

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

ATHENS (ACTS 17:16-21) DISTRESSED IN A CITY FULL OF IDOLS

Athens was the ancient equivalent to NYC or Paris. Not in population, but in cultural influence. It was also the intellectual and idolatry capital of Greece.

- Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus lived in this city full of temples and statuary to remember its glorious history.

PAUL COULDN'T CONTAIN HIMSELF

Paul was unable to remain silent in a city full of such raw paganism and idolatry, so he "reasoned in the synagogue" as well as "in the marketplace everyday with those who happened to be there." The Epicureans (anti-divine intervention) and Stoics (personal ethics) thought Paul was "ignorant" and a "show off."

SOME OF THE ATHENIANS WERE INTRIGUED

The Greeks loved knowledge and philosophical debate. Some of them were intrigued with this "preacher of foreign deities" and took Paul to the Areopagus (Mars Hill) to hear his teachings on Jesus.

- Paul stood on Mars Hill as the Parthenon lay just to his right, and the Agora (marketplace) was just down the hill. He was about to address the people that controlled the affairs of Athens, which would've also influenced all of Greece.

"...TELLING OR HEARING SOMETHING NEW"

These Greeks were philosophers that were always intrigued with "hearing something new." Paul came in to tell them something old, the story of the Creator God and His relationship with mankind. The cultural and intellectual leaders were about to be shown that they were the ones who were ignorant.

IDOLS (ACTS 17:22-28)

KINDNESS TRAVELS FURTHER THAN CONDEMNATION

Paul begins his address with a commendation. He knew that if he was going to make headway, condemnation wasn't going to be a good launching pad. The Athenians were spiritual people, but they were ignorant to the true Spirit, Jesus.

- **We can find good qualities and common ground with anyone!**

"TO THE UNKNOWN GOD"

Paul begins with an object lesson. He mentions all the various idols, but he specifically focuses on the one dedicated to an "Unknown God." The Greeks erected statues to unknown gods in order to cover all their bases and not offend the gods. Paul aims to enlighten them on the "Unknown God," the God of the Bible.

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AND CREATION

Paul fills in the blank for the Athenians by telling them who their "Unknown God" is. Paul says that there is only one God and that He "made the world and everything in it." A crazy thought for the Greeks that worshipped hundreds of deities.

A GOD THAT CANNOT BE CONTAINED

Virtually every line Paul teaches to the Greeks contradicts their culture and beliefs. Paul says that there is one God, He does not live in shrines or temples, He is not served by human hands, He doesn't play favorites, and we're all made from Him. Paul also mentions that God is personal and wants us to seek Him.

THE ATHENIANS THOUGHT THEY WERE SPECIAL

People from Athens believed they came from their soil and were unique to all other people in the world. Paul tells them that they all came from "one man," Adam.

- **This should remind us to be cautious with nationalism and the false assumption that we are more important than everyone else.**

ANYONE CAN FALL IF OUTSIDE GOD'S WILL

Paul tells them that God determines the success of nations and peoples, a sore subject for a people conquered by Rome.

- **We must remember God is in control and "the authorities that exist have been established by God."** (Romans 13:1) **"He removes kings and sets up kings."** (Daniel 2:21)

"...AS EVEN SOME OF YOUR POETS HAVE SAID"

Paul finds common ground by quoting "For we are also his offspring" from *Hymn to Zeus* written by the Greek poet Aratus. This shows us that **there are truths even in things that aren't Christian, and all truth is God's truth.**

- **It also shows the importance of safely building bridges through non-Christian avenues.**

A COMPREHENSIVE DOCTRINE OF GOD

In just 5 short verses Paul teaches the Athenians the fundamental doctrines of God:

1. **God made the world.**
2. **God gave all people life.**
3. **God controls the nations.**
4. **God revealed Himself so people would seek Him and have a personal relationship.**

THE GOSPEL (ACTS 17:29-31)

WE ARE HIS OFFSPRING

Paul addresses the idolatry head on when he says, "Since we are God's offspring, we shouldn't think that the divine nature is like gold, silver, or stone..."

- Paul is saying that we're God's design, therefore **we can't fashion our ideas of God. This is our biggest problem; we try to make God in our image!**

UNIVERSALISM IS ALSO INCORRECT

Not only did the Athenians create their own image of God, but they made many gods. Not only does **the Bible clearly state there are no other gods and all other "gods" are demonic**, but **simple logic shows us that universalism is contradictory and ridiculous.**

OUR FALSE BELIEFS REQUIRE REPENTANCE

Now that the Athenians have been shown truth, "God now commands all people everywhere to repent because He has set a day when He is going to judge..."

- When we realize that our thoughts and actions are contrary to the Bible, **we're called to ask for forgiveness and take steps to live differently.**

THE GOSPEL IN A FOREIGN AREA

Moving from the doctrine of God, Paul teaches the gospel. His ability to **put things in context and relate** is an amazing model of how to communicate and adapt.

- **Though we don't compromise our beliefs, we must learn to adapt and connect with even the most eclectic people.**

RESPONSE (ACTS 17:32-34)

"...SOME BEGAN TO RIDICULE HIM"

After hearing that Jesus was raised from the dead, some laughed at Paul. Interestingly enough, others were intrigued and wanted to hear more.

- The Greeks had no issue with immortality of the soul, but the idea of someone resurrecting from the dead was ludicrous to them.

THE SCOFFERS OUTNUMBERED THE INTRIGUED

Though more people laughed than wanted to hear more, Luke writes "some people joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them." Dionysius, named after a Greek god, was a judge. Damaris must've also been influential and educated.

LUKE DOESN'T PORTRAY THIS AS A LOSS

Though many scoffed and there is no mention of a church forming at this time in Athens, Luke still portrays this as a win because some did come to know Christ.

- Ironically, every year a flag at the Parthenon is lowered at half mast on Good Friday and is raised again on Easter.

WE CANNOT CONTROL THE RESULTS

Paul was called to present the truth, though he couldn't dictate people's responses. Paul did what he was called to do:

1. **Condemn idolatry and sin**
2. **Show a need to repent**
3. **Explain the certainty of judgment by Jesus**
4. **Offer salvation through Christ's death and resurrection.**

DO WE HAVE IDOLS?

- We may think the idea of shrines built to manufactured Greek gods is ridiculous, but **how many idols has American culture created?**
- Do we have idols in our lives? **Are we aware that God will not coexist with other gods?**

ARE WE REPENTANT?

- Have we asked God to forgive us of our sins? Not just "once upon a time," but every time we go
- against God's commands?
- Have we made the necessary changes in our lives to live according to His Word?
- **Does sin still bother us?**

DO WE BELIEVE IN RESURRECTION?

- Do we still believe that Jesus' resurrection from the grave sets us free of "sin's dominion?"
- If we claim to be saved, **why do so many still walk in their old ways?** Are we not "new creations" after we give our lives to Him?
- **Have you experienced liberation through Christ?**