

## Scripture Reading:

Acts 14:5 “When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel. 8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. 11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” 18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. 19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.”

# "Worship Only the Creator!"

Here at Church of the King, we stress the importance of exegetical preaching. That is the fancy word for going straight through the text when studying a Book from the Bible.

- This is what we are doing with Luke and Acts here in the New Testament and what I did for several years going through the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Not only do we then have the benefit of the whole counsel of God, but it makes it tougher for the preacher to avoid the more difficult subjects or texts that you will often find in the Bible!

- However, there is still a great deal of discretion that I as a pastor can and must use.

If I tried to exhaust all that could be taught from most passages we would still be considering the Ascension of Jesus to the Father’s right hand in the early part of Acts chapter one!

So as we move through a book I do have to make decisions about how much we deal with each verse and how long we study a certain portion. Sometimes it is obvious where the emphasis is like the resurrection of Jesus in First Corinthians 15. Sometimes it can mean looking at tough doctrines that come up, like election has in the last few weeks... Here we must spend some time making sure our thinking is in line with Scripture and that we bring our covenant children along in their discipleship.

Sometimes it can be an issue we have been discussing as a church or one that is very relevant for the age in which we live. I pray about all of this as we move through each book and you trust me to follow the Spirit’s leading... [ and of course our time of Q&A helps as well!]

- Well this week everything seemed to go in one direction for all of the above reasons so it made it pretty easy to pick a focus.

As you can tell from the title we are going to deal extensively with the Apostle Paul's focus on God as our Creator. It is where our great creeds begin, confessing that we believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. It is where the Scriptures begin declaring that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

- It is a theme that is expanded upon and focused on throughout all the rest of the Scriptures

And since it is probably one of the most important battles that we face in our modern world, it is well worth spending some time on this morning.

Luke tells us how Paul & Barabbas move on to Lystra and there we find the Spirit performing another stunning miracle. Now obviously we could focus again on miracles as well, but we have spent some time on miracles and there will be others as we move along in Acts.

- I will point out again that we have another example that shows clearly who is in control of these miracles: The Spirit of God.

Luke the doctor points out in three ways that this man has no ability to walk and had never walked in his life. Paul discerns that the man has been given saving faith, as we learned last week, and commands him to rise. While it may seem similar to the man who Peter and John healed at the Temple there are as many contrasts as there are similarities which I believe is intentional...

- So we are never tempted to think we have this whole miracle thing worked out...
- If we honestly study the Scriptures!

The interesting thing about this miracle is that it leads to a totally unexpected result and the opportunity for us to see for the first time how the Apostles will approach a thoroughly Gentile audience that has no background in the Scriptures or Jewish religion.

- Today we have more and more opportunities to do the same so we should pay special attention.

It should also serve as a gentle warning about the use of miracles. Some tend to think that we need miracle services to draw people to the Gospel and yet that is not always the case and it puts the miracle worker in grave danger. Paul and Barnabas tear their cloths and beg the people to stop their worship of them, but it could easily have gone the way it did with King Herod who basked in the praise of men or as we see with some of the "famous" Christians we can think of today.

In some ways the reaction of the crowds should have been expected: They were pagans who long had told stories of how the gods Zeus and Hermes had visited their area and the temple to Zeus or Jupiter was just outside their city gates.

- The miracle convinces them that the gods have come again and they prepare to properly worship them.

All of the excitement and planning is done in their native language which Paul and Barnabas did not know so it was well under way by the time they realized what was happening.

They were ready to worship mere men, created men rather than the Creator, the one true God and Paul confronts them with this truth.

- It is a truth that we must confront our world with today if we are going to be engaged in the proper battle as Paul did here at Lystra.

Sadly today, the doctrine of Creation has been placed largely on the back bench... It is something that we Christians have sort of agreed to disagree about and this is something an honest reading of the Bible will not allow and something that robs us of one of our greatest comforts as Christians.

It is a battle that the world has decided is over, with their side having won a decisive victory, not even worth discussing anymore... *[mention websites]*

- And I can assure you the father of lies, that ancient serpent the devil would like to keep it that way!

So just as Paul and Barnabas confronted the pagan culture that sought to make them gods, we too must confront a world that has once again turned away from the Creator.

We must be ready NOT so we can win arguments, but rather because Jesus has called upon us to be His witnesses and for the sake of the souls of those caught up in such lies.

As our responsive reading this morning we turned to Psalm 19 which clearly shows how both the Creation and the Word tell us of God and His great Salvation.

- Creation leads people to God as the Creator
- Scripture leads people to God as their Redeemer!

The Apostle Paul uses the same argument as he shows the Saints in Rome how the truth that God is the Creator must be suppressed and is suppressed in unrighteousness.

In Psalm 19 we read, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. 2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”

In Romans chapter one Paul builds on this truth: “18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.”

- It is very important that we understand the argument Paul makes here if we are to be confident witnesses in our modern age:

Paul reminds us that EVERYONE has to get up each and every morning and live in God’s universe, even on those days where they will insist that God does not exist & did not make anything.

- Paul also goes on to show that God has placed within them a conscience that witnesses to them:

20 “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”

- It is the Prophet Isaiah who is tasked with giving us the best example in all of the Scriptures of what this idolatry looks like...

Isaiah 44:9 “All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit...

13 The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house.

14 He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. 15 Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread.”

- Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it.

16 Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my

god!" 18 They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. 19 No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" 20 He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand? *[review just what this man does]*

Now of course any truly modern man would chuckle at such a picture and insist that this is why all of these ancient religions and superstitions have been set aside or left behind

➤ AND they would insist that the Bible should be included as well!

So is modern man better off? Have we advanced to the point where we no longer need God or the gods?

Living in America we can certainly see that our material wealth and comforts have taken great leaps forward... We no longer need to burn wood to keep warm and can even predict the weather... Sometimes!

➤ But sadly, knowledge and science have replaced that old log that served the primitive man

Yes, they keep us warm and serve up many material blessings, but are we still looking to a dumb idol when it comes to the important matters of life? We get hints about the problem when we see some of the bumper stickers...

➤ "The one who dies with the most toys wins"

➤ Or "I am spending my children's inheritance"

Or, as our President summed things up, "YES we can!"

From the time that the enlightenment thinkers began to try and drive God from the public square we have seen almost incomprehensible death & destruction: From the horrors that followed the French revolution or the nearly one hundred million who lost their lives to communist or fascist thinking in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to the toll of the unborn today in our nation... Having turned away from the witness of the creation and the revealed truth of the Scriptures man is now only an advanced animal and we should not be shocked that they then act like animals!

Perhaps no one on the side of the humanists has been as brutally honest as one of the most famous humanist, Bertrand Russell:

““That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins... Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.”

I don't know if there can be a clearer contrast of world views or the foundations of sand and rock that Jesus taught about at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: The heavens declare the glory of God on the one side and the heavens are ultimately total darkness on the other.

If we are to be faithful witnesses today we must reflect on the subtle despair that the modern person feels and know why we can, and must, always appeal to the Creator and His Word...

If you enter the University campus or an "intelligent" discussion on the Internet believing that God created all there is in six days, you will be mocked, laughed at, and in the end ignored.

What we need to remember is that try as they may, it is hard to ignore a faithful witness as we saw in Paul's letter to the Romans: **EVERYONE** has to get up each and every morning and live in God's universe, even on those days where they will insist that God does not exist and did not make anything. This is why the Psalmist can say that the heavens declare the glory of God.

We also know that God has placed within all people a conscience that witnesses to them...

- And thus they must suppress these truths in unrighteousness.

And trust me that is not easy: While they mock us for taking Genesis chapter one literally, they insist that everything that exists once was compacted together in an area smaller than a pin-head and that it exploded into the universe we see today with everything, including man's mind, the result of only the forces of time and chance. [ *It is known as the 'Big Bang' theory & that takes a LOT of faith ☺* ]

- And as we saw from the Russell quote, the honest humanist knows it must all end again in utter darkness.

Man is made in the image of God and cannot live this way:

- Most refuse to think about such things and fill their lives with busyness and material things.
- Others turn to casual relationships and erotic pleasures.
- Others mask the despair with drugs and/or alcohol
- And perhaps it is the most honest among them that end up in the mental institutions or using violence against themselves or others.

**So I hope you can see why it is so important that we have a strong Christian witness in the midst of such despair, even when it is dressed up to look pretty good.**

- We must declare to a hurting world the truth that Dr. Schaeffer captured in one of his book titles: **He is There and He is Not Silent!**

We must point to the creation as evidence of the glory of God as the Creator and take people to the Scriptures to show that God has spoken to us as the great redeemer.

The world, the flesh and the devil all war against these truths and sadly we have for the most part as a Church has sadly covered before their onslaught for the past few hundred years.

It is hard for us to imagine that only a hundred years ago it was the evolutionists that were trying to get a foothold in the government schools as evidenced by the famous Scopes trial.

- They wanted God put on trial and in large part I think we lost the battle when we agreed to that false premise which they put forward.

The Bible says that the heavens declare the glory of God and that man is made in His image: These truths need no proof at some human trial...

- They are self-evident.

The moment we agree to try such things in a human court or discussion we have assumed the very false foundation that destroyed man in the first place: "hath God said..."

- Truly it is still the battle cry for all the modern humanists.

We must learn again to join with the Apostle Paul in declaring 'men why do you think such things... We urge you to turn from such vain things to a living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them!'

The early chapters of Genesis are mocked by the world and for the most part today even Christians make many excuses for them... Don't get caught up with the details of science, but keep your focus on the Gospel we are told.

Well, brothers and sisters, the Bible has NO other way of presenting the Gospel than through these truths that are established in these early chapters! In just the first three chapters we learn about how God created the world, how God made man in His own image and how everything that God made was very good. We learn how man fell into sin, bringing death and destruction to the creation and how God immediately gave them hope with the promise of the Gospel. And we even learn about eternal life as man is kept from the tree of life until he is redeemed so he can live forever in a righteous state rather than be eternally lost in sin.

- There are many who want to make these passages poetical or just philosophical principles that God is explaining and NOT real history.

At bottom they are trying to make peace with the idolaters rather than calling them to repentance as Paul did.

Without the truths of these early chapters the rest of the Bible makes little or no sense: It becomes just another religious book among many religious books in this world. However, when we accept them as God's revelation then we know about the creation that we live in each day and how God will save us from our sin.

- Not only is this essential for us to be the witnesses that Jesus wants us to be, it is what gives us great comfort in life and in death.

As you meditate on the Scripture readings in your individual and family devotions in the coming weeks and months; I hope you will begin to see how often remembering that God is our Creator is used to comfort and assure us as His covenant people. This is what the world, the flesh and the devil want to take away and we must resist them on all fronts! This is why we purpose to read the Creation account together every few weeks here at Church of the King

- This is why we often return to the book of beginnings, Genesis to make sure we are building on the proper foundation of rock.

Our hymn of response will be the singing of Psalm 65 which we use as our response to the reading of the Creation account: As we prepare to heartily sing Isaac Watt's arrangement listen to the great comfort we are to KNOW when we see God as the Creator of the World: The only one who we are to Worship!

Psalm 65:1 "Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed. 2 O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come. 3 When iniquities prevail against me, you atone for our transgressions. Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple! By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas;

- And how do we know that we can trust this God of our salvation?

6 "the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; 7 who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples, 8 so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs. You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy. 9 You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide their grain, for so you have prepared it. 10 You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. 11 You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance. 12 The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, 13 the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.