

How to Get Stoned

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 21st of February 1999 The preacher is Phil Muleman His sermon is entitled How to Get Stoned and is from Acts chapter 14 verses 8 to 20 Let me tell you that there is also a risk in being an authentic Christian If you don't tell the people what they want to hear the danger is that they will turn against you or to someone who will tell them what they want to hear even if there is overwhelming evidence to support your case And that's what we see here in Acts chapter 14 verses 8 through to 20 Paul and Barnabas have been going on their first missionary journey and they've been proclaiming the truth of the gospel as they've gone

And we see in these verses here Paul and Barnabas risk their very lives for the sake of authentic Christianity And we see in the space of 12 verses no less how they go from being idolised as gods to Paul being stoned not stoned out of his mind which is the sense that our culture would talk about but being physically stoned and dragged out of the city as verse 19 tells us supposing that he was dead Well let's have a look at the passage to see the secrets of events in these verses Firstly Paul and Barnabas have just fled the city of Iconium after hearing that both Jews and Gentiles wanted to stone them and mistreat them in that city That's why they've left because they've heard that they're going to be stoned Now they have come to what they perhaps thought was the safety of this township of Lystra

Lystra was a Gentile town under Roman rule in the high country of the province of Galatia somewhere around the area of Turkey today and the town probably only had within it a small population of Jews and while staying here and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ as we are told that they did in verse 7 after all that's what the good news is they made a man who had never walked who was crippled or lame from birth and this cripple is listening to Paul speak and Paul is speaking the gospel and that's why he's listening to him and Paul looks at this man he looks at him intently as we're told here and seeing that he had faith to be healed that is he's seeing that this man had faith in the Lord Jesus Christ Paul says to him in a loud voice stand upright on your feet and the man sprang up and began to walk so the first thing that we see happen here is a miracle a man lame from birth sprang up and walked because he had faith in Jesus Christ you may recall back in Acts chapter 3 that Peter healed a lame man from birth there as well and what Peter has done in Acts chapter 3

Paul has just done here and I want you to note the thoroughness of this miracle it is powerful it's effective and it is immediate it's powerful because the man has faith faith in the Lord Jesus Christ it's effective because this man had complete healing and it is immediate this man crippled lame from birth is healed straight away he sprang up and began to walk it's because of the gospel that Paul has been speaking about that this miracle is allowed to happen well why do miracles happen let me offer you three reasons firstly miracles bring glory to Christ that's the purpose of them in some respects in the New Testament where miracles occur their purpose is to draw attention to Jesus and glorify his name when the lame man when the lame man is cured of his of his disability in Acts chapter 3 he praises God and Peter then uses it as an opportunity to preach Jesus to his Jewish audience who have witnessed what happens right back then in chapter 3 so miracles bring glory to Christ secondly miracles demonstrate belief and trust in God alone

Paul is able to see here that this man has faith a faith that is based on the God who can heal and this God is the creator of all things this man's faith and trust in God alone came about before any healing occurred as well he was probably I don't suspect he was expecting physical healing at the time he had faith and then Peter tells him to get up and walk and he sprang up thirdly miracles happen in order that people might believe and trust in Jesus Christ now if you were to flip back again in the book of Acts and look at chapter 9 we see that the paralyzed Aeneas is healed in the name of Jesus Christ and in verse 35 of chapter 9 after this happens we see what happens in that township all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord now I'm sure that the reason this miracle happens here is so that people might believe and trust in Jesus Christ but it appears that the people of Lystra have not understood this and they view

[6 : 32] Paul and Barnabas as gods as we are told so the second thing that we see here is this city's attempt to worship Paul and Barnabas they shout in their own language the Lycaonian language the gods have come down to us in human form they speak in a language which neither Paul nor Barnabas understood and then we read on that they call Barnabas Zeus the chief god and they call Paul Hermes which means the messenger of other gods or something like that well why this sort of fanatical behaviour why overboard I guess people might idolise rock bands today but they don't go around giving them the names of Greek gods it's all a bit odd what's going on here let me try and explain to you Zeus and Hermes were two popular gods in the Roman world people the people from

Lystra here claimed that these two gods Zeus and Hermes had once visited their city in human form according to legend and according to this legend no one offered them hospitality when they arrived except for one old couple so Zeus and Hermes or Zeus killed the rest of the people within that town within that region and they rewarded the old couple so when the citizens of Lystra saw this miracle performed by Paul and Barnabas they assumed that they were the gods revisiting them now the people from Lystra were probably a superstitious lot and their religion was a pagan one and now remembering the story of what had happened to the previous citizens of Lystra this township immediately thinking about that honored Paul and Barnabas for fear of what might happen to them if they didn't so they're going to get the priest of

Zeus whose temple is outside the city gates and the priest of Zeus comes back bringing oxen to sacrifice as well as garlands or wreaths to lay at the city gates and the whole town it seems is whipped up into a frenzy because of this miracle that has happened to this man that has been crippled from birth now because the people were speaking in their own language in their Lyconian language which was a language foreign to Paul and Barnabas they didn't realize what was going on until it was too late you know when you might be having a conversation with someone who is of ethnic origin and suddenly they start speaking in another language you don't understand what they're talking about it's the same sort of thing I think that's happening for Paul and Barnabas these people are speaking in this language they don't understand what's going on and they're just sort of waiting and suddenly they sort of pick it all up and they don't realize what's going on until it's too late because this city is attempting to worship them they're trying to worship them as gods but now Paul and

Barnabas try to stop this form of idolatry it's hideous so we see in verse 14 that when they learn of what is going on they tear their clothes in horror and run to the crowd shouting friends why are you doing this we are mortals just like you and we bring you good news Paul and Barnabas want to correct the misinterpretation of the situation they don't want to be glorified they don't want the glory for what has happened they want to see God's name glorified now sometimes in our own lives when something good happens it happens to us it's all too easy for us to take the glory on ourselves the danger is that we take the praise and we don't offer any thanks back to God for his hand in this process it's bad enough that we don't draw attention to

God in the situation but it's worse when we neglect to give God the thanks and praise well Paul and Barnabas's desire here is to publicly tell the people why this miracle has happened their desire is solely to glorify God the question is how are they going to communicate this gospel of Jesus Christ to these illiterate pagans these are people who know little or nothing at all about the Jewish religion Judaism they don't know about the God of Abraham and his acts in history as the educated Jews did in Pisidian Antioch where Paul first spoke so where is Paul going to begin with this gospel well rather than starting with the scripture that they did not know he starts with the natural world around them which they did know and could see wherever they looked he begs them to turn from this idolatrous worship these worthless things and to turn to the living

[12:15] God but how does he get this message of good news across to this Bible illiterate community what we see in verses 15 through to 18 is Paul's approach to these Bible illiterates now I don't think that Luke includes Paul's whole sermon here it's only three verses it's very short but I have no doubt that Paul's message included the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ which for Paul is unchangeable you go look at the New Testament read the letters that Paul writes to the churches which he planted and the gospel of Jesus Christ comes out in each one of them so Paul begins his message here by speaking of the living God this living

God who is the creator of the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that in them is as verse 15 tells us and perhaps he is as he is doing this he is gesturing to a mountain range which is around about them and the sea that is beyond that mountain range and to the heavens the skies as he talks about the heavens and so on and moreover he goes on he says he who made all things has not been inactive since although in past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways as verse 16 says he has never in any place or in any time left himself without a witness on the contrary he has borne a consistent witness to himself in doing good to all humankind including the audience that he is speaking to right here and now he goes on and he says he has given them rains from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy that is

Paul's appeal and it is to this living God that Paul urges the community to turn to he doesn't want them to turn to useless idols or to him or Barnabas who as he's just said in verse 15 are only mortal he wants them to turn to the living God the living God who has created all these things which we can see around them so what Paul does here is he paints a majestic view of just who this living God is well it's awesome and it's refreshing to think that this God who we are able to have a relationship carries us as Paul talked about this morning in Isaiah chapter 46 through all the highs and lows of life we are able to have a relationship with that living God it is perhaps because of this majestic perspective that Paul brings across to these people that they are overawed and the crowd is restrained only just from sacrificing to them they don't make sacrifice to

Paul and Barnabas they are restrained from doing that as Christians let me put it to us in a simpler form we know that from the Bible that God is the creator of all things that's one of the things that we believe and we also know that due to sin people have rebelled against God and have gone their own way we also know we ought to know that to get back into a relationship with God we need to repent or turn away from all our sin from our rebellion and submit to God's rule in our life we know that as Christians if we've grown up with it we know that but you can't use that sort of language to people who are biblically illiterate just like the people from Lystra were we need to learn creative ways to approach people with the good news of the gospel of Jesus

Christ and we need to be flexible in our approach to preaching or proclaiming the gospel of Jesus just as we see that Paul is here but we have no liberty no liberty whatsoever to change the heart of the Christian message we have to begin where people are at so that we can find a point of contact with them with an increasingly secularized world the starting point for the gospel could be all sorts of things I want to point out too it could be for example someone's search for freedom the desire to be free free from this pain and all those sorts of things what's the starting point for the gospel with someone who wants to escape from everything so that they can be free as

[17 : 50] Christians we can appeal to the freedom that we have in Christ freedom from sin freedom from guilt of the things done wrong in the past we need to appeal to that and in doing so it may mean identifying areas in your own past where you wish that you could find freedom but no matter where you looked you still felt trapped on that beautiful cruise you went away you still felt trapped you didn't feel totally free you have to set up the scene and capture the people's attention and once you've done that then you can explain how a personal relationship with Christ has helped to set you free from that endless pursuit of freedom another example could be someone's search for personal significance I think that's a very big issue for people today they're searching for their own personal significance in their job work their family life and all those sorts of things a couple of years ago

I was talking to someone who was searching for just that this person had relocated from another country and life at the time when he came to saw me was being pretty lousy for him and he was trying to enroll in a university course only to discover that I can't remember the full details of it but the school mark that he got in his previous country was not good enough to gain him entrance into the university degree that he wanted to do as a result his own personal significance and confidence had been pretty well dashed and by the time I met this person he was well and truly in this downward spiral where life hovers along like this and he was just going and it was a pretty lonely tough existence for him well this person's name I'll call him John my starting point for

John was just to listen to him and to hear his dilemma and then after some time to talk about some possibilities now John had a belief in God he believed in God but he didn't really understand at all anything about Jesus and about Christ so I sought to show John how significant he was before God so significant was he before God that God sent a substitute in the form of Jesus to bring him back into a living relationship with this living God and I explained to him what it cost Jesus to show just how significant he was before God well John made a commitment to following Jesus and he joined a church and through the church he has made some friends and found some personal significance because of his faith in Christ and he's gained confidence by making some Christian friends from the church that he goes to as well as doing some voluntary work using his skills in computing and so on now if

John hadn't been told about Jesus then I think he could well still be searching in vain for personal significance somewhere else my point from those two examples is that as Christians we have to begin telling people about the good news of Jesus where they are at we have to meet people where they are at but wherever we begin we end with Jesus Christ who is himself the good news and who alone can fulfill all human aspirations if we only start with the person and listen and care and so on and we don't move on to Jesus then I don't think we're doing the job of proclaiming the gospel that we as Christians are commanded to do now the story of

John is a good news story and there is much joy for me out of that story it was great to see a person come to faith but the gospel is also not always easily received and wherever we are in life there's always going to be opposition to the gospel that we as Christians have to proclaim and Paul discovers this yet again first in Pisidian Antioch in the Nicomium and now here in Lystra in verse 19 we read about the Jews from Antioch and Iconium who were opposed to his message arriving in the township of Lystra and while there they won over the crowds and turned against Paul stoning him and dragging him out of the city thinking that he was perhaps dead poor Paul he is stoned physically not mentally and he is dragged out of that city because he told he dared to tell the good news of Jesus

[23 : 33] Christ it's hard to imagine isn't it that one day Paul is virtually worshipped as a god by the people of Lystra and the very next moment he is stoned by the very same people we don't have to look too hard to discover that Jesus had a similar thing happen to him do we the gospels record a similar yet grander reception for Jesus as he enters Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday they worshipped him as he entered Jerusalem they laid down palms and their jackets and everything and they shouted out Hosanna to the king of kings they praised him as he entered into Jerusalem and within a few days what happened they demanded his execution well like

Jesus Paul remained true to his calling and his faith for he knew it was worthwhile this afternoon I was driving home and I was listening to the radio and the Melbourne storm song came up I get knocked down but I get up again and I thought if Paul were alive today he'd probably sing those words I get knocked down but I get up again to any opposition to the gospel he might get knocked down he might get stoned physically but he gets up again we too should not forget that opposition to the gospel will come our way as we seek to proclaim it and in the proclamation of the gospel there is also great joy and even in our world today of universal acceptance and of mediocrity and so on it is tough being an authentic Christian so let us pray that we remain true to the one true gospel of Jesus

Christ despite the hardships and persecutions that we may endure along the way I want to finish by reading to you a verse from a famous hymn it's stand up stand up for Jesus stand up stand up for Jesus the trumpet call obey then join the mighty conflict in this his glorious day be strong in faith and serve him against unnumbered foes let courage rise with danger and strength to strength oppose I mean I mean Thank you.