

ACTS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 17 as we continue our study through the Word of God. Keep in mind that we are now witnessing the Gospel going to the ends of the earth, the Gospel message is spreading from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, to Asia Minor and now into Europe!

If you remember from our last study, Paul has begun his second missionary journey taking with him Silas this time.

In Lystra Paul picked-up Timothy, a young man who was mature in the faith and was saved during Paul's first missionary journey.

Then in Troas Luke joins them.

In Philippi God was moving, people came to know the Lord, a demon-possessed slave girl was set-free from her demon-possession, and then the trouble for Paul and his men began.

Paul and Silas were thrown into prison because the owners of this girl were upset that she could no longer predict the future, they were losing money, and they caused an uproar in the town, and Paul and Silas were placed in this prison after they were beaten, their feet placed in stocks, all for preaching Christ and setting this girl free from here bondage!

And that can be discouraging. Think about your walk with the Lord, there have been times of discouragement and yet, in those times God is there to encourage us to continue on.

Let me show you what I mean. Several weeks back one of the men we are sending our studies to, sent me this letter showing how God brings words of encouragement and sometimes, when we least expect them. This is what he wrote,

. . . I'd like to relate a story to you that happened not long after I was saved, but still having some doubts concerning my salvation. It goes something like this:

One morning, about a year into this sentence that I'm serving, I began to pray, at which time I was already in the habit of reading God's Word before I began my day. I'm not real sure what I was feeling or what exactly was going on in my life at this time, but, my prayer quickly turned into a plea for Jesus to please reveal to me His presence in my life.

As I finished my prayer I began to read His Word, hoping and expecting for some verse to stand out in answer to my prayer, but nothing!

Then I thought, and I think I was reading the Daily Bread at that time, maybe something would stand out there, but nothing!

So, I went to breakfast, got ready for work, and as I was walking to work, I quickly said a short prayer, asking for His forgiveness in doubting what I already knew His Word said about asking for signs, and of His many promises of being always with us.

So, I got to work. At the time I was recycling old computers.

When I got to my work station there was a pallet loaded with old printers, they were wrapped in shrink wrap all the way to the top.

It was not usually my job to cut away the shrink wrap and dig into whatever needed to be recycled that day, but I did.

I grabbed the first printer I could reach from the top of the pallet and brought it to my work station. I flipped it over to get the screws on the bottom to begin taking it apart, and as I did, a card fell out.

I picked it up and noticed some Bible verses on it. One of them read: "I will never desert you, nor will I ever leave you," Hebrews 13:5b.

On the other side of the card was a little story called “Footprints.”

I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT!

The man I worked next to was also a Christian, I handed him the card and said, “Do you know what this is?”

And I related the whole story to him. There was also a Moslem and an atheist at our work station that witnessed this seemingly answer to my prayer earlier that morning.

I get chills and my eyes well up with tears every time I repeat this story.

I don't know how this could have been anything but, from God Himself!

This happened over 15 years ago, and I still rely on the experience to this day whenever I begin to doubt God's presence in my life. Even though I knew before this happened that God has said He lives in the hearts of those who are His, He gave me the honor and privilege to hear from Him in a very special and personal way.

It blows me away that God Himself would reassure someone like me that I was one of His and that He will never desert me nor will He ever forsake me! I am, and I feel, so unworthy of such a gift!

So, that's how God spoke to me one morning, what do you think?

- John Hubbard, 2017

I think our God is amazing and He loves us so much that He will give to us the things we need at the time we need it. We just need to ask and seek Him, and He will reveal Himself to us.

Remember, Paul and Silas are in jail and it could have been discouraging for them. But they are praying and praising the Lord and through this all, the Philippian jailer and his household were saved. What an encouragement that must have been to them!

Now, after that they spent some time at the house of Lydia before they moved on.

At this point it seems that Luke remained in Philippi for we see a change in the pronouns that Luke uses.

He went from “we” to “they” and it is possible that this Gentile remained in Philippi to help this very young church to grow while Paul and Silas were run out of town you might say.

That is where we will pick-up our study this evening in Acts chapter 17, beginning in verse 1 as Paul and Silas are on the road again!

ACTS 17

VERSE 1

As they leave Philippi, heading southwest, they are traveling on the Egnatian Way, an important Roman highway.

The first big city they hit is Amphipolis, (am-fip'-o-lis), which was some 33 miles from Philippi.

From there they traveled some 30 miles to Apollonia, (ap-o-lo'-ni-a).

And finally, another 40 miles to Thessalonica which was the capital of Macedonia with a population of around 200,000 people.

Today this Grecian city is called Thessaloniki, and it is still a significant city.

Thessalonica was an important center for business, and it was only rivaled by Corinth!

Also, it was located on several important trade routes and had an excellent harbor, again, making it good for trade, for business!

Also, the text seems to imply they made this 100-mile or so journey in just 3 days, which means they were moving, some suggesting that they traveled on horses, but we don't know that for sure. They could have just been walking fast and for several hours.

VERSES 2-4

Make no mistake about it, Paul's heart was for the Jews and thus he went to them first and then to the Gentiles.

It broke Paul's heart that his fellow Jews were rejecting the Messiah and they were going to die in their sins!

Thus, to the Jews he preached Christ crucified, to the Gentiles he preached Christ crucified, he gave them the Gospel!

In Romans 1:16 Paul said, "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.**"

Here in Acts 17:2 it says that Paul, "**reasoned with them from the Scriptures . . .**" and the word "**reasoned**" is from the Greek word DIALEGOMAI from which we get our English word "dialogue" from. Notice, it was not from a book, a teacher, but from the **SCRIPTURES!**

As Paul spoke of the Suffering Servant and the Reigning King from the Scriptures, he showed them that this is Jesus who came the first time to save us from our sins and He is coming again to set-up His kingdom and to rule and reign on this earth for 1,000 years!

Keep in mind that Paul only spent three Sabbaths with them in Thessalonica and yet he taught them the death and resurrection of Jesus as well as the Rapture of the church and the Tribulation Period, the Antichrist! Not new believer's information and yet, Paul felt it was important that they knew the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth!

Paul had the right message and he taught them from the Old Testament these things that we take for granted in the New Testament. But keep in mind that the New Testament was not yet put together, it was still being written!

Now some of you may be thinking, "I could never do what Paul did!"

The reality is you can if you put the time in and study the Word of God, as well as being empowered by the Holy Spirit!

Peter tells us in I Peter 3:15 "**But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.**"

Now, was there fruit from Paul sharing the Gospel here in Thessalonica?

Some were persuaded, many devout Greeks, many leading women came to saving faith!

But not all were persuaded by what Paul had to say, why?

Because everyone has a choice to make, to be open to what the Holy Spirit is saying, or you can harden your heart to what He is saying.

Those that were open received Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives and those who rejected these things remained lost in their sins.

We will see as we read on that Paul travels to Corinth, and he wrote back to this church in Thessalonica. And I want you to listen to what took place as these new believers were growing and the impact of the Lord upon their lives.

In I Thessalonians 1:1-2:5 we are told, “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness - God is witness.”

What we see here is the transforming power of God in the lives of these Gentiles and it is very obvious and that is true for anyone who comes to Jesus! At least it should be!

God is moving, things are happening, people are getting saved. And what do you think is going to happen next? **PERSECUTION!** Their enemy does not like when God is moving, and he will try to stop it and we will see that as we read on!

VERSES 5-9

We see that God is moving and when God is moving the enemy wants to put a stop to what God is doing, and that is what we are seeing here.

Those Jews who rejected what Paul said, rejected Jesus, caused an uproar in this city. Because of this a group of them went to the house of Jason, where Paul, Silas and Timothy were probably staying, to arrest them or cause them trouble, but they were not there. Thus, they dragged Jason, a Jewish believer, out of the house. Now what is the charge?

Listen carefully, **“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus.”**

That is an awesome statement, but it is not exactly correct. The reason I say that is look at the world today. The world is truly upside down, sin has distorted what God has created, sin has turned things upside down and now Jesus, through His disciples are turning this world right side up!

Isn't that interesting. God wants to restore, and the Devil wants to destroy. Now, if that is true, and it is, then why do people fight against this so strongly?

Because the light of God exposes their darkness and instead of turning to Jesus, they try to put out the light. They love the darkness so much that they will try to extinguish the light!

And that is what they are doing here as they come to the home of Jason. And since Paul and the rest are not there, they are threatening Jason because he was harboring these criminals who were saying that there is another King, *JESUS!*

Please understand that the charge against them was serious enough that it “**troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things**” because this raised the fear that their city might become known for opposition against Caesar and Rome. You did not want to cross Rome because they would come down hard upon you!

And, make no mistake about it, in their minds Caesar was King, and they had come to believe that Caesar was a god!

Now the Jews knew it was blasphemy to worship any other god, but they hated Jesus so much they were willing to say that Caesar is King!

I do realize that this may be hard for some to accept, but again listen to the words of some of the Jews, the religious leaders as Jesus was on trial, “**From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, ‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’ . . . Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’ But they cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’**”

John 19:12, 14-15.

Now let me ask you this question. Wherever the Gospel has been presented, wherever people came to saving faith in Jesus, did it destroy the city, the nation or did it bless it? It was a blessing because it elevated the people to living in a way that would be good for them and not destroy them.

When you take Jesus out of a city, out of a nation there is death and destruction. And if you doubt that, look at our own nation and how quickly we have fallen from grace as we have turned our backs, as a nation, on Jesus! Now we are reaping what we have sown and the immorality, the violence, the wickedness is growing faster than I ever thought could happen!

And in verse 9, when they couldn't find the people they were looking for, we are told, **“So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.”** Acts 17:9.

What that means is that Jason and some of the other believers had to leave what we might call a security deposit. In other words, if these men came back to stay with Jason, he would lose this money!

Now, as we read on, we are going to see them leave Thessalonica, leave the house of Jason and maybe Paul's words in I Thessalonians 2:17-18 reflect his anguish over this issue. He said, **“But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you - even I, Paul, time and again - but Satan hindered us.”**

Let's read on and see what happens next!

VERSES 10-12

Berea was about 46 miles southwest of Thessalonica on the eastern slopes of a mountain, and as his custom, Paul and his men head to the Synagogue to share Jesus with the Jews and those who were seeking the God of Israel.

The thing I want you to notice is they not only received the words of Paul with an open heart, but they then searched the Scripture to see if what Paul said of the Messiah was true, if Jesus is the fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophets said.

Their conclusion, He was the Messiah. What Paul said was true, the Scriptures confirm it and they believed, they were saved!

Did you notice they did not say of Paul, “He is such a good teacher!” Or, “He is so funny, he makes me laugh!” Or even, “He tells great stories, he made me cry!”

No, it was not about Paul, it was about what he said, and they compared that to the Word of God to see if he was speaking for God or for himself!

We don’t see that much in the church today and because of that, we have all kinds of false doctrine, false teaching flooding into the church and people don’t even recognize it!

But these Bereans searched the Scriptures and that blessed the heart of Paul and it blesses my heart when you do the same!

Yes, we need to be open to what God is saying, but I don’t care who is doing the teaching, you check out the Scriptures and search to see if these things are true. If they are not, then toss them aside.

And don’t say things like, “*Well, there is some good stuff in what this person is saying. I don’t want to throw the baby out with the bathwater!*” Let me just say this, if it is false teaching, false doctrine, there is no baby in the water so toss it out!

Now, once again, what happens when God is moving in an area? The enemy moves in as we see in the next few verses!

VERSES 13-15

This is amazing to me. The Jews in Thessalonica, the disgruntled Jews from Thessalonica, the ones who rejected Paul's message of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, have traveled those 46 miles to Berea to stir the people up and cause them to fight against Paul and the work he was doing.

We see that the same had happened at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45, 50), at Iconium (Acts 14:2, 5-6), at Lystra (Acts 14:19) and at Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10) This was the fifth city Paul was run out of by an angry mob, stirred up by envious Jewish leaders.

Now, in seeing this, the brethren sent Paul away to Athens and upon his arrival, Paul calls for Timothy and Silas to come to Athens to assist in the work.

Timothy and Silas may have stayed in Berea to assist in the work there, to help establish the church there before moving on to Athens with Paul. Paul was not just interested in seeing people saved, he wanted to teach them the things of God so that they could mature in the faith, they would grow and be able to stand strong!

VERSES 16-17

Keep in mind that in its heyday, some seven centuries before Christ, Athens was the place to be.

Bruce said, “Although Athens had long since lost the political eminence which was hers in an earlier day, she continued to represent the highest level of culture attained in classical antiquity.”

And Williams said, “By now the greatest days of Athens were behind it, but it could still be fairly described as the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world and, at the same time, the religious capital of Greece.”

Think about it. Socrates, his brilliant student Plato, and Plato’s student Aristotle, perhaps the greatest and most influential philosopher of all time, taught there. So also did Epicurus, founder of Epicureanism, and Zeno, founder of Stoicism, two dominant philosophies.

So as Paul takes in the sites he is overwhelmed with the darkness of this city, it was full of idols.

Athens was also a religious center, where almost every god in existence was worshiped. The pagan writer Petronius sarcastically quipped that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man. Every public building was dedicated to a god, and statues of gods filled the city.

Now think about this for a minute. The population of Athens was some 10,000 to 20,000 people but there were some 30,000 statues of gods! And as Paul looked at this he was grieved!

Let me put this into perspective for you. As we look at Athens, intellectually, it was great. Religiously it was deep. Architecturally it was beautiful. They had it all and yet they were empty because they didn’t have Jesus, the void in their hearts could not be filled with anyone or anything but Jesus. It was a very dark place to be!

And yet, America is no different! We have it all and yet, we have nothing outside of Christ!

May we, like Paul, view America like Athens, a city full of lost men and women who are doomed for an eternity apart from Christ! May we have a passion for people, to see them saved as Paul did, especially for the communities we live in!

And as Paul felt all this darkness, he couldn't wait for Timothy and Silas to get there. It is great to have brethren who can encourage you in the work. And while he is waiting for them to come, he goes into the Synagogues and market places speaking of Jesus to anyone who will listen!

VERSES 18-21

In these verses we see Paul encounter two groups of people.

First of all, there are the Epicurean philosophers, (followers of Epicurus, 341-270 B. C.). And they felt that the chief purpose in life was pleasure, happiness. They did not deny the existence of God but felt the gods did not interact with man. In one sense, the founder Epicurus was an "existentialist" in that he sought truth by means of personal experience and not through reasoning. The Epicureans were materialists and their goal in life was pleasure. They taught that, at death, the body and soul (both composed of atoms) disintegrate; there is no afterlife.

On the other hand, the Stoics, (followers of Zeno, 320-250 B. C.), were pantheistic in their beliefs. They believed everything was god and god was in everything. Thus, everything came from god, both good and evil, and thus, all should just be accepted. Also, they believed there was no real direction or destiny for man.

Let's put this into perspective. The Epicureans said, "Enjoy life!" and the Stoics said, "Endure life!" but it remained for Paul to explain how they could enter into life through faith in God's risen Son. You see, both these groups of intellectuals were trying to explain life but in doing so they negated the Giver and the Sustainer of life, Jesus Christ!

Upon hearing some of the things Paul was saying, these philosophers mocked Paul and what he was saying; they called him a "**babbler**" or literally a "seed picker."

The idea was of a bird that picked indiscriminately at seed in a barnyard. In other words, Paul just picked up scraps of ideas from here and there and then spoke them forth like he knew what he was talking about!

Others said that he spoke of deities they never heard of before.

Thus, in wanting to hear more from Paul, they brought him to the Areopagus, which was the area on the hill that court was held at one time.

When you read that it sounds great, they want to hear what Paul is saying. But Luke fills us in on what these men were really like as he tells us, "**For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.**" Acts 17:21.

In other words, they were not interested in the Gospel, they were not interested in being forgiven of their sins, they only wanted to hear new ideas, to have their ears tickled, and this was just information for them, they did not necessarily apply these things to their lives!

Man is no different today, they like information, but not application. And the thing is, if it is the wrong information, then the application is meaningless.

Back in the early nineteenth century, Adam Clark described the situation of his day and I believe it applies to us in the twenty-first century. He said, “This is a striking feature of the city of London in the present day. The itch for news, which generally argues a worldly, shallow, or unsettled mind, is wonderfully prevalent: even ministers of the Gospel, negligent of their sacred function, are become in this sense Athenians; so that the book of God is neither read nor studied with half the avidity and spirit as a newspaper. . . It is no wonder if such become political preachers, and their sermons be no better than husks for swine. To such the hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.”

And we see this in the church today. Looking for new things to tickle our ears but if it is new, it is not true and if it is true, then it is not new. May we learn the lesson and not add to the Word of God or take away from the Word of God. But may we be like the Bereans and search the Scriptures to see if what is being taught is truth!

VERSES 22-23

Here, at the Areopagus or Mars Hill, there was an outcropping of rock known as the “Stone of Impudence” where a person would stand to present his philosophy while the city fathers sat around listening.

So as Paul stood up to speak he called these men religious, and that was not in a positive sense.

You see, they had many gods they worshiped. In fact, some 600 years before Paul stood on this hill, a terrible plague hit Athens and a man named Epimenides came up with an idea.

He let a flock of sheep loose in the town and wherever they would lie down, they would sacrifice that sheep to the god of the closest temple or shrine.

And, if there was no temple or shrine close by, they would sacrifice that sheep to the unknown god, which Paul picked-up on and is going to use in his sermon to these intellectual men!

Now we read this, and we think how simplistic they were. And yet, how many people today worship at the altar of the “unknown God” or as Jesus put it, “**You worship what you do not know . . .**” John 4:22.

This unknown God that they were worshipping, Paul is going to show them who this is.

VERSES 24-25

Paul shares with them the true and living God that was unknown to them. The One who created the heavens and the earth and is involved in all things but is not in all things. You see, “This view of the world is very different from either the Epicurean emphasis on a chance combination of atoms or the virtual pantheism of the Stoics.” (Stott)

Also, as Paul looked at all the beautiful temples and shrines to these gods, he tells them that the heavens can’t contain God let alone some building. He created all things and all things are sustained by Him!

Paul goes back to creation and that is a good place to start with those who don’t know the Scriptures. Paul does not quote out of the Old Testament, this was foreign to them. Yes, he did that with the Jews and with some Gentiles who were aware of the Jewish teachings, but not with these men.

And yes, the heavens do declare the glory of God! It is as Paul said in Colossians 1:16-17, **“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”**

He not only created all things, but He holds all things together!

Also, in Psalm 24:1 we are told, **“The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.”**

It is His because He created it, He is God.

And the reality is, God doesn’t need us, but we truly need Him!

VERSES 26-28

That statement, **“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth . . .”** must have shocked them.

You see, it was a blow to the national pride of the Greeks, who scornfully referred to non-Greeks as “barbarians.”

And yet, Paul is saying that all men are equal, because all were created by God.

He determined their appointed times; the rise and fall of nations and empires are in His hands (Daniel 2:36ff.; Luke 21:24). God also set the boundaries of their habitation, placing certain nations in specific geographical locations (Deuteronomy 32:8) and determining the extent of their conquests (Isaiah 10:12–15).

Now, here we are in the twenty-first century and we have not learned this lesson. Let me ask you this. How many races are there? I am sure that you have a number in your mind, but the reality is, there is only one race and it is called ***THE HUMAN RACE!***

We divide people up because of the color of their skin or whatever and that is wrong. We all came from Adam through Noah and his children. Thus, put aside all the prejudices you have because we are all related!

And I guess I have to include this as well. No, we are not descendants of apes or monkeys. No, we are not the product of random chance processes.

Like I have said, we are all descendants from Adam, created by God.

Now, since we are all related, I hate to bring you the bad news. We all come from a dysfunctional family, Adam and Eve!

But, we can be transformed back into the image of God through Jesus Christ.

In II Corinthians 5:17 we are told, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”**

Again, Paul said in I Corinthians 15:21-22, **“For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”**

That means that our God is not some distant deity that is not involved in our lives, but He sets boundaries on our life, how long we will live and the things we will do during that time. He is not a distant God, but He is right beside you and all you have to do is ask Him into your life – call upon Jesus to be Lord and Savior and He will!

Now in verse 28 Paul quotes from two different Greek poets, Epimenides the Cretan (from around 600 B. C.) and Aratus (from around 310 B. C.).

Why did Paul do that? Possibly he was trying to build a bridge to these pagan intellectuals, for they would have recognized these words and then Paul tells them that this is a Biblical truth, it speaks of God's control in our lives and we can become the offspring of God if we receive Him into our lives!

VERSE 29

Paul is telling them that their poets were right. We are the "**offspring**" (creation) of God. And because of that you must not reduce Him to gold, silver or stone for He is alive and cannot be represented by those things.

We are told in Psalm 94:8-11, "**Understand, you senseless among the people; And you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge? The Lord knows the thoughts of man, That they are futile.**"

In other words, Paul wants them to understand their foolishness. You see, "The Athenians have acknowledged in their altar inscription that they are ignorant of God, and Paul has been giving evidence of their ignorance. Now he declares such ignorance to be culpable [they are guilty]." (Stott)

And make no mistake about it, we form our gods into the image we want them to be, and that is just foolishness.

In Psalm 115:3-8 we see the Psalmist speak of our God not being like the idols that man has made with his hands. He said, **“But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.”** Psalm 115:3-8.

Why serve idols that are not real, they are not alive, they can’t do anything for themselves? Think about the Philistine god, Dagon. When the Ark of the Covenant was placed beside Dagon, the next morning he was on the ground. He had fallen and he could not get up. And the Philistines picked him back up and the next morning he had not only fallen down but he was broken in pieces!

We worship the living God, not some dead, lifeless idol who can’t move, can’t breathe, can’t do anything! And Paul wanted them to understand that truth!

Let me also say this. When man was formed he was created in the likeness of God, but as Adam sinned, the picture of God in us became distorted.

Now, as Christ comes into your life, we are being transformed once again into His image, that as people see us the nature of Jesus should flow and touch their lives.

Paul put it this way in II Corinthians 3:18, **“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”**

Praise the Lord for His love, the work He is doing in us and through us for His glory!

VERSES 30-31

In his presentation, look at what Paul covered. Paul went from knowing who God is (our Creator), to who we are (His offspring), to our responsibility before Him (to understand Him and worship Him in truth), to our accountability if we dishonor Him (judgment).

And this is where many miss it, but not Paul. Paul concludes his message by telling these Athenians that they need to repent and receive Jesus or else the judgment of God will come upon their lives! He didn't hold back but spoke the truth with boldness!

First of all, they need to repent of their sins and they must receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior, because, as Peter said in Acts 4:12, **“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**

And if you don't, then you will be judged by the Righteous Judge, Jesus. And you will stand before Him in your own righteousness, which are like filthy rags before a holy and righteous God!

It is as Jesus said in John 5:22-24, **“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”**

Now one more point I would like to cover here because some get confused by this. Paul said, **“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.”** Acts 17:30.

Is Paul saying that God ignored their sin, but now, after the death and resurrection of Jesus He is holding them accountable? Obviously not, because if you read the Old Testament all were accountable for their sin. Then what is Paul saying here?

Warren Wiersbe put it like this,

As he brought his message to a close, Paul summarized the clear evidences of God's grace. For centuries, God was patient with man's sin and ignorance (see Acts 14:16; Rom. 3:25). This does not mean that men were not guilty (Rom. 1:19-20), but only that God held back divine wrath. In due time, God sent a Savior, and now He commands all men to repent of their foolish ways. This Savior was killed and then raised from the dead, and one day, He will return to judge the world. The proof that He will judge is that He was raised from the dead.

- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary NT*, p.378

Think of it like this. Yes, in times past God did overlook times of ignorance in the sense that He did not always intervene with special judgment. But make no mistake about it, sin always had consequences against individuals and nations who did not know Him. But now is the time to repent and turn to the Savior, turn to Jesus because the judgment of God is coming, it is at the door!

Now, as Paul is talking he is going to be interrupted as we will see as we read on. And in this interruption, we will see how they responded to this message about Jesus, the Savior of the world!

VERSES 32-34

As Paul lays it all out before them, when he gets to the resurrection of Jesus, he is interrupted. Things were fine but now they were not fine. What happened?

You need to understand that it was not that the Greeks did not believe in the resurrection, they did. But the Greeks believed in the resurrection of the spirit but not the body, which was inherently evil.

Boice picks up on this as he tells us, “All Greeks thought that man was composed of spirit (or mind), which was good, and matter (or body), which was bad. If there was to be a life to come, the one thing they certainly did not want it cluttered up with a body.”

That is why the interrupted Paul, as soon as they heard about the resurrection, they put an end to what he was saying, they did not want to hear about that anymore!

They mocked him, some said they would hear more later, sure.

The sad thing here is they had all the right information before them, but as they shut Paul down, many of them left just as they came, dead in their trespasses and sins!

But here is the wonderful news, some did believe! Yes, not many, like we saw in Thessalonica or Berea.

And, like I said, the reason they refused is because they rejected the truth that was before them, just as many do today!

Now, in saying that, with these meager results in Athens, was this a failure on Paul's part? Did Paul not preach Christ crucified and His resurrection?

Of course he did and we covered that already.

Make no mistake about it, Paul's message was Biblical. Bruce put it like this, "Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the creator of all and ends with God the judge of all. . . . The speech as it stands admirably summarizes an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans."

The problem was not with Paul. The problem was not with the message. The problem was with the heart of man. They had a choice, and many rejected what Paul said and yet, there were some who believed and Paul poured himself into these new converts to Christ so that they could grow and mature in the Lord.

As I close this evening, let me leave you with this to think about. We are told,

This confronting call for decision was not what these cultured dilettantes [dabblers] were looking for. The famous Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno comments:

This admirable account plainly shows how far Attic [Greek] tolerance goes and where the patience of the intellectual ends. They all listen to you, calmly and smilingly, and at times they encourage you, saying: "That is strange!" or, "He has brains!" or, "That is suggestive!" or, "How fine!" or, "Pity that a thing so beautiful should not be true!" or, "This makes one think!" But as soon as you speak to them of resurrection and life after death, they lose their patience and cut short their remarks and exclaim, "Enough of this! We will talk about this another day!"

Everything is fine as long as we remain theoretical [academic], but when we call for action, men begin to shift their posture and look at their watches. Seeing their accountability to the true God makes many uncomfortable.

And thus, what the church has done many times is not make men feel uncomfortable in their sin but comfortable in their sin, and thus, there is no conviction and no turning to Christ, or, even turning away from Christ. There is nothing that happens, and lives are not transformed.

Remember what Jesus said to Martha in John 11:25-26, “... ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”

Repent, believe and forever receive Jesus into your life!