

Explore the Bible: Misguided Worship

November 20, 2017

- The Explore the Bible lesson for Dec. 10 focuses on Acts 14:8-20.

In the brief space since the previous encounter at Pisidian Antioch, we see the growing response to the message of Paul and Barnabas—a mixture of curiosity and anger.

We cannot forget the good news (gospel) is offensive because it calls us from our nature to follow God's way. The Jews were furious and constantly on the heels of these missionaries, trying to stir up animosity. Ask your group: *How do we see similar mixed responses to the gospel today?*

In this new setting, we see an interesting situation of misguided worship. The missionaries encountered a crowd who tried to take God's worship and apply it in a pagan way.

Healing (Acts 14:8-10)

This is not just any ordinary healing. Here is an example of one who not only was willing to be healed, but also had the faith to be healed. This crippled man obviously was hearing the gospel message with piqued interest and desire.

This act was bold for all involved. Paul was bold in his command, the cripple was bold in his faith, and the people would respond with a bold, yet misguided act of worship. *As a group, discuss the significance of being bold in our faith journey.*

The word for “healed” in this passage is a favorite of Luke, the author, because it also can mean “to deliver,” giving us a “double meaning” of how this man’s faith healed him physically and saved him spiritually (J. Bradley Chance, *Acts*, 236). *Can you remember when Jesus also said, “Your faith has made you well”?*

Reaction (Acts 14:11-13)

The summary of this lesson is simple: “Only God is worthy of worship and praise.” If we believe this—and we should—it is obvious the audience of Lystra got this wrong. They were fitting God’s miracle into their pagan worship practices.

The mixing of gods and humans was not unusual to them. The people would’ve recalled a legend when “Zeus and Hermes had appeared in human form in this region, only to be rejected by the populace, with the exception of one elderly couple” who were rewarded later for hospitality while the populace was punished (Chance, *Acts*, 237).

While it is clear their reaction was incorrect by God’s standards, it also is obvious they intended well. *How have our good intentions led us to the wrong reaction?* To add to the confusion, these people spoke in their native language. So, Paul and Barnabas likely did not comprehend what was happening at first.

Redirected (Acts 14:14-18)

Here is where we should give Paul and Barnabas the respect and appreciation that is due. They had the opportunity to capitalize on power and influence, but they instantly rejected these once they realized what was happening. While a different circumstance, this response reminds me of Moses’ response in Exodus 32:9-14.

The believer always should be quick to deflect glory and honor to God. This means all glory, power and influence belong to God, and we should not be confused. Paul and Barnabas were stressing their humanity in light of God's sovereignty.

What would this kind of situation look like in our church context? We need to talk about how humans too often are raised to God's level by peers, and our response should be to redirect humanity to worship God instead of human examples. As they spoke in this text, it is God who orchestrates everything so he gets the glory.

Rejected (Acts 14:19-20)

If they would not take credit, the Jews who were at their heels were sure to take advantage of the confused crowd by turning the people against Paul and Barnabas. This was so severe that Paul was left for dead.

These final verses of the story always bring a chuckle because instead of running away in fear, it seems Paul and Barnabas left without hesitation for the next place. That's it. They "dusted themselves off" and kept on sharing the gospel in spite of how they were received.

Keep in mind that even when we are rejected, we do not forsake the gospel message that we are charged to live and share. *How will living and sharing the gospel take us into risky situations? Will we forsake the gospel when we are rejected?* If the gospel is true and God should be glorified, then our response must be to keep on.

Conclusion

Many churches emphasize missions in December. So, consider the words of a missionary whose life was risked and, in his case, required. Jim Elliot

said: "Missionaries are very human folks, just doing what they are asked. Simply a bunch of nobodies trying to exalt Somebody."

When it comes to sharing the gospel, we are indeed risking all of our nature to embrace and share about the one, true God. As this was the attitude and action of Paul and Barnabas, so it should be ours. Elliot also said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

In closing, ask your group: *Am I ready to face each opportunity to share the gospel, and in spite of what happens, keep sharing?* God is worthy of our worship and praise, and when we keep walking and keep sharing, we are indeed worshipping him to the fullest.

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