

Life Is Good
Statements 3, 4, 5, and 6 from Gospel Primer
Acts 14:6-17
September 25, 2011 (KIT)

Paul and Barnabas worked hard to bring the good news of Jesus to new places. But that doesn't mean things always went as they planned. One time, when they were run out of one town as trouble makers, they ran off to another and found themselves being worshiped. Let's look at that story together.

TEXT: Acts 14:6-17

Acts 14:6-17 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.

What do we see here? First, we must see that Paul and Barnabas were preaching the gospel, the good news that Jesus died for sinners. This is the message that has the power to bring faith. The Bible says that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the words of Christ." Also, Paul tells us, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe." This miracle of healing was neither random nor disconnected from the gospel. Rather it was the result of the gospel being preached. The ones crippled from birth heard and believed. This faith Paul saw, and obviously led by God's Spirit, showed the power of God to the people by healing this man. Now, this man had faith. This man was made whole in both body and spirit at the same moment.

But notice how the effect on the people around was not quite so positive. They didn't have faith. So they misinterpreted what they saw. They were amazed at the power of the healing and believed that their own gods had done it, not the God that Paul was proclaiming. They thought Zeus and Hermes had done this. So the priest went and got the sacrifices that they were regularly sacrificing to Zeus so that they could honor Paul properly. (We should note an important principle here: **When God is near and shows Himself, mankind is not likely to believe in Him.**) Miracles, although they prove God's power, do not have the power to give faith to people. Many demand proof from God today. But we are mistaken if we think they would believe the proof if it was right in front of them.

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.

Paul and Barnabas respond to the attempt to worship them instead of God by being appalled. Something has gone horribly wrong! They were preaching the gospel. Some believed. God even healed someone. At this point all the people should be praising the true God. Instead, they got the whole thing wrong.

They saw the power of God and used that as an excuse to worship Zeus and Hermes, and Paul and Barnabas while they were at it! This is an evangelistic rally that got weird really fast. Paul and Barnabas tried to reason with them. They pointed out that they were not gods. They were men, just like the rest. “We came to bring you good news!” or the gospel. “We came to bring you good news, not to be gods! What’s wrong with you people? You sacrifice to gods that aren’t even there. It is vain. You are wasting good cattle on nothing. You are wasting your time on temples and priests that are serving no one. And it’s really silly to worship to us. No, worship the God who made everything.”

They made an appeal to creation. Everything exists. Someone made it. Worship that One. This argument is as profound today as it was 2000 years ago. No matter how educated man becomes, he can not answer the following question: How did everything get here? Sure, he has theories of evolution and big bang, and what not. But those are all guesses at the process. None of them address the bigger issue: how did anything at get here? “If there was ever a time when there was nothing, there’d be nothing still.” Even if you live in a world that believes in evolution, who invented the first, and then the matter of evolution? To say that there is no first cause is senseless to human reason. It doesn’t make sense today and it didn’t make sense then.

That’s why Paul used it as a trump card. Stop worshiping invented gods and worship the One who made everything. That One is God. Paul and Barnabas present themselves as messengers of the Creator God, come with good news of salvation for all men. Then Paul makes this intriguing statement:

16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways

Here is a Jewish man who goes to the gentile nations and declares, from ages past until now, God has allowed your peoples to go uninformed. Israel had to follow the true God and they displayed that God as one nation in the midst of a world of nations. But now, something has changed. That is the implication. Now, all the nations are required by God to honor the God of the Jews.

This is a fascinating truth. That means that when we send missionaries to other countries to bring the gospel of Jesus, we are not sending people who are suggesting to others that there might be a better way to live. Instead, we are sending messengers from the Creator God who is commanding all the nations to repent of their false gods and believe in Him who made all things. In other words, **no matter what governments and laws may say, we have the right and the duty to declare the falsehood of all belief systems and urge people to turn back to the Creator who has revealed Himself to the earth in the person of Jesus!**

Then he says this:

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."

God let you go your own way, but He didn’t leave you without evidence. All those centuries He did good to you by giving you rain and food. The evidence to all mankind that God exists is creation itself. You are here. Whoever made everything is God.

Then, Paul builds on that argument by pointing out that that God is good and the proof of that is food, even physical life itself. God doesn’t owe life to anyone, especially to those thinking beings who do so much sin. He created everything and is therefore the Master of it all.

Yet, He is good and proves it because the ground grows food that can be eaten. And it tasted good too. I love food, personally. I associate food with joy. It's fun to eat. Some people say that we should eat to live and not live to eat. To that I say, whatever. Don't get me wrong, we should not be gluttonous and over eat like pigs. However, to eat just to live sounds dreadful. Food is good. You can live on potatoes with butter, salt and sour cream if you eat the skins. But who wants to? You can live on spice less boiled beans. But who wants to?

You can live off of shrimp Diablo too. Firm fresh shrimp covered with a light red sauce and just the right amount of spice? Yum! You can live off of fresh soft bread, with butter melting in the middle of it too. You can live on a seared, lightly spiced rib eye steak, with some broiled mushrooms, mash potatoes and gravy and steamed vegetables with garlic and butter. And you can wash it down with a cold beverage of your choice. And when you are done, hot pumpkin pie and whipped cream. Or maybe just ice cream.

You can live off of that too. And you can celebrate every delectable bite and then, when done, remember where all the food in the world comes from: it is the daily gift of the good Creator God. Oh, the faithless always want to complain against Him when they feel pain, but where are the praises when they bite into a sweet chocolate bar, or taste a fine wine, or eat the freshest juiciest cold nectarine on a hot summer day?

God feeds the world. "*Satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*" Do you see Paul and Barnabas' argument to these Greek idol worshippers? They are asking them to thank God for something He has done before their eyes all their lives! By the way, this argument didn't work. If you were to read on, you will see that the people not only did not believe in Jesus but they were stirred up by some enemies and ended up stoning Paul and leaving him for dead.

This event demonstrates how stubbornly mankind resists the truth about God. God feeds all nations at all times and still the peoples of the world rebel against God. We take our food for granted, as if we are owed it, as if it somehow natural that we live on an earth that abundantly feeds us food, and that that food is pleasurable to us. That is not natural. Someone had to design that system. And not just Greek pagans of two thousand years ago took this for granted. We are the same way. Even as Christians, we can forget how everything we enjoy in life is a gift from our God. And if we are to understand the gospel and preach it to ourselves, we must be reminding ourselves daily that all good things come from God.

As we go through the book called, "The Gospel Primer," we are learning to rehearse the 41 statements of the gospel that the author has formed. Today we are covering four statements, numbers 3 to 6.

3. *He has also been unbelievably good and merciful to me as the Creator and Sustainer of my life.*
4. *Every breath, every heartbeat, every function of every organ in my body is a gift from Him.*
5. *Every legitimate pleasure I experience is a gift from His loving hand to me.*
6. *All that I am and all that I have I owe to Him and to His goodness.*

This week, we want to remind ourselves that all good things in our lives come from Him, and this is certainly true. There is nothing good, nothing pleasurable on this whole earth that was not provided by God.

Look what the Bible says:

James 1:17 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

When we think of those millions of little things that make life worth living, we must remember that it is a gift from God. Nothing is exempt from that. Not the cuteness of the boy that a girl has a crush on, or the beauty of the girl that he sees. Not the feeling of warm soft socks added to cold feet or the comfort of a good dog. Not the feeling of shade on a hot day or the joy of exercise. Not the beauty of a Christmas tree lit up in a dark room. You and I could begin to add up all the little things in our lives that we think are good and they number in the millions. They are all from God. And when we begin to think of the big things? They are all from God.

The four statements that we are focusing on today could be summed up like this: God is the Giver of my life, the keeper of my life, the joy of my life, the owner of my life.

When I think of how God gave me life, I think about how unlucky I have always been. If there is a random chance of being picked for anything, or a drawing for any prize, I will lose. I always do. If there is a fifty- fifty chance, I always lose. I'm the most unlucky person I know. I can't even win at bingo.

Then people say to me, "Hey, the Powerball is up to a billion dollars! Why don't you buy a ticket?" I think, "You buy it. I know I won't win." And, because of the odds of that, I know you won't win either. It's a sucker bet. The odds are so stacked against all the players, winning takes a miracle. Then one day I was thinking about existing, about me existing. Then I realized how I had already been the luckiest person in the world, luckier than any person who had ever won any lottery any where at any time. Why? Because I exist! The odds are so against me existing.

My mom and dad had to meet. One of is from Altoona and one from California. They met in Alaska. What are the odds? Then they had to fall in love and get married. Then when you look at the biological odds, things really get weird. Without getting graphic, I had one day where I could have been conceived; only one. The next day, my possibility was gone. That means mom and dad had be close that day and in good moods. Then, even on that day, I was in competition with 3 to 4 hundred million other potential people, if you know what I mean. Imagine that! If someone said that only one person in all America gets to live, then the odds that it would be you or me are pretty slim, aren't they? But those were the exact odds of me having a shot at life! And yet, here I am.

I don't need to win any drawings in life. I've already won life's lottery. I'm alive. And if we go back generations, the odds of me being here get even worse. Many things had to go just right in order for me to be here. Who engineered my life, my existence? God. He "knit me together in my mother's womb." the Bible says. *He has also been unbelievably good and merciful to me as the Creator and Sustainer of my life.*

He is also the keeper of my life. My body works amazingly. No engineer, no doctor, no machinist built this thing. It was built by God. The lungs move the oxygen from the air to my blood, while removing the other chemicals I breathe in that I don't need. My digestive system is amazing. There is a large variety of fuels I can put into me. They can be processed in all different ways. I can put in raw vegetables, processed Twinkies, meats, proteins, carbohydrates into the machine. I can put in hard things, soft things, and chewy things, things that grow in the ground, things with hair, things with feathers, things with fins, things with exo-skeletons, and all kinds of things into my mouth and swallow them. And my body handles them all, breaks them down,

determines what will nourish and what needs to be filtered out and eliminated. And it does it. My body heals itself from bruises and cuts. I don't have to do anything. God has equipped my body for life. It lives.

And then, He has set His angels about me so that I cannot die without His permission. I'm not alive because of anything I do. I'm alive because of something He did and continues to do. There are dangerous situations I have put myself into that have caused others to be dead. But I am not dead. He keeps me. *Every breath, every heartbeat, every function of every organ in my body is a gift from Him.*

The fact that God is good to those who do evil must be remembered. Drug dealers and murderers laugh sometimes. They feel loved sometimes. They eat good foods and know excitement. They have happy weddings sometimes. They fall in love sometimes. They get presents they like sometimes. Life is filled with joys and God is good even to evil people. How much more should we who have been saved from our wicked ways now consider that every joy in life is a gift from God?

For example, when men hunt, it should be a time of worship and thanksgiving. God made the white tailed deer and the turkey. He stocked the woods with them. He built the trees. They are all gifts from Him. If you had a friend who said, "I have 100 acres of woods, and I have stocked them with game, and only my close friends can hunt with me there. You may come and hunt with me." You'd be thankful for your friend and you'd think he had been very kind to you. Do you realize that God did that with the whole earth? Who put the deer there for you in the first place? Who made the woods?

Who made women to love beauty and seek fashion? Do you enjoy shopping? Having your hair and nails done? Getting all prettied up? Smelling nice and buying new and beautiful dresses and clothing and jewelry? If you had a friend who owned the nicest mall and all the stores in it and she told you that you could have your pick of anything from every store, you would think she was the kindest friend in the world. Well, who fills the world with fabric? Who invented beauty and gave to women in greater abundance than to men? Who made all the colors and gave humanity the ability to create beauty? God did. Trips to the beauty shop and the clothing store should be times of worship. In fact, anything that brings joy to life should be cause for worship of God; homes, four wheelers, tractors, mountains, streams, fish, boy friends, healthy fingers and toes, cell phones, green grass, flat screen TV., football teams, chocolate cake, smiles, laughter, everything. *Every legitimate pleasure I experience is a gift from His loving hand to me.*

Finally, God is the owner of my life. The statement that we are rehearsing that corresponds to this idea is this: **All that I am and all that I have, I owe to Him and to His goodness.** We must embrace this idea for we are very tempted to think that our own lives belong to us, and they do not. We can be tempted to think of all we have as something that we have provided for ourselves or that we deserve. It is not so.

America is a very rich nation. God has given us wealth never seen in human history. We are so wealthy that by United States standards, we have 44 million people living in poverty, but the estimate of those that are homeless tops out at 600,000 people (and of those, only 250,000 are considered unsheltered). In other words we are so rich that even those who say live poverty have homes. This is not like poverty in the rest of the world! And beyond that, there are 300,000,000 people who live above the poverty level.

The Bible says if we have food and clothing we are to be content. We all have food and clothes and more. We have beds and sheets and lots of clothes. We have refrigerators with food inside, and cupboards with food. We have computers and cell phones; TV's and vehicles. We have land and on and on and on. Owning

things causes us to have pride. Those who have more we admire, and those who have less we call less successful. We must hear that really don't own anything.

1 Timothy 6:17 17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

God is speaking to us, Americans. Don't set your hopes on riches. They can't be counted on. We have elections coming up in our country. In 2012, the subject will be more on putting our hopes in riches than in any other year I know of. Both parties will be making their play to assure us all that our money will do better under them than anyone else. But riches can fly in an instant. Riches aren't God. Riches can't promise that you'll stay alive and safe. They can't promise that you'll be happy. They say they will, but they won't deliver.

In fact, if we have possessions in this country, it is because God has given them to us to enjoy. We must not confuse the provision with the provider. Let us put our hopes in God and be generous with everything we have. Why? Because, everything we have, isn't ours. God was generous to us, so we should share what we have with others. "Freely you received, freely you give."

Look at the grace in this last verse. God gives us all things to richly enjoy. What a good giver God is. He wants us to enjoy the things He gives us in this life. Bruce Springsteen has a line in a song that says, **"It ain't no sin to be glad you're alive."** Christians would do well to remember it. Often Christians are the last ones to remember that God gives us things because He likes us and wants us to enjoy life. We often think that what we do for God is our duty, and the fun we have in life is the non-religious part. Not so. Having fun and enjoying the good things of this life is holy, if done with thanksgiving and humility. A trip to the fair to eat fattening fried food and laugh with our friends is a gift from God. Don't rip Him off. Laugh loud, enjoy the good things and squeeze every ounce of fun out of all life. There are many hard times in this world, but God is good and has given us much to enjoy. Glorify Him by enjoying your life.