

Easter

He Has Given Assurance to All

Acts 17:29-34

A very religious city

- With the exception of Rome, no other city in the Empire carried as much cultural influence as Athens, Greece. Athens was an ancient city. It's stunning architecture and vast array of temples made it one of the most impressive cities in the world. We are told that Paul was distressed, even angry, over the proliferation of pagan worship in the city (vs. 16). The Greek historian Xenophone described Athens as, "one great altar, one great sacrifice." A well-known Roman satirist wrote that in Athens it was easier to meet a statue than to meet a man. The goal of the impressive Parthenon was to embrace every god. So committed were the Athenians to their view of many gods, that they even dedicated a temple to "an unknown god." The Apostle Paul knew that their worship of the gods was no mere indiscretion. Nor was their idolatry the natural result of a lack of information (Romans 1:18ff). What was behind the idolatry in Athens was what is behind all idolatry everywhere and in every generation: a stubborn rejection of the truth that God has made clear.



Battle on Mars Hill

- The Apostle Paul was a man of great learning. He had an elite education. He was, by any reasonable standard, a fine writer. While in Athens, the crown jewel of Greece and Greek culture, Paul followed his typical pattern of proclaiming Christ in the synagogue among his fellow Jews. From there he expanded his witness to the Gentiles. It was during this time that certain men of influence invited Paul to make his theological arguments before the gathered philosophers on the Areopagus (Mars Hill).

Supernatural, not superstitious

- The Greeks, like most of the peoples in the Ancient Near East, conceived of a rather chaotic universe overseen by a multiplicity of gods. These gods were variously gifted with different powers, authority, and spheres of influence. Like their human creators, the gods could be kind or cruel, thoughtful or capricious, faithful or duplicitous, honorable or immoral. They were at times jealous of one another to the point of waging war. The gods were also amorous, engaging in sexual relations with each other and/or various human consorts. The religious world of the Ancient Near East, including the sophisticated Greeks, was one of superstition.
- Paul's address to the philosophers in Athens aimed directly at their superstitious view of reality. He confronted them with a vision of the world which was certainly supernatural but not at all superstitious. The universe was created intelligently and orderly. The world did not spill forth from the chaotic fumbblings of the gods. Ours is a world created and upheld by an eternal and self-sufficient God. It is, however, a world which has been frustrated and broken by sin.

The God who is there

- In his address to the Athenian philosophers, the Apostle Paul begins by presenting to them an alternative view of God and the way the universe works. He will get them to the gospel. But he first must confront their pagan understanding of God and the world.

The Creator God

Vs. 24 – "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth."

The Self-Sufficient God

Vv. 24-25 – "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything..."

- Unlike the gods of the pagans, the Lord is uncreated, depending on no one or nothing outside himself. And because God does not need to be served in order to have something supplied for him that he lacks, he needs never to manipulate his human creatures. Rather he is the eternal wellspring of all things that we need.

The Life Giving God

Vs. 25b – "...since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

The Sovereign God

Vs. 26 – "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place..."

- The gods of Athens are quite literally moved about. They are idols of wood and silver. They dwell in stone houses constructed by their human servants. In contrast, the eternal God is not moved but moves his creation according to his own sovereign will.

The Saving God

Vs. 27 – "...that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us..."

- God is not a cruel or aloof task master. He is the God who comes near to his people. He has done so most profoundly in the Lord Jesus who saves all who will repent of their sin and seek him.

The Just God

Vv. 30–31 – "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

"...by raising him from the dead."

- The resurrection of Jesus does not mean merely the survival of his soul or spirit. Neither does the resurrection of Jesus simply refer to the preservation of his memory and teachings among his disciples. When Paul declared to the men of Athens that God had proved himself by "raising [Jesus] from the dead," he was referring to that fundamental truth upon which the Bible and Christianity rests. He meant it in its most literal sense. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not referring to the revival of his ideals or the religious potential of his influences. The resurrection of Jesus means that following his death on the cross and his burial in a borrowed tomb, the physical body of Jesus was reanimated, it came to life again, his heart started beating, blood began to course through his veins, he began to breathe, the neurons in his brain began firing again. Just as the gospel writers state, when Jesus was raised, he got out of his burial shroud and walked out of the tomb. The Lord Jesus was raised up in a newly glorified body free from the corruption of decay.
- The resurrected and glorified body of the Lord Jesus exists and functions today. The authors of the gospels, of Acts, of the Epistles, and Revelation saw the risen Christ. If the camera had been invented in those days, a photograph could have been taken of the risen Lord. Those who saw the Lord in his resurrected state saw a body which still bore the marks of its recent crucifixion. Thomas was invited by Jesus to see the marks of the nails and to put his hand into wound in his side. In the Book of Revelation, John records a vision of the heavenly Christ. He describes the Lord as being in the midst of throne. What all these men saw and heard; what they touched was the body of Jesus Christ.
- Our Lord's incarnation in his glorified body continues. This is a mystery to be sure. Without sacrificing any of his deity, without any of the voluntary limitations of his earthly incarnation, Jesus continues on in a body. But his is the resurrection body; the glorified body, incorruptible and immortal. Jesus, being indivisibly united in the Godhead, nevertheless exists simultaneously in one location *as to his body*. How can we rightly ponder such depths of truth? Jesus is embodied at the right hand of the Father. The risen Christ is the most vibrant physical reality in all the universe. Though eternally united with the invisible God, Jesus is simultaneously the resurrected and embodied Teacher who teaches, the great High Priest who offered himself and intercedes, and the Lord who rules and works all things together for the good of his people. And from that place that he inhabits in the body in the body which was raised, Jesus will one day physically and literally come back into this cosmos; back to this earth to judge the living and the dead.