

## Hermes and the Jumping Man

*<sup>4</sup>The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup>For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup>For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.<sup>1</sup>*



### During Paul's First Missionary Journey

As we have seen, Paul's life was radically changed for the better by Jesus of Nazareth on the road to Damascus. So what did Paul want to do as a result of seeing the resurrected Lord? The same thing that most people want to do under similar circumstances: he wanted to share the good news and, in Paul's case, he committed his life to doing just that!

Our text deals with a crippled man in Lystra, a man who "had faith to be healed." It is just as true today as it was in the first century; people were not always happy about hearing of Jesus. In fact, the Lystra healing came on the heels of a gang of Gentiles and Jews who wanted to stone Paul and his fellows because they preached Christ. Needless to say, the apostles got on the road fast and high-tailed it for a more receptive audience. However, as it turned out, the Lystra crowd was too receptive!

*<sup>8</sup>In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup>He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed <sup>10</sup>and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.*

*<sup>11</sup>When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" <sup>12</sup>Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup>The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.*

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4-6.

<sup>14</sup>But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: <sup>15</sup>"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. <sup>16</sup>In the past, he let all nations go their own way. <sup>17</sup>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." <sup>18</sup>Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Jumping Man**

*The man was listening to Paul speak, when Paul saw that he had faith in Jesus and could be healed. So he looked straight at the man and shouted, "Stand up!" The man jumped up and started walking around<sup>3</sup>.*

He was a young Jewish boy. He always sat by the sidelines. He never participated in games like the other kids. When his time was up he crawled back home or his daddy came, picked him up, and took him home. Consequently, as he grew he found himself shunned by those people who believed his twisted limbs were a punishment by God. Even Luke does not honor him with a name or give us a hint of his age. He was just a man who had never walked, that had been crippled since he was born. He never had a chance. But he did have ears. And one day he listened carefully to Paul's message about God's love, about Jesus and His resurrection. As he listened faith sprang up in him; he believed Jesus could heal him. Paul saw something wonderful in the man others didn't see. He looked at the cripple's eyes, eyes that spoke of faith.

Then the great apostle said in a loud voice, "*Stand up on your feet!*" At that moment, frozen muscles thawed, nerves came to life, and twisted feet straightened. At that moment, the crippled man became a jumping man! Not only was the man's feet corrected, but he received a sense of balance. It was a true miracle! Those who knew the man and his troubles knew a god had something to do with it! "*The gods have become like men,*" they shouted, "*and have come down to us!*"<sup>4</sup> The next thing Paul knew is that the people were making wreathes for the idols and sacrifices to him and Barnabas. They

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 14:8-18, NIV.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 14:9-10, Contemporary English Version.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 14:11B, The Good News Bible.

were even given new names. They were no longer Barnabas and Paul; they were Zeus and Hermes. What was next?

**Zeus:** Luke writes that Barnabas was given the name Zeus. However, there is more in these names than meets the eye. Zeus was the supreme god of Greece and ruler of Olympus. He was more powerful than any god or all the gods put together, for that matter. His image appeared on most coins and he was praised for being the guardian of political order and giver of peace. (P.S. We could use a little Zeus in the current presidential election in our country!) He sounds great, but Greek gods had an Achilles heel so to speak. Zeus was susceptible to pleasure and pain! Most of all—can you guess—Zeus had no defense against Eros (earthly love), which got his females in trouble with his wife, Hera.

**Hermes:** Paul, on the other hand, became Hermes “because he was the chief speaker.” Along with his uncanny ability in oratory, Hermes was the god of shepherds, merchants, literature, athletics, and thieves, the last due to his cunning and shrewdness. Initially Hermes was a phallic god, the description of which I leave for later. His second most significant role for mortals was probably to guide the souls of the dead down to the underworld. Oh yes, Hermes was given credit for inventing foot-racing and boxing, both of which would be of the utmost value to a Christian missionary such as Paul (just kidding). In Rome Hermes was known as Mercury, with wings on his feet and his cap. Naming these brothers gives us some insight how they were viewed by a pagan culture. Paul was the preacher, a role which he thought little of for himself in Corinthian letters. Barnabas was Zeus, prominent in his bearing and influential in the spiritual and mortal worlds. Paul was Hermes, preacher and guide of souls.

**Those Worthless Things:** I have had some fun with idolatry in today’s passage, though I realize idolatry is really a serious topic, then and now. The Lord said to Isaiah: <sup>5</sup> *"One by one, people will say, 'I am the LORD's.' They will come to join the people of Israel. They each will mark the name of the LORD on their arms and call themselves one of God's people."* <sup>6</sup> *The LORD, who rules and protects Israel, the LORD Almighty, has this to say: "I am the first, the last, the only God; there is no other god but me."* <sup>7</sup> *Could anyone else have done what I did? Who could have predicted all that would happen from the very beginning to the end of time?* <sup>8</sup> *Do not be afraid, my people! You know that from ancient times until now I have predicted all that would happen, and you are my witnesses. Is there any other god? Is there some powerful god I never heard of?"* <sup>9</sup> *All those who make idols are worthless, and the gods they prize so highly are useless. Those who*

worship these gods are blind and ignorant---and they will be disgraced. <sup>10</sup> It does no good to make a metal image to worship as a god! <sup>11</sup> Everyone who worships it will be humiliated. The people who make idols are human beings and nothing more. Let them come and stand trial---they will be terrified and will suffer disgrace. <sup>12</sup> The metalworker takes a piece of metal and works with it over a fire. His strong arm swings a hammer to pound the metal into shape. As he works, he gets hungry, thirsty, and tired. <sup>13</sup> The carpenter measures the wood. He outlines a figure with chalk, carves it out with his tools, and makes it in the form of a man, a handsome human figure, to be placed in his house. <sup>14</sup> He might cut down cedars to use, or choose oak or cypress wood from the forest. Or he might plant a laurel tree and wait for the rain to make it grow. <sup>15</sup> A person uses part of a tree for fuel and part of it for making an idol. With one part he builds a fire to warm himself and bake bread; with the other part he makes a god and worships it. <sup>16</sup> With some of the wood he makes a fire; he roasts meat, eats it, and is satisfied. He warms himself and says, "How nice and warm! What a beautiful fire!"<sup>5</sup>

Paul was stunned that the people would assume he and Barnabas were gods come to earth, though the Christian Gospel is such news, though without the notion of an idol made of wood, stone, or metal attached to it. In the heat of passion, Paul said: "*Men, what are you doing? We're human beings like you. We're spreading the Good News to you to turn you away from these worthless gods to the living God. The living God made the sky, the land, the sea, and everything in them.*"<sup>6</sup> It was Christ of the gospels that made the man whole. It was a true miracle done by the living God.

### **Paul: The Miracle Man**

Many years ago I was attending a ministerial conference. The main speaker was scheduled for 2 P.M. When the time arrived a spokesman stepped up to the pulpit and said, "Our guest cannot speak because he has a splitting headache. We should pray for him to be healed. Brother Mercer (I was sitting on the first row and caught the spokesman's eye), will you lead us in a healing prayer for our speaker?" I thought, "Oh no, what do I do now?" I do not profess to have the gift of healing, although I believe it is possible. So, I prayed a rather weak prayer while people around me said "Yes!" and "Amen!" When the prayer was over the spokesman went to a back room where the guest evangelist was laying down. I was shocked when a few minutes later the spokesman returned and said the speaker was healed and would be able to speak after all. I thanked God for His mercy.

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 44, The Good News Bible. Underlining mine for emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 14:15, God's Word.

Paul, however, evidently had a gift of healing, although he did not claim such a gift. If we take a quick look at Paul's story in the Acts of the Apostles, we find an interesting record of healings.

1. An inverse account where a man was made blind because of sin (13:9-11).
2. Saul (Paul) was given "the power to perform miracles and wonders" as proof of the validity of the gospel (14:3). Healings were therefore regarded as testimony to God's healing power in Paul.
3. The crippled man from Lystra healed (our text; 14:9-10).
4. Healings mentioned as proof of God's work with Gentiles (15:12).
5. Paul delivers a woman from an evil spirit (16:18). Many first century people regarded this kind of deliverance as the greatest evidence of God's power.
6. Paul delivers people from evil spirits in non-conventional ways (19:11).
7. Paul brings a young lad back to life after an accident (20:10).
8. Paul and others delivered from shipwreck (27:24).
9. Paul delivered from a poisonous snake bite (28:5f.).
10. Many sick healed (28:7f.).

When compared with our Lord's ministry, the healings by St. Paul are rather meager in number; however, to me they are incredible. I am sure there are others in Paul's years of service, of which we have no evidence. It seems to me that miracles were done for the most part as proof of the truth of the gospel message. Paul makes it clear that Jews wanted miracles they could see as such proof. Our Lord Jesus healed and delivered people out of His compassion for them, and did not like the idea of doing healings as proof of the validity of His words. You remember that Satan tempted Jesus to perform certain miracles.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps you have such a divine gift yourself. Paul gives us a partial listing of such gifts in his letters to the churches at Corinth. Paul tells his readers that the order of listing is important. As it pleases God, He grants the following powers to human beings:

1. Apostles
2. Prophets
3. Teachers
4. Those who perform miracles.
5. Those who heal.
6. Those who help others.
7. Those who lead or guide others.
8. Those who speak in tongues.
9. Those who interpret tongues.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 4:1-11, The Good News Bible.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, Ibid.

Paul says these gifts play an important role in the church, but there is one gift better than all those mentioned: the gift of “love.”<sup>9</sup> Paul gives more instruction about the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians, chapter 14.

## **Barnabas**

Acts 11:19-30

In our last installment (#8) I asked you to research Acts 11:19-30 and find out all you could on the character of Barnabas. Barnabas is mentioned in other places than these verses, but they give us a snapshot of the man and his zeal for the Lord. I guarantee you that you would like to have him as a next door neighbor.

Concerning Barnabas’ name, in Acts 4:36 we read of him for the first time. We find that Barnabas was a Levite, whose ancestors were responsible for taking care of the tabernacle. In his day, Barnabas, a Levite, would likely be identified as a scholar of biblical writings or, perhaps, a lawyer. **Joseph** by name, he was from Cyprus, a large island in the Eastern Aegean area of the Mediterranean. It was the apostles who gave him the name “**Barnabas**,” meaning “Son of Encouragement” according to Acts 4:36. Barnabas can also mean “Son of Exhortation,” which would give us a hint of his preaching ability. We also learn from the Acts 4 passage that Barnabas was extremely generous.

However, in Acts 11:19-30, we find other sterling aspects of his general character. For example, did you find the following?

1. He was trusted by the elders (vs. 22).
2. He had spiritual perception (vs. 23).
3. As his name suggests, he was an encourager (vs. 23).
4. He was a “good man” (vs. 24).
5. He was full of the Holy Spirit (vs. 24).
6. He was full of faith (vs. 24).
7. He was an evangelist (vs. 24).
8. Finally, Barnabas was a teacher of the gospel (vs. 26).

Do you see any conflict in Barnabas’ character when one brings up the episode in Acts 15: 36-41? Does that change your view of him?

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:13, Ibid.

## Looking Ahead

What can we do to prepare for Lesson #10: **Keep in Step with the Spirit?**

1. Read carefully Acts 15:1-35.
2. What are the specific issues under consideration at the Jerusalem Conference. This is to say, What must we do to be saved?
3. What do we learn about God in chapter 15 of the book of Acts?
4. What specifically will you incorporate into your prayers this week from this study?

*--Jerry Mercer*

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