

“Stay Off the Pedestal!”

Acts 14 (14:1-20)

Intro. – It was over thirty years ago. I was making a call on a family somewhat involved in the church where we were serving. I was met at the door and quickly ushered into the kitchen by the husband/dad of the family. He had been drinking alcohol. His breath made this evident, but, how he was acting removed all doubt. His wife quickly joined us and we were having a good visit when all of the sudden, the husband became animated. He looked at me and said, “I have something I want to say to you. I think you are a (blank) of a preacher.” He meant this as the highest of compliments, but his wife was mortified. After I got my bearings, I said, “Well, John, I can honestly say I have never received such a compliment in my life!”

I use this to illustrate and introduce the idea that some people will want to put us on a pedestal. This is especially the case for those who have leadership responsibilities in the Lord’s Church.

Our text takes us *back to the basics*. Paul and Barnabas are on their first missionary journey. While in Lystra, God used Paul miraculously heal a man lame from birth. When the crowd “saw what Paul had done” they were ready to treat him as a god. They started calling Barnabas *Zeus* and Paul *Hermes*. The people were preparing to offer sacrifices to them.

Talk about being tempted to let people put you on a pedestal! Don’t think for a moment this temptation wasn’t strong then and isn’t just as strong today. The more “success” one achieves in life, the greater the tendency to *mount* the pedestal of pride; to accept peoples’ applause and to look for more of it.

Purpose: learning to stay off the pedestal that belongs only to our Lord

I OPPORTUNITIES Will Abound

- by looking at Paul’s life we certainly will note the parallel to our lives:

A. Popularity is an Area of Temptation

1. Paul could have easily developed a serious ego problem – big crowds were flocking to hear him...
 - a. Acts 13:16-41 records a sermon in Antioch in Pisidia
 - b. listen to what followed: Acts 13:42-45 *“As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath... The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.”*
2. It is an ego boost to be asked to speak before a large crowd:
 - a. Illus. – remember moving to a church three times size of church serving prior to move... I can remember thinking, “Wow, preaching to more people Sunday PM than was to Sunday AM/PM combined!”
 - b. don’t think for a moment, there isn’t strong temptation to revel in the attention, prestige, applause to the point you tempted to lose perspective.
3. How about you? Are you tempted to lose perspective by the following?
 - a. seeking to be popular rather than upright...
 - b. seeking the approval of peers rather than the approval of God...
 - c. seeking recognition for doing that which is *duty* to start with...
4. Being popular with world rather than being approved by God is an area of temptation then/now!

B. Power is Another Area of Temptation

1. Paul could easily have lost perspective not just because of popularity, but, because of “power.”
 - a. Paul had the ability to work true miracles (e.g. 14:3)
 - b. e.g. lame man in Lystra healed – imagine the excitement of this man... look at crowd’s reaction... called them gods!
2. Power corrupts almost any person – e.g. politicians, law enforcement, starlets etc.
 - a Senator was asked why Congress was doing so little about the federal deficit. “It’s awful hard to get a hog to butcher itself.”

3. Power gets hungry making it tough to cut it off:
 - a. Illus. – a patient went to the doctor not feeling well. Dr. asked, “Do you smoke?” “No.” “Do you drink alcohol?” “No.” “Keep late hours?” ... “Eat junk food?” ... “How can I cure you if you have nothing to give up?”
 - b. Illus. – Samuel Clemens said it, “It’s been said if you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principle difference between a person and a dog.”

Power misplaced becomes a freeway to mounting the Pedestal.

II False PRIDE is the Basis

- Paul’s reaction to being deified was not mock humility (i.e. “Aw shucks, you really shouldn’t...)
- Paul was genuine = i.e. he was not out to impress, but was out to exalt the Lord!
- true indicator of leadership is how one reacts when people seek to put that person on the pedestal of false pride. Four steps are usually used:

A. Flattery is the First Step

1. World of difference between flattery and compliment:
 - a. compliment is genuine praise intended to encourage and lift up...
 - b. flattery is exaggerated praise intended to manipulate...
 - c. Proverbs 29:5 “*A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps.*”
2. It is good to have people think more of us than we deserve... to even get compliments... but if we are not careful we can begin believing these things and develop an inflated view of one’s self.
3. Proverbs 25:16 “*Have you found honey? Eat only what you need, that you not have it in excess and vomit it.*”

B. Expecting E.S.T. is the Second Step

1. There are “perks” in most positions = e.g. use of company car, parking places, exec. washroom...
 - Extra Special Treatment = “clergy” tag etc.
2. Nothing wrong until one starts abusing these perks or begins thinking of themselves as superior acting smug and assuming should be treated this way all the time...
 - Illus. – John D Rockefeller entered NYC Riverside Church late one day. He whispered to the usher, “Don’t take me to the regular seat, it’ll be too disruptive. I’ll sneak up to the balcony.” But the couple that came in just behind Rockefeller said, “Show us to our regular per. We’re not the balcony type.

C. Insisting on Titles is the Third Step

1. Matthew 23:1-12 v 12 “*...Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.*”
2. In spite of this and other passages, some insist on being called “Doctor, Professor, Pastor etc”
 - Illus. – was at a meeting where an elder of a local church came up to a member of the same church family and said, “You’re sitting in an elder’s chair!”
3. This is false pride, the type of pride that leads to self-promotion.

D. Accepting Worship is the Fourth Step

1. Remember Herod (Acts 12) accepting worship... God struck him and was eaten by worms...
2. What a reminder how wrong it is when we begin to think people ought to idolize us... God will one way or another knock us off that pedestal!
3. We must never be out to impress people with ourselves; instead, we must be out to impress people that our Lord alone is worthy to be exalted.

III REASONS to Stay Off

- how did Paul keep his equilibrium having all the power and influence he had?
- three reasons, reasons that apply to you and me as well:

- A. People are Fickle
 - 1. The “praise” of Lystra didn’t last long = the same people who wanted to put Paul on the Pedestal one day, were stoning him the next....
 - 2. Jesus experienced this: one day rode into Jerusalem with crowd shouting, “Hosanna!...” Few days later the same crowd was shouting, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”
 - 3. One solid reason to stay off Pedestal = same people who put you there will knock you off!
 - a. Illus. – 6 minute standing ovation is what Pete Rose received when he got his record breaking 4,192 hit. That same crowd booed him the day before for going 0 & 4!
 - 4. People are so fickle, don’t let their applause go to your head!
- B. All of Us Are Mortal
 - 1. Paul realized/understood his mortality = dragged out of town, stoned and left to die (personally believe he really was dead...)
 - 2. Paul also had a *thorn in the flesh* (2 Corinthians 12:7-9) – such kept him humble... know die...
 - 3. Illus. – Wayne Smith recently went to be in the Lord’s presence was called the Bob Hope of the Restoration Movement... Had a serious car accident, head-on... Spoke for 3 yrs in row at the Kentucky Annual Mayors’ Convention. Spoke the year of his accident. He told a couple of jokes and then said, “Men, I really don’t feel like joking. I’m a new man. I have just survived an auto accident... I see the theme of your Mayors’ Conference is ‘Changing Our Cities.’ I want you to know you can’t change our cities until you are changed. And there is only one way you can be changed for the good and that is to let God change you.” He then proceeded to preach a Gospel sermon.... After he had lifted Christ high, he was given a five minute standing ovation. Smith commented later, “It doesn’t matter what they thought. That accident reminded me that I was called to preach the Word!”
- C. Christ Must be Exalted
 - 1. Note, Paul always focused on Jesus and not on himself – 14:20-21 he goes to Derbe and does what?! Preached Christ!
 - 2. I Cor. 4:3,4; 2 Cor. 5:9; Gal. 1:10 “*If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of X!*”
 - 3. Paul never forgot that Christ alone belongs on the Pedestal – we must never forget the same!

Conclusion: English poet and author Thomas Overbury wrote, “The man who has not anything to boast of but his illustrious ancestors is like a potato, -- the only good belonging to him is under ground.”

Mahatma Gandhi was visited by 3 faithful missionaries. Gandhi requested they would sing a hymn that expressed the essence of their faith and convictions. After a few moments this is what they sang:

When I survey the wondrous Cross,
On which the Prince of glory died.
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

I conclude and summarize this text with Galatians 6:14 “*But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*”