the ills of this world. We ignore his promise to be with us and we feel far too often like we are all alone in this world! We may not sacrifice a bull to worship someone who isn't God, but when our eyes are what guide us and our sight is what determines our feelings, we fall into the very same trap that Satan laid for the Lystrans. We turn ourselves into gods to take the place of the real God.

Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes, upset at the sin that the people were committing. And that's the way that God should respond when we sin the same way! For all the times that we serve ourselves instead of others, that we chose the easy way instead of the right way, for the times that we listen to ourselves instead of the Word of the Lord, God should tear his clothes and unleash wrath and anger, punishment and hell. That's what we have earned for ourselves in sin!!

But Paul and Barnabas knew that God is different. They respond to the sin of the people in the same way that God responds to our sin – with mercy and grace!!

2. It's what the preachers taught

¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

In the face of their sin and unbelief – Paul delivered to them the gospel. *We are bringing you good news* they proclaimed.

The people thought that they were In the Presence of Greatness because of Paul and Barnabas. But really they were In the Presence of Greatness because of the message that they proclaimed.

Paul and Barnabas had the privilege of telling them about the real time that the real God came to earth in human form. They told of a God – not that threw lightning bolts but instead that cast love to the people that he created. They got to tell how God *became flesh and made his dwelling among them* (John 1:14). They got to tell of his perfect life lived from sinners like us, of his suffering and death in our place. They told of mankind's failure but Christ's success and victory. And then the glorious story of a risen Savior. They got to tell a powerful message of Easter victory – for Jesus and for us! They got to share how death died and sin was destroyed, how Satan and his empty ways were crushed. *We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God.* They were looking for a God in human form, a living breathing deity! They got

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what they were looking for in Jesus. And they got a promise of what they weren't even looking for – forgiveness, peace, life everlasting with their living God.

They wanted the gods to make a dwelling with them on earth. When they thought they saw it, they thought they were **In the Presence of Greatness!** But when faith opened their ears to what the mortal men before them proclaimed, they heard real greatness. The message that they heard is what really put them in the Presence of Greatness! *The gospel... is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16).*

The real greatness was that the real God came not to live among them, but in them. The real God came closer than their town, he came into their hearts, he made their hearts his Spirit's temple!! That's the presence of greatness. That's the epitome of grace and love.

And you my friends stand in the Presence of Greatness as well, because that same Spirit dwells in your heart and soul. He has planted that faith in you and now works with you to bring glory to God. He works with you to listen to the glorious message of grace, to study his Word and grow in faith. He works with you to carry out a ministry to others, to help them in their times of need, to build up those who have fallen down, to support those wearied by the weight of life, to lend a helping hand whenever you can and to be a Christ for them to see. We can be a Jesus to our family to our community to our world. We can show them and tell them of the love of God, a God who came to earth to save the earth from its sin!! We can tell others the greatness of the love of God and the heaven that he has won for us all!!

Have you ever met anyone famous? Have you ever stood in the presence of greatness? Those questions are pretty meaningless – especially to a Christian who knows real greatness and real glory! Greatness lives in us as God himself makes our hearts his home. Greatness is our life as we hear his promise to turn defeat into victory and hardship into blessing! Greatness is our future, as we look forward to the glorious city of God where we will live with him for endless days in glorified bodies!! Rejoice my friends that Greatness is our God and that we can stand in his presence through Jesus here now and forever in his glory!! **In the Presence of Greatness!** That's where we all are and that's where we'll stay forever in Jesus!!! Amen!