



SEPTEMBER 5, 2021 | PASTOR EDGAR NHO

“Living Beyond Approval Ratings” (Acts 14:8-20)

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ 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.

¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ 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.” ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

Greetings and Good afternoon to everyone who is here and for those of you joining us online.

I'm Glad to be here and also glad to have the privilege to preach the very first sermon now that after some of our brothers and sisters have gone to start their new church. And to preach to those who will be staying.

We will be continuing the book of Acts series and will be reading from Acts 14:8-20.

[Read Acts 14:8-20]

Today's passage and message comes at, and I think, a good time for us here.

It is a passage and message that calls each and every one of us to be Bold.

To be bold in living out the Gospel in our lives and in its proclamation and to do this contextually, meaning to share and serve in a way that would best connect with our hearers and their situation or circumstances and culture. This takes the Power of the Holy Spirit to give us discernment and wisdom, as there isn't a “cookie cutter” or “How to...” formula for all situations.



However, again, it begins with boldness to live and proclaim the Gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ wherever we are and wherever we go, but what can **stop us or hinder** us from being bold, sharing, serving and contextualizing?

Well, one author of an article put it this way...

If we are always concerned with what people think about us, we will always be reluctant to tell them about Jesus.

Perhaps the single most significant hindrance to Christian witness in the world today is our hunger for human approval. By nature, we think more about what people think of us than about what they think of Jesus. We crave acceptance and dread rejection — which inclines us toward whatever might improve others' perception of us and that will very rarely, if ever, lead us to call them to repent from their sin and believe the Gospel. — Marshall Segal

It is the fear of human approval ratings and the excuses or reasons that follow that can be and probably is one of the larger reasons that hinders us from sharing the Gospel and there are approval ratings everywhere.

With Facebook, Instagram, Amazon, Youtube, Yelp and basically every social platform there is.

We all love to get those followers, those thumbs ups, hearts and likes.

I remember when I changed my Facebook profile picture, I ended up getting 79 likes and for me that felt good. I rarely changed my profile pic and to get that many likes, made me feel good. Some of you out there are probably judging me and saying 79??? Pffft... I have 406 likes...

At the end of the day, we all liked to be liked and again think more about what people think about us, then what they think about Jesus because here we have the Gospel as Christians and people will either praise us or criticize us and we need to be bold and rise above the approval ratings of humans and seek towards the worship of God.

There are many in the bible that were above human approval ratings. Most notably, of course Jesus, but in today's passage we also see the Apostle Paul.

Wherever he went he had mixed reviews in vv. 1-7 of chapter 14, Paul preaches the Good News and it comes with mixed reviews, where people eagerly accept it and then there are people who eagerly rejected it and criticized it and even plotted to find ways to shut him up, and shut him up for good. How does Paul react? He leaves and continues to preach the Gospel. We see here that it is clear that he does not care what people think about him but cares more about what people think about Jesus and wants to point them to a life of worship towards Jesus.

No different in today's passage, as he comes to the town of Lystra, which was an ancient village, with origins that are unknown. In time, Caesar Augustus turned it into a Roman Colony at 6 BC. It was mainly made up of uneducated Lycaonians who came from a small tribe and spoke their own language and had little to no understanding of Jewish religion or scriptures. The ruling class were Roman army veterans and those in charge of commerce were mainly Greek. There were also a few Jews there, but apparently not enough to create a synagogue because as Paul and Barnabas entered Lystra, they began preaching in public, where normally they would start at a synagogue.



As they were preaching there was a lame man who was intently listening and believing in the Gospel message, where Luke records that Paul...

“...saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.”

This is very familiar to what happened with Peter earlier in the book of Acts and here it happens with Paul and it makes him and Barnabas instant celebrity pastors.

Because of the miracle, the people were seeing them as gods that came in earthly form. In this case Zeus and Hermes because of a local mythical legend.

And you can just imagine the confusion that Paul and Barnabas were going through. As the people of Lystra were praising them in their own native language and Paul and Barnabas, not understanding, were probably thinking at first,

“Barnabas, this is good right?”
“Yea it must be good”

Until they saw the priest of Zeus coming to make sacrifices to them.

Now do they enjoy this new status and high approval rating and go Paul #Hermes and Barnabas #Zeus, or do they care more about what the people think about Jesus and want to direct their worship towards Him?

Paul responds with a short sermon in vv. 15-18 and boldly tries to redirect their worship by rejecting their praise (tearing of the clothes) and proclaims and points towards the one true living God and contextualizes the message because he doesn't refer to philosophy or scripture because the locals were unfamiliar with it, they never heard of the Jewish scriptures, but instead points to something that they were familiar with, nature, where he preaches...

¹⁷ 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.” ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

However, Paul continues to proclaim the Gospel, even to the point where Jews that did not like him and did not like the Gospel came from Antioch and Iconium and turned the fickle crowd against Paul and Barnabas. The crowd probably thought that if they were not Zeus or Hermes then they were imposters and rejected the Gospel and began to stone Paul. Why not Barnabas? Well, it looked like Paul did the miracle and seemed like he was doing most of the talking, or they just really didn't like Paul.

To travel from Antioch to Lystra is 161km and it would have taken these Jews 5 days to reach Lystra from there. Iconium wasn't too bad as it was 32 km away and would have been 1 day's journey by foot. But these Jews must have not liked the Gospel and Paul a lot, to travel 5 days, just to stick it to him.

Paul was dragged outside the city and stoned to apparent death, and they thought they killed him, but miraculously, he survived.



Paul wasn't approached by HR in the office, or unfriended or unfollowed on social media, ignored by family or friends, or fell into cancel culture, he was beaten with rocks and left for dead, for simply preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. He faced the most severe form of criticism and opposition and persecution, **but did he give up and give into the approval ratings?**

No, he continued boldly, and this is crazy, by going back into the city, while his fresh blood was still on the stones that they stoned him with, then continuing to preach in other cities and then coming back to Lystra again, because he cared more about what people thought about Jesus than what people thought of him.

And I think he definitely lived out Mark 13:13, where Jesus said,

Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Even after the stoning, Paul stood firm and the marks from the stoning that he got that day showed on his body the bold extent he would go for others to know Jesus and he mentions it in a few of his other letters...

¹⁷ From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. (**Galatians 6:17**)

²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea (**2 Corinthians 11:25**)

¹¹ persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. (**2 Timothy 3:11**)

Paul was bold and his body, emotions and mental state and everything suffered for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.

Now the question to us is...

Can we live above approval ratings for the sake of Christ and the Gospel?

Do we care more about what people think about Christ than what people think about us?

Are we ready and willing to be wary of praise and bear the marks of criticism, in whatever it looks like today?
Are we ready to be a bold people?

I know it can be scary:

Application:

For those who are believers:

How can we begin to be bold?

Pray for courage and ask others to pray for you, so that God may help you to think more about Christ than yourself. To think more about others and how amazing it would be if they came to worship Christ at your expense.

Pray that God will give wisdom and discernment to take the initiative and to do your best to contextualize. It is evident for Paul, that in order to do what he did, he needed to rely on Christ.



In...

Romans 8:26 he writes...

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

In order for him to write this, I'm pretty sure he was speechless before God and begging him for help.

2 Corinthians 1:11 he writes...

as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

Colossians 4:3

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

These words aren't just thrown away sayings or introductions. Paul is genuinely asking for believers to pray for him and that Christ's power will be upon him to have boldness and to preach the good news.

Another way that can help...

Read passages like Acts 14 to give you courage and truth about God and ideas to contextualize and do it.

From the passages that we just read, let's us also...

In the Workplace or at school:

Be bold enough to ask to Pray for Someone

I've worked odd jobs here and there, from office jobs to manual labour etc. and every time someone from work would share something about their lives or a difficulty in a situation, I would ask if I could pray for them.

Out of all my years of being a Christian, I have not met anyone that has turn down a prayer for them and their situation. This too when I was an intern at Cornerstone before it was brought here to Young Nak. I would meet people of all walks of life, and when asked if I could pray for them and minister to them, not one had turned me down and as I prayed for them and asked them for updates, it gave avenues to share the Gospel and minister to them. As time goes on, you can continue to minister to them and over time share the good news of Jesus Christ. Almost like being the local chaplain in your company or school.

Another way

Create a prayer/book study group with those Christians around you at work or school.

- Invite none Christians to come and you can pray for them, and minister to them and hopefully and boldly call them to repent and believe in the Gospel.

Let's pray and brainstorm for ideas.

For those who are curious about Christianity:

What can you get out of this message?

Why would a person like Paul who once was adamantly against Christianity to the point where he was hunting Christians down, all of a sudden go 180 degrees on his stance and become the main supporter and human instrument of the Gospel message?

To the point of suffering for the Gospel, as we just talked about and read and then finally die for his faith.



Not only him, but the testimony of hundreds and thousands of other Christians throughout human history, who risked life and limb to bring this message.

Why?

Something to think about and really reflect on when we wonder if the claim of Jesus is true, that he is the way the truth and the life and no one comes to Father, but through him.

As we have read this passage today, I pray that we may go forth in boldness.

Let's pray.