

3. Response to the Truth

Acts 17:30-32, 34 NLT - 30 "God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. 31 For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead." 32 When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, "We want to hear more about this later.... 34 but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

1 Corinthians 1:23 NLT - 23 So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

Paul presents a clear explanation of what God requires of us. We must repent and turn to Him before our day of judgment. Not everyone was accepting of this command. What were the types of responses Paul received? We fulfil this command when we first come to faith. But it can be an important part of our ongoing faith journey.

Pause for a moment of silent reflection. Ask God to reveal any areas you need to repent and turn from in order to draw near and know Him more.

WRAP-UP

Paul found the men of Athens were very religious. Some worshiped nothing and some worshiped everything, but they didn't know the one true God. Paul revealed Him as the creator of everything and Lord over all who calls everyone to repentance and will be found by all who seek Him.

MEMORY VERSE

"His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him--though he is not far from any one of us.

- Acts 17:27 NLT

Challenge – Consider expanding the methods you practice that help you to know God. Do you need to add more time studying the truth of scripture or experiencing the presence of God in a person way-like prayer or worship.

The Unknown God

Celebration Sunday

INTRODUCTION

During our Sermon Series “Beautiful Disruption” we concluded with Paul being a disruption from his prison cell. This weekend we celebrated with baptisms, child dedications, new memberships and honoring our graduates. The series may have ended, but in the Book of Acts we find Paul continuing his mission to spread the Gospel to all nations. In Chapter 17 he arrives in Athens. Although Paul began by preaching Jesus in the synagogues as was his custom, he also encountered the men of Athens in the marketplace and was invited to speak on Mars Hill, where Athenians spent their time discussing the latest ideas in philosophy and religion. There were many philosophies and faiths represented in Athens, but what was unique to Paul’s Gospel was that he preached only one true God. When he presented the truth of Jesus and the resurrection, Paul created yet another beautiful disruption.

Ice Breaker

Do you have any collections like comic books, coins, baseball cards, bobble-heads, antiques.... How many of those items do you own?

Key Passage

Acts 17:22-23 NLT - 22 So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, 23 for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: 'To an Unknown God.' This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Idols Everywhere

Acts 17:16 NLT - 16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city.

In Paul's time, Athens was a bustling metropolis filled with diverse cultures, ethnicities, and religions. And the Athenians had a multitude of temples and places of worship where they gave their allegiance to their own portfolio of various gods. Some estimate there were up to 30,000 shrines in Athens.

Acts 17:17-18 NLT - 17 He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there. 18 He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, "What's this babbling trying to say with these strange ideas he's picked up?" Others said, "He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods."

In addition to bringing the news of their Messiah to the Jews, Paul took the Good News to everyone in the public square. He interacted with two specific groups. Epicureans were atheists who believed in no god, no afterlife and that everything happened by chance. They lived for the moment without regard for the future. Stoics were the opposite. They were pantheists who believed god was in everything and everything was a part of god. They believed that fate dictated their future and resigned themselves to living out whatever their fate dictated.

We still encounter these two viewpoints today; atheists who say we are foolish to believe there is a God, and pantheists who think there are many gods and many ways to get to god and they encourage us to believe in whatever we choose. Before you became a Christian, did you hold one of these viewpoints? If so, what changed your mind. If not, how do you approach these two philosophies differently in presenting the Gospel?

2. How Do We Know God?

Acts 17:19-21 NLT - 19 Then they took him to the high council of the city. "Come and tell us about this new teaching," they said. 20 "You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it's all about."

There are primarily two ways we come to know something or someone. The first way is by gathering information (written or spoken) and using it to form our understanding of the person or thing. The Athenians spent a great deal of time in this pursuit. At Mar's Hill (also called Areopagus) respected local men gathered who were charged with investigating spiritual or philosophical ideas. This council was primarily interested in defending a Greek concept of "the gods." They wanted "to know" what Paul's teaching was all about.

The second way we know something, or someone, is through personal experience. We might read a detailed biography, but we won't "know" that person in the same way as we would if we were married to them.

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Among the many gods being worshiped in Athens was a shrine to an unknown god. Even though they had no information nor experience with this god, they were willing to worship it in hopes that it would bring them good fortune. Do you think there are people in our churches today who worship but have no information or experience with the God they worship? Why do you think men would worship a God they didn't know?

Paul was there to make the one true God known.

Acts 17:24-25, 27 NLT - 24 "He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, 25 and human hands can't serve his needs--for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. ... 27 "His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him--though he is not far from any one of us."

As Paul spoke these words he stood at the foot of the Acropolis, atop which were numerous temples and statues dedicated to the gods, including the Parthenon. How did Paul's first declaration about God (v.24) challenge everything the culture of Athens was founded upon?

Paul's statement in v. 27 tells us three important points we should know. Who does Paul say was included in God's purpose? How were they to seek Him? Where is God in relationship to us?

God is being made known by Paul in two ways- first by sharing the information about His nature and power and purpose, and secondly by encouraging them to experience Him by feeling their way to Him and finding Him nearby! Both are important parts of our relationship with God. How do you include each in your regular practice? What are your sources and methods of gathering information about God (bible study, devotionals, podcasts...) and in what ways do you personally experience God (e.g. through interaction with other believers, dreams and visions, prayer and worship times, revelation of his presence in nature or circumstances...)? Which is your most common way to connect with God?