

## The Futile Things of Lystra

Acts 14:8–18 | 19 April 2026 KRCN

1. This took place when Paul entered the city of Lystra. Lystra is located in what is now the southern region of Türkiye. There was a man there who could not use his feet. It was not that he had no feet or had lost them, but though he had them, he had been crippled from birth and had never walked.
2. According to Luke's account, Paul "looked intently at him and saw that he had faith to be healed" (Acts 14:9). What did he see? Faith? More concretely, he saw that the man was listening to what Paul was saying. Paul, who had fled from Iconium, came to Lystra and preached the gospel, and this crippled man was paying close attention to it.
3. For some reason, Paul then cried out in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet!" And the man leaped up and began to walk. Luke does not simply say "he walked," but "he leaped up and walked." It is as if the man who had been sitting sprang up like a coiled spring. His twisted and folded legs were suddenly straightened, and he began to walk on them.
4. There are scenes somewhat similar to this. In some gatherings, when a leader holds a microphone and makes a blowing sound, people in front fall like leaves. With just a touch of a finger, they collapse. Though not unconscious, some lie down laughing, others crying, dancing, or running about.
5. But if you think this is what a typical church looks like, you are mistaken. And if you assume such things naturally happen because it is a church, that too is an error. These are neither the defining characteristics nor the marks of the church. You might say that Paul also performed such a miracle in Lystra, but this did not take place within the church.
6. In Hinduism, there are sometimes revival-like gatherings, which they call *Kundalini*. If you attend one of these Kundalini meetings, you will witness scenes that seem very similar to what you might see in churches—speaking in tongues, people falling down, rolling on the ground, sometimes even being healed, and at times claims of the dead being raised.
7. The event that took place in Lystra can be described as being of a similar kind. However, the fundamental difference from other religions is this: the miracle was directed toward one crippled man, and its cause was not Paul's power, but the faith within that man.
8. Look at 14:11. "When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language..." That is right—the people of Lystra saw what Paul had done. But what did Paul focus on? The faith in that crippled man—the faith that could lead to salvation.
9. Therefore, what can be said upon seeing "faith" is, "Stand upright on your feet," whereas what the people of Lystra said upon seeing the act was, "The gods have come down to us in human form." In church language, this would be like saying, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."
10. Luke says that they shouted in the Lycaonian language. Though it was part of the empire, Lystra was in a remote region of Türkiye, and even their language was different. By implication, their religion would also have differed from that of Rome. Yet whom did they bring? The priest of the temple of Zeus outside the city—in other words, the pastor of the temple of Jupiter.

11. The Korean translation refers to “the priest of the temple of Zeus outside the city.” Here, “outside the city” does not simply mean the countryside, but the entrance to the city of Lystra. This indicates that although the people of Lystra spoke a local language, their religion was that of the Roman Empire’s polytheism.
12. Bringing the priest there, in our context, would be like bringing a pastor from Bovenkerk. And what were they trying to do? They were preparing to offer sacrifices to Zeus and Hermes. In other words, they believed that the miracle—of making a crippled man spring up like a coiled spring—was something that could be done not by Judaism or Christianity, but by the temple of Zeus. In effect, they were proposing to hold a kind of Kundalini gathering.
13. In truth, we who observe this miracle are not so different from the people of Lystra. Even sitting in church today and worshiping under the name of believers may not be so different from attending the gathering led by the priest of Zeus. For we focus not on faith, but on the miracle of the crippled man rising.
14. If one day the church bulletin announced that the passage would be the miracle of the crippled man in Acts 14, what would you expect? Would you not wonder how the man was healed, or how Paul performed such a miracle? And would you not pray with hope, “God, grant me such a miracle as well”?
15. It seems that preaching in the church has become like Paul’s loud cry: “Stand up on your feet!” “Awake, O sleeper!” “Rise, you who are dead!” “You who are discouraged, suffering, and oppressed—rise with faith!” But how is this any different from the reaction of the people of Lystra who witnessed the miracle?
16. Paul cried out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you” (Acts 14:15). In other words, he was saying that he was not Hermes, but a man just like them. Therefore, for a human to offer sacrifice to another human is meaningless.
17. Then what should we do in the face of such a miracle? First, we must preach the gospel. Second, we must turn away from futile things. And third, we must turn to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. This is what may be called Paul’s religion.
18. First, preaching the gospel is a mission entrusted to Paul, so we will set that aside for now. But second, what does it mean to turn away from futile things? It means, to begin with, stopping something. It means abandoning the act of bringing bulls and garlands to Zeus and offering sacrifices.
19. Bringing bulls and garlands to Zeus means they had prepared a sacrifice. More specifically, it means they were trying to show proper respect to Zeus. They intended to carry out prayers, offerings, and praises before Zeus in an orderly, formal, and careful manner. This is what worship in the temple of Zeus looked like—the form and structure of that religion.
20. Even gathering for worship once a week is part of such a formality. Praying, praising, and dedicating oneself all follow a set schedule, procedure, and structure—once a week—in order to show proper respect before God. When Paul stopped them from offering sacrifices, he was questioning the sincerity of the people of Lystra in their desire to worship, and pointing out the futility of such forms.

21. When offering sacrifices, what is considered most important? What food is prepared matters, and where it is arranged matters even more. In addition, the timing, the manner of bowing, the reading of proclamations, and the wearing of proper garments are all important. The seating arrangement of the choir, the color of the stole on the pulpit, the order of the representative prayer, even the person in charge of distributing bread...
22. What governs the worship of the Christian church? It is precisely these procedures, forms, and etiquettes. This is not to say they are unimportant. But the problem is that the “faith” we ought to focus on is pushed aside by “what is done.” Such outward form controls and restrains our visible behavior—what we might call formalism.
23. If there is something more that must be abandoned, it is the religiosity of the people of Lystra embedded within these forms. What kind of religiosity? It is the tendency to look for their gods within miraculous events—when the impossible becomes possible—or, conversely, to expect that their god will perform such miracles for them.
24. If all we hear from a doctor is the usual prescription, our illness does not easily improve. “Paracetamol 1000mg!” Even if we take the medicine as prescribed, we often do not feel better. But if the doctor examines us personally, sends us for tests, or gives us an injection, only then do we feel that we are truly being treated—even though in the end it is still just paracetamol 1000mg.
25. Consider what Paul said when he arrived in Athens: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22). What did Paul see that led him to say this? “As I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god’” (Acts 17:23).
26. There were temples to well-known gods everywhere, yet among them was an altar “to an unknown god.” This reflects the thoughtfulness of the Athenians—their morality and their sense of respect toward the gods. This considerate attitude is precisely what Paul refers to as their religiosity. It corresponds to what we today might call our sense of propriety, morality, and etiquette.
27. To summarize, the ritual of sacrifice that both the healed man and the citizens of Lystra offered in response to Paul’s great miracle was, in fact, a futile thing. Such religiosity does not prove that their religion is true or proper, even if a “church” at the city gate were to come and conduct the sacrifice with perfect decorum.
28. What makes the church truly the church is neither such miracles nor such rituals. The church is the place where the gospel Paul preached—the Word of God—alone is present. It is the place where that Word breaks down the many forms, moralities, and structures devised by human beings.
29. It is said, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” May all these formalities and structures be broken, and may our worship become one in which only the Word of God is freely proclaimed.