

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Luke 22:64

God Works Through His Word And Through Miracles

BY MICHAEL LINDSEY

Dean of North Portland Bible College

The text for the Sunday School lesson (International Series) for next Sunday is Acts 14:8-18. Please read this text and the others I refer to, as you read these comments.

This wonderful incident of healing happened later in Paul and Barnabas' missionary journey to the heart of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). If you have maps in the back of your Bible, or better yet, a Bible atlas, you will get a better grasp of the journey by following the "First Missionary Journey" on the map as you read Acts 13-14. Remember that Paul and Barnabas, like most travelers of their time, would be walking these many miles from town to town. For example, from Iconium to Lystra would be about 18 miles, while Derbe was about 55 miles further.

Lystra was a mere village compared to Antioch and Iconium, and there also seems to have been no Jewish synagogue there. Lystra was officially a Roman colony, and I'm sure the people all knew Greek, but they still held on to their ancient language, Lycaonian (14:11). Their religion had adapted to the Greek/Roman pantheon [Luke refers to "Zeus" and "Hermes," for which the King James translators used Roman equivalents "Jupiter" and "Mercury" (14:12-13.), but it was still the same Lycaonian worship they had practiced before the Roman Empire arrived.

So when Paul and Barnabas came to Lystra, they began preaching the gospel (14:7) wherever they could find an audience. The audience at first was probably just a handful, but one man among them was a special case. Not because he was crippled, though the author makes sure we see how crippled (do you see the three-fold description of his disability in verse 8?). Paul noticed more than the outside of the man-

-he was "steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed" (14:9).

The Lord was working on the heart of the man first! A man so crippled as this Lystran man would usually be consigned to a life of begging, hunger and disease, and an early grave. But as he heard the word of the Lord from Paul's lips, God used it to awaken faith and hope from within. Paul saw this change with spirit-led insight, and he did not despise the unattractive form of the man. Instead, Paul took the risk of commanding him to stand up and walk (as Jesus and Peter had done before: Luke 5:17-26; Acts 3:1-10) and God immediately restored his feet, and gave strength to his atrophied leg muscles, so the man could leap to his feet and walk.

So it is today. The people of God must be concerned for the diseased and crippled and hurting people around us (and among us as well!). But the final answer, the real difference, comes from the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. When God awakens faith in people, he also produces hope so people can live productive, healthy lives. In some cases, the Lord chooses to heal the sick quickly, including those whose lives have been ravaged by sin. In other cases, the physical healing is not as forthcoming, but God gives the grace to allow his child to live with his infirmity (2 Cor 11:7-10).

As the account of Lystra proceeds, we see that the healed man made a far greater impression of the local people than the message of the gospel had. But their response might surprise a lot of modern Christians. Instead of glorifying the God who had done this great thing, they jumped to the conclusion that the preacher themselves must be gods. We know from a Roman poet, Ovid, that the Lycaonians had a legend of two gods coming among them in human form. In the legend, only two

people recognized and honored the gods, and the rest of the city were destroyed. Perhaps this explains the reaction of the Lystra people.

Because of the language barrier, it took Paul and Barnabas a while to realize that the people were preparing to worship them in high style. Of course, they refused any part of this, and Paul appealed to them eloquently, to recognize the Creator and his goodness, instead of worshipping people or other created things (14:15-17).

The response of the Lystrans demonstrates an important truth about Christian witnessing. We cannot seek miraculous signs and wonders to confirm the truth of the gospel at every turn. The miracles may be there, as in the first days of the church in Jerusalem, and even by Paul and Barnabas' hand recently in Iconium (14:3). And these miracles do confirm the message of Christ. But often people will find any other explanation of a miracle more acceptable than the truth. In Iconium, despite miraculous signs and wonders, many banded together to oppose the apostles and persecute them (14:4-5). In Lystra, despite the evident healing miracle, the people were easily turned against Paul, so that they stoned him, leaving him for dead outside the city (14:19).

The Miraculous signs only confirm the message when they are perceived through eyes of faith. "And faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). I think we can pray for miraculous works in today's church, consciously following the example of the Jerusalem church (Acts 4:29-20). But it is far more important that we pray for boldness to preach (or, as we might say today, "share our faith") and for prepared hearts to receive out testimonies. Only then can we confidently expect to see changed lives and communities.

Matrons Celebrate 36th Anniversary

by Mattie Ann Callier-Spears

The Harley Akers Matrons Club of Bethel AME Church will celebrate their 36th anniversary

Sunday September 22, 1991 4pm
Bethel AME Church
5828 NE 8th Ave.
Portland, Oregon

The special service will include -- an "Affirmation Service," guest soloist: Earl Winchester & Leslie Williams and a scrumptilyumptious reception to be held in the multi-purpose room at the church. The matrons' colors are yellow, black and white.

THEME:

"Our Legacy -- Past, Present & Future"

The public is cordially invited to attend this memorable occasion.

Lillie Simmons, President; Lenora Morris, Program Coordinator; Rev. Milton Green, Pastor

Volunteers

The Portland Women's Crisis Line announces openings in its November training for Crisis Line volunteers. Trainings are 46 hours long, scheduled over a three week period. Crisis Line volunteers are trained to answer the crisis line, provide crisis intervention counseling, and to provide advocacies for women and children (and their families and friends) that have or are experiencing domestic or sexual violence.

PWCL is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization which operates a 24 hour a day crisis intervention hotline, provides advocacies and support groups for victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Additionally, we provide transportation from danger to safety for women and children.

Women interested in volunteering at the Crisis Line can call 232-9545 for application and further information. Deadline for applications is October 28.

College students are urged to apply. Practicum credit is available.

PWCL is an equal opportunity employer, funded in part by the United Way.

Voices Of Kuumba III

by Mattie Ann Callier-Spears

September twenty-second will mark the third publication of VOICES OF KUUMBA, a collection of literary works by the Northwest African American Writers Workshop. This event will culminate with a gala reception and book signing which will be held at the YWCA located on NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard between the hours of 2 and 5 pm.

There will be a program featuring readings and entertainment by the members of the NW African American Writers Workshop.

The members, of the NWAAWW, have performed throughout the year at Lit-Eruption, the main Library downtown, Powell Bookstore, Conant & Conant Bookstore, with the Oregon Colony of Writers and more. The writers have also hosted the first, of many, Black Historians Conference. All persons, of all ages, who have a desire to become a published writer should con-

tact -- Joseph Franklin, (503) 620-8843. Leave your name, telephone number, your address and whether or not you are an adult or a student. If you are a minor aged student, please have your parent call and leave all pertinent information.

The public is encouraged to attend this affair and be witness to the creativity of this group.

Anthologies will be on sale during this affair: KUUMBA I, II & III. So -- if you missed the first two anthology publications, come prepared to purchase, to mingle to enjoy and bring a friend.

Are you proud of your heritage? Come share an afternoon of creativity. Don't forget: September 22, 1991 2 pm to 5 pm
Northeast YWCA
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