Acts 14:15-17 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 past, he let all nations go their own way. 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.

After their expulsion from Pisidian Antioch, we are told that Paul and Barnabas traveled to the city of Iconium some eighty miles away. While in Iconium they had some success with people coming to faith but eventually the Jewish leaders stirred things up again and they were forced to leave the town. By the way, I say that they had some success only because Scripture tells us that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed because of the message of Jesus these men brought. Yet it was not the men who caused this faith. Faith is the result of the Holy Spirit working to change hearts and minds, to cause souls to be reborn and given new life in Christ. We are point blank told in God’s Word that the Holy Spirit does this work through the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. Not men, but God who brings and gives faith.

After being forced to leave Iconium the two missionaries next travel to Lystra, a town about 25 miles from Iconium. There, the missionaries proceed with their work. It is this work and the events that take place there that are before us today. Let’s jump in and consider our text under the theme: **LOUSY MISSIONARIES! 1st. They came and preached. 2nd. It all fell apart. 3rd. It fell apart further!**

I must confess that I thought long and hard about this particular theme. I decided on this theme for one particular reason…it speaks of a problem, a problem that perhaps the modern church still suffers from today. It speaks to a false attitude that so many in today’s world have toward the church and the work of the church. It speaks to false conclusions so many make and it is a warning to take care.

So in truth are these two men, Barnabas and Paul actually lousy missionaries? In past mission endeavors we are almost always informed that because of the preaching and teaching about Jesus that they did, people came to faith, people had their hearts and minds made new and changed to the glory of God. But please remember, as I told you earlier, the growth of the church or the bringing of people to faith is not the work of men. Men are called upon to sow the Word, to preach and teach the precious truths of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Men might be an instrument in carrying out this work of God but please note that men are very limited in what they can do and accomplish. Men can preach and teach but men do not grant or give the gift of faith and the salvation that comes with it.

Fact is, God is responsible, particularly the Holy Spirit who is responsible. Consider these very simple passages. Matt 16:16-17 is a great one. After Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God Jesus reveals this: **“Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”** Or consider the straight forward confession of Paul in 1 Co. 12:3 **“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”** By the way, this passage goes on and talks about the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the gift of faith. It concludes with this verse, **“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”** The work is God’s not ours!

So what happened here in Lystra? First, please note that Paul and Barnabas do exactly as they have done in quite a few cities already. They go in and teach the message of Jesus as Lord and Savior from sin. Just trace what they have been doing during this First Mission journey. They hit is the Island of Cyprus and its cities. Did you know that in this place there is no mention of anyone coming to faith? They move on to Pisidian Antioch. At first the message is received with joy but two Sunday’s ago we heard how they were expelled from this region. The believers left there, small in number would in later years be visited by Paul and encouraged in their faith. I don’t believe they ever become a big congregation!

From Antioch to Iconium. Many believed here, but again they are forced to leave. A plot is uncovered that threatened the lives of the missionaries. History bears out that this church of believers thrived and the message of Jesus continued to be taught there for the next two centuries. Now we get to Lystra. The missionaries come in and do what they normally do, they preach and teach the name of Jesus as Lord and Savior from sin.

A few things stand out here. First, it appears that Lystra is a “gentile” city as there is no mention of a Jewish synagogue and worshippers. The second thing to stand out is the miracle done here. A man who had been crippled from birth was present. Here is what we are told, **“Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that the man jumped up and began to walk.”**

It is not unusual that some miracles accompanied the preaching and teaching of the Apostles and here we have no exception. A man was there, crippled from birth and it is made clear that everyone, everyone knew it. Paul, after preaching that Jesus Christ is God and Lord, our Savior from sin and granter of eternal life, simply commands this man to stand up. The result is awesome! **“At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.”** No delays. No head slapping, praying and mumbo jumbo. No assistants, no real flash and dash, just a command and action. The man jumps up. The man immediately walks. To anyone who had been listening, this is clearly done by the power of Jesus.

I don’t know if you grasp how awesome this miracle is? Let makes sure to get a few things straight. When our text says, **“saw that he had faith to be healed”** it is nothing more than a reference to the fact that this man heard the message of Jesus and believed that Jesus Christ was HIS God and Lord. That is always what the word faith refers to. It doesn’t mean this guy thought he could be healed or even that he believe he could be healed! Paul hadn’t preached a message of physical healing but rather a spiritual message of Jesus Christ crucified for our sins and raised to life for our redemption. Paul had preached that in Jesus we have forgiveness and with that forgiveness eternal life and salvation! Paul, motivated by the Holy Spirit, moved by this man’s faith in Jesus, gave the command to stand up and God, with his power, caused that man to stand and walk all in one swift motion of glory. Please note that it is then that things go haywire!

You heard the text. These people decide that Paul and Barnabas are Zeus and Hermes, two false idols of Roman pantheism. They want to make sacrifices to these men. They want to glorify and honor these men! And maybe it was a language barrier, but Paul and Barnabas had a very hard time stopping all of this from happening.

From the worlds’ point of view, not very good missionary work! One guy of faith healed and a whole town erupting into a frenzy of false worship. Another few thoughts. Paul preached Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. Evidently the message was not heard or really listened to because these people easily and readily engage in false worship and not in the actions of faith. Paul fault? Was he not clear? Did he fail to engage the people, to meet them on their level, to deliver according to their desires? God’s fault? God sent bad preachers. God didn’t know what these people needed? God didn’t give an appealing message with all this sin and salvation stuff? How about the fact that in many cases people just hear what they want and despite the truth you might be telling them they continue to believe what they want. Welcome to the world. The world and its people in many cases like to stick to what they know, even if what they believe is wrong and false. These people didn’t want to hear about Jesus, they wanted to stick to their false gods. Paul had a hard time stopping them.

Welcome to the fact that the world is hostile to God and his Son Jesus. Welcome to the fact that no matter how hard you try or no matter what you do, there are people and places in this world that are simply going to reject Jesus and his message of love. Just as true, they will reject you and God’s message of love. It is the way of the world, tainted by sin and Satan. I do give thanks to Paul and Barnabas simply on the fact that they do not let themselves be honored and praised. They do not let themselves and the false impression that they are something stand. They don’t decide that hey, we got ‘em involved, we got them in the doors and as long as they eventually hear the truth, what’s the harm? Modern evangelists should maybe contemplate this. If the world has taken you in, if the world is touting your name and fame, just who is being honored? If Jesus and His work is not prominent, please look at what you are doing. If your message is clearly not Jesus as Lord and Savior from sin, clearly the message of eternal death and eternal life with God in Jesus then it is not the right message. If you are only telling me what I must do and be, even if it is always “in the name of Jesus” you have missed the boat. Preach Jesus as Lord and Savior from sin and let God bring in the harvest.

Note that not all missionary work is successful. I believe that when God’s truth and wonder is told, you can expect that more people will reject and be hostile to that message than will believe. It is all really in God’s hands. In Cyprus, no believers mentioned. In Antioch, this same message by the power of God created believers in Jesus. In Iconium, this same message brought some believers who stayed faithful for centuries to come. Here in Lystra, it looks like one believer. God will accomplish what He wants done. Please, preach and teach the faithful message of Jesus. Present the wonder and marvel of our Lord and Savior and let God take care of the rest.

Then comes the final disaster of this place. In the next two verses after our text, we are told that Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrive and the end result is that Paul is stoned and left for dead outside the city. Now, if we were just looking at this from a worldly view point, we would have to conclude that Paul was one lousy preacher. They tried to kill him! Yet we know this is not the case. Paul is a servant of the Lord Jesus. We are told that Paul lives and the next day they head out for Derbe. As far as we can tell they got one believer in all of this and Paul almost died.

I want you to know that as Paul continues his missionary journeys, he keeps the same message of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior from sin. Dear churches of today, stop the gimmicks and stop watering down the message of Jesus. Jesus is the heart of the Church. Jesus is the point of the church. Preach Jesus and let God determine who gets the gift of faith.

I want to close with Paul’s words found in Ephesians. Words that tells us what Paul consider the heart of faith. Ephesians 3:16-19 **“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”** Amen