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Who We Are and Who We Ain’t

Text Acts 14:8-18

 Luke, physician and chronicler, must see a parallel between the healing with which this passage begins and the healing narrative in Acts 3, featuring Peter and John on their way to the temple. Some of the same descriptive language is used in both narratives:

Acts 3:2- *a certain man, lame from his mother’s womb.*..

Acts 14:8- *a cripple from his mother’s womb...*

Acts 3:4- *And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said,...*

Acts 14:9- *Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed said, ...*

In Acts 3, the person God used as His instrument of healing was Peter. In this text, the agent of healing is Paul.

 I am sure the people in this text, the Lycaonians had fairly pure intentions. However, the Lycaonians have deified the servants of the Lord and complimented them inappropriately.

**Illus.**

In Acts 12 there is the narrative of King Herod, orator extraordinaire, who gave an oration and then was deified by the hearers. Herod should have rejected the accolades as did Paul and Barnabas.

It is incumbent upon us to handle the compliments that may come our way with grace AND clarity. I have been made to feel uncomfortable in some situations. People have given me compliments that are awkward or, worse, simply not true. I have been told I’m an awesome speaker. No, I am not!!

At the end of a concert, I’ve been told my music was amazing. Not it is not! I know what they mean. I know what they intend. It is incumbent upon me to keep my ego in check when receiving comments like these. Let us, who receive compliments, not get it twisted and let’s not let others get it twisted.

At first, Paul and Barnabas aren’t even sure what the people shouted, for it was shouted in the Lycaonian language (v. 11). It was when the priest of Zeus started his acts of worship that it was clear to Paul and Barnabas that something was amiss. Paul and Barnabas’ response to the over-the-top compliments of the people is multi-layered.

1. Paul and Barnabas admit and affirm their mortality (v. 15).
2. Paul and Barnabas frame their rejection of the excessive compliments in solid theology. Listen to them as they declare not only that they are mere men, but that there is
* A living God- (v. 15b)
* A living God who has created- (v.15b)
* A living, creating God who honors freedom of the will- (v. 16)
* A living, creative God, who honors the freedom of the will who has acted in the affairs of humanity, thereby leaving a witness, a statement (a calling card) - (v. 17)

Even with Paul and Barnabas’ clear refusal to be called gods, the Lycaonians persisted (v. 18).

I like Paul and Barnabas. They demonstrate that their successful ministry has not gone to their heads. Their egos are in check. They know who and what they are and they know who and what they ain’t. Yes, I said *ain’t*! :-)

We *are* God’s servants. We *are* God’s spokespersons. We are *not* gods. We are *not* awesome. We are *not* worthy of sacrificial animals being offered up in praise of us.

**Illus**.

A missionary sailed from Liverpool, England to West Africa. At Lagos, Nigeria, he changed ships and boarded a coastal tugboat, to go to a fever-infested area to which he believed God had called him. While changing ships, he met a man who told him, “If you go to that place, you will die.” The missionary replied, “I died before I ever left Liverpool.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

It is clear that Paul and Barnabas died to self before they left Tarsus, before they left Antioch, before they went to Lystra and Derbe and Iconium.

Paul’s address here (v. 15-17) is the first recorded address to a pagan audience. In previous descriptions of their ministry, we have seen Paul and Barnabas in the synagogue, speaking to a very receptive audience, consisting of rulers of the synagogue and others (13:5, 14). Now, they are in front of a heathen audience.

This is a passage about identity; about the way a servant of the Lord Christ and the Church perceives her or himself. Paul and Barnabas have just healed a man, by the power of God (14:8-10). In our service to God, we do good work. We are privileged to witness, and be part of, life-changing events. We see people’s circumstances dramatically changed. It’s tempting to take the credit for all that. “Look what I did!” “I have an anointing on me.”. The same God who uses us as His instruments, to bring about healing, deliverance from the demonic and transformation of lives is the same God who reserves glory for Himself.

Isaiah 42:8

*I am the Lord, that is My name; And my glory I will not give to another...*

When we do our work and ministry and people are inclined to excessively compliment us, let us respond with a gracious “thank you” and let us point those ministry recipients to our God.

Beloved, go forth in the love of God, remembering who and Whose you are...and who and whose you ain’t!

Amen

1. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans, God’s Freedom*, vol. 6. P. 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)