

Acts- Church Afire! “Apologetics,” Acts 17:22-34
Sermon Summary & 5-Day Devotional May 3rd, 2026 By Elder Bill Seiden

Sermon Summary

The sermon discusses Paul's second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 17. Elder Bill Seiden explains how Paul, after parting ways with Barnabas, traveled through Asia Minor and into Macedonia. Responding to a call through a vision, Paul entered Europe, arriving at Philippi, where Lydia's conversion marked a pivotal moment. His journey was fraught with obstacles like imprisonment, yet he pursued his mission with zeal. Intense opposition only deepened his resolve to spread the Gospel. Paul's experiences, including miraculous events and harsh beatings, mirrored the sufferings of Christ and set the groundwork for his methods of ministry in areas like Thessalonica, where some accepted the Gospel, while others resisted.

Paul's journey continued to Athens, where his heart was stirred by the widespread idol worship. Known for his skill in apologetics, Paul addressed the Areopagus, confronting the Athenians' ignorance by pointing to an altar inscribed to an 'unknown god.' He used this as a platform to proclaim the Gospel to the intellectual elite. By contrasting their idols with the Creator God, who transcends human confines and desires a relationship with all people, Paul invited the Athenians to understand divine truth. His message was a call to repentance, emphasizing that God is judge and has confirmed this through the resurrection of Jesus.

Several responses emerged from Paul's sermon; while some sneered, others were intrigued and open to further dialogue. A few became believers, notably Dionysius and a woman named Damaris. The sermon underscores the importance of meeting people where they are, addressing their spiritual hunger without judgment, and leading them to the truth of the Gospel. Elder Seiden encourages listeners to engage in this ministry of reconciliation, suggesting that like Paul, believers are called to know the world and reach people in their contexts, inviting them into the transformative relationship God offers.

Key Takeaways

1. Paul's Use of Apologetics

Paul utilized apologetics, a reasoned defense of faith, to engage the Athenians' religious and intellectual context. By recognizing their spirituality and guiding them from the known to the unknown, he effectively communicated the Gospel. This strategy highlights the need for contextual sensitivity when presenting faith today, encouraging believers to understand and articulate their beliefs thoughtfully to address doubts and objections.

2. Bridge Through the 'Unknown God'

Paul's discovery of an altar to an 'unknown god' became a pivot for introducing the Athenians to the true Creator. By connecting the unknown in their worship to the God he proclaimed, he bridged cultural gaps. This approach teaches that effective evangelism may begin with acknowledging and respecting the existing beliefs of others, while gently guiding them towards a fuller understanding of truth.

3. God's Proximity to Us

The sermon emphasized the notion of God's proximity—He is not confined to temples or idols but seeks relationships with everyone. This knowledge of God's closeness can change how we live, offering a profound sense of comfort and accountability. It challenges believers to live in awareness of God's presence and to invite others into this intimate relationship.

4. Persist Despite Mixed Responses

Paul's experience in Athens illustrates varied responses to the Gospel—ridicule, curiosity, and belief. This variety underscores the importance of persistence in witnessing, as genuine engagement may lead to transformation, even from skeptics. Believers are encouraged to stay the course, understanding that their role is to plant seeds and trust God for growth.

5. Be Jesus' Hands and Feet

Elder Seiden encourages believers to follow Paul's example by engaging with others, loving them despite differences, and demonstrating faith through action. This call to be Jesus' hands and feet challenges individuals to actively participate in helping others and sharing the Gospel. It involves recognizing the spiritual and physical needs around us and responding with compassion and openness.

5-Day Devotional

Day 1 — Engage with cultural contexts to introduce faith.

Supporting Scripture: Acts 17:22-23

In Acts 17:22-23, Paul begins his sermon by acknowledging the religious nature of the Athenians. He sees an opportunity to introduce them to the God they unknowingly seek. Paul doesn't dismiss their beliefs outright but uses them as a starting point for the Gospel. This approach is essential in today's world, where diverse beliefs and values exist. Paul's method encourages us to respect others' spiritual journeys while gently guiding them toward the truth of Jesus Christ. It's a reminder that effective evangelism involves understanding and engaging with the culture around us. By building bridges and finding common ground, we can create meaningful conversations that open doors for the Gospel message.

Reflection Question: How can you relate Paul's approach to today's culture?

Day 2 — God is not confined by physical structures or human efforts.

Supporting Scripture: Acts 17:24-25

The Apostle Paul emphasizes that God transcends human-made temples and needs nothing from us, as He is the source of life and sustenance. In our lives today, we may sometimes unconsciously confine God to specific places or times, thinking of Him only within the walls of a church or during spiritual activities. However, Paul reminds us that God is omnipresent and desires to be part of every aspect of our lives. He wants to engage with us in our daily activities, offering guidance and strength. By breaking free from this limited perception, we allow God's presence to influence our thoughts, actions, and decisions continually, experiencing fullness in our relationship with Him.

Reflection Question: In what ways do you try to confine God in your life?

Day 3 — God created us for relationship and seeks us out.

Supporting Scripture: Acts 17:26-27

In Acts 17:26-27, Paul speaks of a God who desires for all humanity to seek and find Him. He outlines that our very existence is marked by God-appointed times and places intended for relationship with Him. This profound truth reassures us that no matter where we are in life, God longs for a connection with us. He is never far from those who seek Him—an ever-present help and comfort. This understanding should inspire us to seek Him actively, through prayer, worship, and studying His Word, cultivating a deeper relationship that aligns our hearts with His purpose. It's an invitation to reach out beyond our immediate circumstances to discover the life God intends for us.

Reflection Question: How can you seek God in your daily life?

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Day 4 — We are God's offspring, reflecting His likeness and creativity.

Supporting Scripture: Acts 17:28-29

Paul expresses a profound truth by stating, 'For in Him we live and move and have our being.' Recognizing ourselves as God's offspring transforms our perceptions of identity and purpose. It means we share in a divine creativity and calling, reflecting God's attributes in our daily lives. Just as a child mirrors the traits of a parent, we are to mirror the love, holiness, and creativity of our Creator. Embracing this identity calls us to live with intentionality, embodying godliness in our interactions, choices, and ambitions. By viewing ourselves through this lens, we gain confidence in our unique contributions to the world, knowing they stem from a vital relationship with God.

Reflection Question: What does being God's offspring mean for your identity?

Day 5 — God calls all people to repentance, assured by Jesus' resurrection.

Supporting Scripture: Acts 17:30-31

Paul firmly declares that God calls all people to repentance as a response to the truth of the Gospel and prepares each individual for a coming judgment established through Jesus Christ. This call to repentance isn't merely about turning away from sin but involves a turning towards God—embracing a relationship and renewal through Jesus. With the assurance of Jesus' resurrection, believers are given hope in eternal life, which inspires a transformation of thinking and acting. It encourages us to align our lives with God's will and purpose. Knowing that the resurrection is proof of God's plans fills us with assurance and conviction to live authentically as followers of Christ, eager to share this hope with others.

Reflection Question: How does the promise of resurrection influence your understanding of repentance?