

Only One God

Text: Acts 14:8-28

Have you ever been misunderstood.

I find myself in different situations saying things and then looking back on what I've said I am wondering, 'Should I have really said that?'

But being misunderstood is not the domain of just me...

All of you have your own stories to tell.

Being misunderstood by...spouse, children, parents, friends, workmates, and shop assistants.

At some point you may laugh or tell a joke and people will think you are not taking a situation seriously.

A joke might be taken seriously.

If you are serious someone might tell you that you need to loosen up.

You give someone a hard time and people misunderstand that and think that you don't like that person.

The list goes on.

Misunderstanding so quickly leads to quarrels, disagreements.

Leads to breakdown in relationships.

How often do we get politicians having to re-explain themselves;
worse still having someone else explain their actions.

Peter Garret blew it and had to spend a lot of time saying his was misunderstood when he spoke about Labor changing everything when they got into office.

In the account of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra, that Luke records here, their actions have been totally misunderstood, and they have to go to great lengths to explain their actions.

Paul does it in the light of the gospel...

With the incredible truth...

there is only one God, so don't think we are on that level.

We pick up the story from last week...

With P & B being driven from Iconium.

Now they move onto the small town of Lystra.

Lystra was about 35kms south-southwest of Iconium.

What stands out about this story is that Paul doesn't go to the synagogue first. Being only a small town, there probably wasn't a sufficiently large Jewish community, with enough men to constitute a synagogue (needed 10 men).

So Paul would have been preaching in the open market place for the first time.

During one of his soapbox preaching campaigns, he noticed a lame man,
And the Lord gave him insight that this man had faith to be healed.

Sometimes in the Bible God healed people apart from any faith on their part.
At other times He healed in response to their faith.
So Paul loudly commanded this man, lame from birth, to stand on his feet.
When he leaped up to his feet and began to walk...the crowd was amazed/excited.

Paul and Barnabas would have initially misunderstood their excitement,
Because they didn't know the local language.
But the crowd was excitedly telling each other, 'The gods have come down to us in human form!'

They called Barnabas 'Zeus' ...the stately one, older and quiet.
Paul they called 'Hermes', the orator, the spokesperson for Zeus.

They were basing their identification on a legend that the Roman poet Ovid wrote about.

According to Ovid's story, Zeus and Hermes had once visited a valley near Lystra.
They went from door to door...but no one invited them in.

Finally they came to a cottage where a poor old couple lived.
They took them in, fed them and gave them a bed for the night...
Not knowing they were gods.

Because of their kind hospitality, the two gods turned the poor couple's cottage into a golden roofed temple, with marble columns...

But they also destroyed the selfish people who refused to take them in.

Now the people of Lystra didn't want to make the same mistake again!
So some went to the local temple of Zeus, quickly told the priest what had happened.

I can imagine that, up till this point, P & B were actually pretty pleased with what they see happening.

I can imagine Paul, as a preacher, seeing the excited response...
(though not understanding it) getting excited himself.
He sees the smiles, he feels the passion, their hands are waving around.

He probably thinks that these people are responding to the gospel...
Waiting for that outpouring of the Spirit.
He had not idea that the people were calling them gods.

Now when the local priest comes in with the bull for a sacrifice I think Paul & Barnabas begin to understand what is going on.
This was not going to be some BBQ party...they were preparing for a sacrifice.

Now they could have heard that the people were about to offer sacrifices to them and thought, 'Well, what's the harm in that. It's about time we got some recognition and respect after all we've been through. We can use the respect we have to later tell them about Jesus Christ, surely they'll listen then.'

They could have let pride take over...accepting the praise for themselves (like Herod in Acts 12)

But their reaction was not that at all...They were horrified!

They rip their shirts open...typically Jewish response.

Very emotive and graphic.

They desperately run through the crowd trying to explain the truth about God.

And with great difficulty restrained them.

Now an angry crowd probably dispersed.

Angry because they had been hoping that this was the most amazing moment in the life of their small village...the gods were visiting.

This would put them on the map!

People would flock from across the empire to their town...

This was the place the gods came to earth and visited!

Think of what it would do for the local economy!

So when these mysterious visitors insisted they were mere mortals, not gods, the people went away angry and disappointed.

I think that this is what made it easy for the Jews from Antioch and Iconium to win over the crowd and have Paul stoned...

The very thing they were planning in Iconium.

How easily the mob turned murderous.

They stone Paul, drag him out of the city and leave him for dead.

And then there is that amazing moment...

Paul, most likely surrounded by new and confused converts, gets up!

We shouldn't just gloss over this.

Shows us what Paul suffered to present the gospel.

Let's not think for a moment that this stoning was something superficial.

These people knew how to stone someone.

Paul would have been a bloodied and bruised mess.

The people of Lystra were really, really ignorant about God...

They really didn't know him.

They had many gods...one for each aspect of life and death.

They knew nothing of the Bible or the God of the Bible.

They could not identify one true God.

I think all of us know people like that!

People totally ignorant about God.

How do we address that? What would you say to them?

Paul starts with God at the centre of the universe,

God as the creator, God who owns the lot.

That is where we need to start today.

In our supermarket of spirituality we need to start with the statement that there is only one true God, one sovereign, supreme creator of the world.

Some of the things we learn from Paul here are:

1. A Twisted view.

People have a twisted view of God.

The people of Lystra had a twisted view of God...

Shaped by their past.

Today people a twisted view of God that is shaped by shows like the Simpsons, Southpark, TV Shows and movies.

a. People want a god who makes them feel better.

A god who will reward them, give them what they want;
who pulls them out of trouble spots.

A god who is there just when they need him...like a cosmic Santa Claus.

Bruce Almighty...

Bruce is given the power of God for a section of the city.

He can't handle or the prayer requests for what people want so he grants their requests.

The result is chaos...everyone winning the lottery, everyone getting full marks in exams, everyone getting what they wished.

Led to unrest and riots.

But that's the sort of God people want...

One there to look after them, serve them, because they deserve it.

People want a god they can explain.

We don't want a transcendent God who is greater and grander than us.

We have difficulty with an eternal God because we can't explain everything about Him.

At J-Team the other week a child asked, 'Where did God come from?'

How do we explain that, 'God has always been there; God just is.

That's how Scripture explains him.

But that's not good enough...they want the answers to it all.

Not looking for a holy, perfect, pure, transcendent God.

That's what happened in this story.

P & B were gods they could see; they could explain.

Gods who fitted into their superstitious understanding of god.

People want a god who doesn't call them into account for their sin.

People want a god who will let them get away with what they want...

No accountability, no strings attached.

People say, 'God isn't like that!' if you talk about a God who punishes sin, or sent His Son to die for sinners.

What is your view of God?

That is the basic, important question...you can ask that of anyone.

If your view is not grounded in the Word of God...then it will be distorted.

Have you shaped God to your thinking?

I have trying to be good...so God owes me.

I know God will always get me through something...the way I want.

Paul is trying to take their distorted view of God and point them to the true and living God...

The creator of the world; the creator of man.

Paul says there is no God but one God.

V15 he is the creator...

Not a god of your own making...but a god who made you.

This is not a god you can shape to suit your view.

This is not a statue of stone standing in a temple.

He is the living God.

Creation becomes the logical argument that Paul uses to point to God.

Now it goes without saying that God's creation provides us with many blessings.

Just picture the perfect spring day, the warm sun on your back as you wander along the beach, or on a beautiful bush track.

There is the beauty of the night sky...looking through a telescope at Coonabarrabran.

The awesome size and depth of the universe.

Many, many people get a lot of pleasure from creation.

Even as we sit in church there are others out camping, walking in God's creation.

The problem is they don't know it is God's world.

The people of Lystra were well acquainted with God's goodness revealed in creation...

But they remained highly superstitious and ignorant of the one true God.

There are many today who have not progressed far in their understanding of God from nature.

Our own National Anthem has the lines, 'Our land abounds in Nature's gift, of beauty rich and rare.'

Who is nature...that gives this gift?

Paul says, Scripture says, God created the heavens and the earth...

The details of that might be argued...

but the truth is the Almighty spoke the word and it came to be.

Paul argues for God's sovereignty.

Vs16 in the past God let all nations go their own way.

God permitted, allowed them to go the way of idolatry.

He acted patiently in **grace** to all nations.

He plucked Abraham out of idolatry and worked through him the plan of saving people.

But he also a God of **mercy**...because he didn't leave himself without a witness (17)

He has done that through his creation and through his common grace.

The term "common grace" means different things to different people and is a much debated idea in Christian theology.

In the Reformed theology, where common grace has a long pedigree, stretching back to Calvin himself, common grace is understood to be that general kindness of God toward all his creatures.

Through this sin is restrained, human life prospers to some extent.

People can, to a certain extent, distinguish between good and evil.

Society, even in its sinfulness, fosters beauty in art, advances in science, justice in government.

It accounts for all that is orderly, worthy, good, and beautiful in sinful human life.

This is, of course, not the saving grace of God.

It is not **particular**, it is not **regenerating**.

Common Grace tells us that God is the creator, sovereign ruler of the entire world...

Not just restricted to being a tribal, local god.

He is the one who sends the rain and the sun, causes the crops to grow, gave wisdom and insight to kings and leaders.

He is the one who gives us all things to enjoy...

Whether that is food or clothing, medicine and beautiful homes, music and art.

The other thing we learn is that: (twisted view)

It is a Daunting Task

But the daunting task, for Paul, and for you and I is to explain the gospel.

To change twisted views.

We can't remind ourselves often enough what that message is:

Jesus was God's Son our Saviour; sins are forgiven through him; men and women, boys and girls, are made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ; and eternal life is given to all believers.

P & B told them all these things and still the people didn't want to believe.

That belief wouldn't come until the HS turns the light on in their hearts.

This didn't stop them telling about God.

It is the Holy Spirit that changes hearts, as people come to see and recognize their own sin and need of God.

That is why P & B start with themselves.

They say we are men just like you...

The only difference is we have experienced God's saving mercy in Jesus Christ.

They too needed to experience that.

Paul preached the gospel so that they would know God.

Paul appealed to them to turn away from worthless things to the living God.

Those worthless things were their false religion, their view of God and their own sin.

They were pointing people back to the unchanging God who had shown himself as merciful...

Pointing them to Jesus Christ and salvation through him.

Conclusion

Misunderstanding is a part of life.

We are misunderstood in different ways each and every day.

When people know about our faith and belief many will misunderstand us.

They will see our faith as a crutch, a superstition and false hope.

People will misunderstand the God we present.

People will misunderstand the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

They have their own ideas about God and don't want to change them.

So we need to make sure we know God and his way of salvation.

We need to work at explaining it to others...despite misunderstanding.

And we pray that God will open hearts to the truths we believe in and profess.

And leave the convincing to the Holy Spirit.

Optional Stuff.

In chapter 14:3 we read how God confirmed the message of his grace by enabling P & B to do miraculous signs and wonders...

Probably the healing of the sick and casting out of demons.

It was a pattern of the ministry of Jesus, and now of the apostles.

Authenticating and confirming the work of salvation in Christ.

I have always wondered about that.

Why don't we see that today?

I believe that these sorts of signs accompany the advance of the gospel into new and hostile territory.

You read of signs and wonders at the forefront of the gospel into Africa and China.

(Brother Yun, Heavenly Man).

We might wish that we could perform a miraculous act that would convince everyone once and for all that Jesus is Lord.

And no one did more miracles than Jesus...and yet how few believed in him.

But, as we see here in this passage today, that even when miracles are performed not everyone is convinced.

In Iconium the people were divided.

Here in Lystra the people totally misunderstood the miracle.

It made these superstitious people think the gods were visiting.

We can't go round hoping and wishing for miracles.

We are better off sowing the seeds of the good news the best way we can...

And leave the convincing to the Holy Spirit.