

Ministry of The Holy Spirit
Athens
Acts 17:16-34

Last time...Paul and Silas, after being gently escorted out of Philippi, kept moving
First to Thessalonica and then to Berea
Both stops were fruitful and filled with trouble, most of which was targeted at Paul
by the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica
Persecution drove the Gospel onward

Silas and Timothy remained behind while Paul was escorted to Athens

This time...Paul is stirred in his spirit by what he sees in Athens and he makes known to the Athenians the True and Living God

We will be in Acts 17

v16 waited...stirred:

While waiting for Silas and Timothy to re-join him in Athens,
Paul went walking around the city.

What he saw deeply affected him

- provoked/exasperated his spirit
- very disturbed at the spiritual condition of these people
- saw the people as the Living God saw them
 - spiritually dead, searching for God in all the wrong places
 - the Greeks deified everything
 - the Greeks worshipped the human body
 - completely given over to idolatry, the worship of false gods, behind which are demons (1 Cor 10:20a)
 - ruled by a pantheon of gods
 - a race of deities, 12 great gods known as “Olympians”
 - glorified men i.e. gods in the image of man
 - in bondage to lies, deception, and death

And he was provoked by the love of God – action

v17 disputed:

Not sitting idly by and watching as all these people blindly marched themselves into hell, Paul daily reasoned with the

1. Jews in the synagogue, who worshipped the Living God but according to zeal and not knowledge of God's greatest revelation of Himself to mankind: Jesus Christ
2. Greeks who worshipped the Living God, the God of AI&J
3. folks in the marketplace buying their daily food and food to offer to their idols, whoever met him i.e. "chanced to come near" him

v18 certain philosophers:

Philosophers, "wise" men of the world, also heard and spoke with Paul
Greeks were great thinkers of abstract thought...philosophy
Greek language was robust enough to communicate those thoughts

Epicureans

- everything happened by chance
- there is nothing for man after death
- the gods are distant and uncaring about man
- man's chief aim was pleasure (hedonism)

Stoics

- everything was "god" (pantheism)
- nothing happened by chance, all things happen by "fate", the lifeless universal principle or agency by which the order of things is prescribed, over which man has no control (fatalism)
- indifferent to pleasure or pain because what happens cannot be changed

In the end, both philosophies lead to hopelessness, a deadness deep in the soul of man

Philosophers from these contradictory worldviews heard Paul's wisdom/
"philosophy"/worldview, at the very center of which was Jesus

- 1 Cor 2:1-5
- Resurrection

Hearing his "bizarre" philosophy, the philosophers thought Paul to be a

- babbler...speaking non-sense
- proclaimer of strange/alien/foreign gods/demonic beings

To unbelievers, we who proclaim the wisdom of God are babblers speaking
nonsense

1 Cor 1:17-25a

To idolators, the OTL God is strange/foreign

To spiritually undiscerned man, the thoughts of God are “strange”

Is 55:8-9 For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Notice: Paul did not speak against or refute the wisdom/philosophies/worldviews of the Greeks, he spoke of the true wisdom/worldview

He did not dabble in the lies and darkness, he proclaimed the Truth and Light

He was not in “attack mode”, he was in “Shine-your-light” mode

v19-21 new doctrine...strange things...some new thing:

The Greek philosophers were intrigued by Paul’s strange new doctrine/wisdom/worldview, one so radically different than theirs

So they took him to the Areopagus aka Mars Hill, the Acropolis of Athens where the Parthenon stood

The Parthenon was/is to Athens as the Temple was in Jerusalem and as the Dome of the Rock is now

The philosophers have an intellectual curiosity but not a spiritual thirst, as did the citizens of Athens who sat around in their leisure hearing and discussing any and every fresh new wind of doctrine to exercise the vanity of their minds

The Greeks were in search of knowledge, not

- faith...Heb 11:1
- spiritual understanding to live pleasing lives...Col 1:9-10
- the Living God Who is the Source of knowledge and wisdom

Knowledge puffs up (1 Cor 8:1) and the flesh and its lust for pleasure is insatiable

Just as their eyes were never satisfied (Prov 27:20), neither were their ears
In their ignorance of the Living God, they drank but were always thirsty,
they ate but were always hungry (Is 65:11-4)...
spiritually unsatisfied

Nonetheless, presented to Paul is an open door to share the Gospel,
for some may be saved

v22-23 too superstitious:

On top of the Acropolis of Athens, surrounded by philosophers, Paul walks thru the door opened by the Lord

He tells his audience that they are too superstitious...
hyper-religious, but misguided...i.e. not Godly

As he was walking around town, he saw Temples and altars and objects of worship everywhere!

Including an altar dedicated to the “Unknown God”

Since the Greek gods were a super-race of humans holding all power in the universe, the Greeks were very careful to not overlook any god

This altar was a “catch-all” to appease all otherwise angry gods for being overlooked

The Greeks, so keen on knowledge and learning, worshipped a god they knew nothing about; they were ignorant, without knowledge

This altar was the springboard for Paul, a “natural” starting point to make the OTL God known to the Athenians

v24-25 God that made...Lord:

Notice that Paul starts his witness where his audience is, not where he is
They “know” nothing so he starts at Ground Zero

The Unknown God is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Source of all life
He is not man-made, He made man

He is the Supreme Authority in heaven and on earth, the Supreme Authority over all that which they worship (deified everything)

He does not, cannot, live in buildings made by man (1 Kings 8:23, 27)
He is not worshipped by things made by man – graven images/idols of things He created

He does not need anything from man, He is Self-Sufficient
Ps 50:9-12

He does not need man, man needs Him and is utterly dependent upon Him for

- life...John 1:4, Ps 42:1-2a
- breath...Dan 5:23
- all things...Ps 24:1, Matt 5:45

v26-27 made of one blood all nations...determined the times...bounds:

The Creator God made man

He created man in His image

(vs the demonic “wisdom” of man fabricating gods in their image)

There is one race on earth – the human race, Adam’s race

All people and nations can be traced back to Noah (the Table of Nations in (Gen 10) and to Adam and Eve (Gen 5)

The Creator God made the earth to be man’s home and He in advance

determined/marked the times and places all the nations would live

Note: the scattering in Gen 11:7-9 had order to it by the God of order

And He has done all He has done for one reason: that man would know Him

- seek...look for, worship
- feel after...search for
- find...He wants to be found!

Deut 4:29 if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God,
thou shalt find *him*, if thou seek him with all thy
heart and with all thy soul

Is 55:6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye
upon him while he is near

He is not unknow-able, He is known and can be known and will be known

77x in Scripture: “shall know that I am the LORD”

He, the God of all mankind, is a relational God desiring a relationship with all His
creatures

2 willing volunteers with the other’s best interest at heart

And He is not distant, He is near!

Something we all need to keep in the forefront of our minds always!

Today, men who are not in a right relationship with the Living God and not
wanting to know the LORD, believe

- the world’s population is out of control, threatening all life on Earth
Answer: abortion
- global warming (worship of Mother Earth) is endangering mankind’s
life on Earth
- mankind needs to colonize the moon or Mars in order to survive

Not going to happen, Earth is our God-created home!

v28 live...move...have our being:

Gal 2:20a I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me

Only in the Living God do we

- live...life is in Christ, apart from Him is death
- move...
 - Prov 16:9 A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps
 - Jer 10:23 O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps (we are lost, do not know the Way home)
 - Ps 37:23 The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way
- have our being...exist
 - Col 1:16-17 For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth....and by Him all things consist.
- are His offspring
 - created in His image
 - estranged by sin (Is 59:1-2) but reconciled and adopted into His family by faith in Jesus
 - John 1:12-13

Everything we really want can be found only in Him via a right relationship with Him

Only in the Living God is there satisfaction for our soul

v29 we ought not to think:

Therefore, man ought not to have such a low, self-centered view of God

- a race of deities that are glorified humans
- worship by making inanimate likenesses of His creatures

Since we are God's children (created in His image) and since we are not made of lifeless gold or silver or stone,
God cannot be made of lifeless gold or silver or stone.

To think and do otherwise is utter foolishness

v30-31 this ignorance God winked at:

Such low view of Him and such offensive worship of Him has been mercifully overlooked by the Living and Almighty Creator God
But ignorance is no excuse and not tolerated

There is no excuse for such foolish and ignorant thinking like that of the Greek philosophers

There is no excuse for not knowing the Living God

Rom 1:18-23

Now that God has given to mankind the greatest revelation of Himself...
Jesus Christ...

He now commands, and rightly so, that all of Adam's race repent from such folly/ignorance...to "think differently", to believe the Truth

Because God has appointed a day...known only to Him
when He will judge the world...hold accountable for the revelation of Himself
given to every person and will punish unbelief
in righteousness...believing, faith (Gen 15:6)
by that man...Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man
whom He has ordained...appointed, given all judgment to
He has given assurance unto all men...how we can be sure/certain of the One
to Whom He has given all judgment: is the One He raised from the dead

- to pay for the sins of the world
- to reconcile estranged man unto Himself (2 Cor 5:17-21)
- to set man free from the bondage of lies, deception, and death (1 Cor 15:26)

God's wisdom, "philosophy/worldview":

- Man does not make gods in his image,
man is made in the image of God
- God does not need man,
man needs God
- Man has offended Me but I sent My Son to reconcile man to Me;
trust My Son!

(mic drop)

Note: Before the Judge comes to Earth, there will be apostasy, a great falling away from the faith of those who carry His name...
followed by a strong delusion (2 Thes 2:1-12)

Ex: Female Baptist pastor this week thanked Joe Biden for funding Planned Parenthood because "abortion is a sacred decision."

That "wisdom"/foolishness stirred my spirit!!!

v32-34 some mocked...hear thee again...believed:
And with Paul's mic drop, the meeting was over!

The reactions of the philosophers to the Gospel

1. mocked God...Soil #1
2. procrastination...unwilling to make a decision to surrender
3. believed God's testimony...Soil #4
clave/glued themselves to Paul

2 Cor 4:6 God, who commanded the light to shine out of
darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light
of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of
Jesus Christ

Same message, 3 different responses

1 Cor 1:26-31

1 Cor 2:12-14

btw...there is no mention in Scripture of a fellowship of believers in Athens

Application/Lessons

1. Idols

Is Western man is "too sophisticated" to have idols of gold and silver and stone?

- Houses
- Cars and trucks and "toys"
- Retirement accounts/portfolios

Anything that is a passion that gets you moving in the morning and keeps you going throughout the day is an idol, if it is not the Lord Jesus Christ

In our materialistic culture...

- Col 3:5 covetousness is idolatry
1 Cor 10:14 flee from idolatry
1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

2. Wisdom

Prov 1:7 The fear of the LORD (Word of God) *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction

Heb 11:6 without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him

The Source of Wisdom is the Creator God...unto eternal life
“Wisdom” sourced in Man is foolishness...unto eternal death

Only by the wisdom of God, a revelation received by faith, can we discern

- right from wrong
- truth from lies and deception
- Light from darkness
- Life from death

The wisdom of the world says we who hold to the wisdom of God are babblers and fools;
be not discouraged

The inhabitants of the world stand on quicksand, citizens of the kingdom of God stand on the Rock that cannot be moved

3. Know Whom you have believed and trusted to keep you in the day of judgment (2 Tim 1:12)

Jer 9:24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD.

Ps 107:9 he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness

Col 1:12-17 delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the
kingdom of Jesus Christ
redeemed thru His blood
forgiven of our sins
created by and for Him

Col 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ

Greek philosophies remain to this day
Many other philosophies also

Decartes: I feel, therefore I am; I think, therefore I am

A philosophical “proof” of man’s existence, based on the ability to feel and think, apart from the existence of the Creator God

Evolution (not a science)
Racism...the superiority of races
Man is not a highly evolved animal, he is a fallen image of God
Man is not evolving into higher plains of existence, he is sinking
deeper into foolishness
The “missing link” is Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man!

Eph 4:11-15

Only the Living God can satisfy our soul!

4. Is our spirit stirred by what we see around us?

Are we disputing/reasoning with those who do not know the Living God?
If so, are we starting the conversation with where they are vs where we are?

Always keep your eyes and ears open to what is going on around you and to who is
around you

When the people around us are weary of the lies, deception, hypocrisy, and
hopelessness...

1 Peter 3:15 sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give*
an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is
in you with meekness and fear

Friday morning at the softball field,
3 separate and “ground-breaking” conversations about the Lord,
2 of which boiled down to hopelessness

One in particular:

I need to talk to you.
I am barely hanging on because of what is happening in this nation.
I need your help...

Let your light shine

When God opens hearts around you, let your Godly wisdom, “philosophy”, and
worldview be known

(1 Cor 2:2 and Acts 17:18)

Be ready to minister to hurting and hungry people

Esther 4:14b who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as
this?