

"The Second Missionary Journey"

Part 12

Acts 15:41-18:22

Introduction: Last week when we stopped our study of Acts, we left Paul in Athens surveying their spiritual condition.

Notice Acts 17:15-16

As Paul waited for Timothy and Silas, he surveyed the city and quickly discovered the abundance of idolatry. This discovery then stirred his heart meaning that it burdened his heart for the people. Keep in mind Paul knew the Old Testament and he knew all about idolatry. He knew it sent the northern tribes into the Assyrian captivity and it sent the two southern tribes into the Babylonian captivity. The idolatry in Athens helps us to also understand just how dark this city was because of how demons attach themselves to idols. The city of Athens is and was quite a site to behold. Ancient Athens was spectacular with all its architecture and the city's layout. But Paul is not caught up in its beauty and Luke never mentions its beauty. Paul looks at the city with a Biblical world view. The temples and the building were outstanding but Paul also knew that there would come a day when it would all be destroyed.

Application:

There is nothing wrong with God's people enjoying the beauty of what is around us but let us not neglect to view the world through the lens of the Bible. Let us keep in mind that this world and all that is in it will one day pass away.

2 Peter 3:10-13

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

¹¹ Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

¹² Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

¹³ Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

➤ Paul's Ministry at Athens

Notice Acts 17:17

While Paul waited, he was not idle. He went on to "dispute" which means to discuss the Scriptures at the synagogue and in the marketplace. Paul went wherever he had to to get an audience. Paul was learned enough to know that these people would be interested in what he had to say as we shall see. In the next verse we see who Paul discussed the Scriptures with and we get some valuable insight into what life in the city of Athen was like.

Notice Acts 17:18a

Here we see two groups that Paul encountered. They were both groups of philosophers.

1. Epicureans
2. Stoicks

Notice the words of Ray Stedman on these two groups of philosophers.

"The Epicureans were atheists; they denied God's existence. They denied a life after death. They were also materialists, and felt that this life was the only thing that really existed and that, therefore, men should get the most out of it. They felt that pleasure was the highest virtue, and that pain was the opposite. Their motto (and it still persists to this day) was "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." They were what we would call today "existentialists," living for the experience of the moment. This is a widespread philosophy in our day, although it is no longer called Epicureanism.

The Stoicks, followers of the philosopher Zeno, were pantheists. That is, they believed that everything is God, and that he does not exist as a separate entity, but is in the rocks and trees and every material thing. Their attitude toward life was one of ultimate resignation, and they prided themselves on their ability to take whatever came. Their motto, in modern terms, was "Grin and bear it." They urged moderation: "Don't get over-emotional, either about tragedy or happiness." Apathy was regarded as the highest virtue of life. You will recognize there are many people today who feel that the best thing they can do is to take whatever comes and handle it the best they can. These Stoicks were all proud fatalists, and there are many like them today."

I am again reminded of the words of Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 1:9-10

⁹ *The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.*

¹⁰ *Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.*

Just like the Epicureans, there are many today who have believed the lie of Satan that there is no God or no afterlife so they live for the pleasures of this world. Their main goal is to enjoy all they can now and live life to the fullest. There are even many believers who have bought into the practice of living for all they can now. Many are trying to let their children get exposed to and enjoy as much as they can. What they do not take into consideration is that there is a danger when a child tastes the world. That is what happened to Lot when Abram went to Egypt. There is another verse that comes to mind here.

Hebrews 2:14-15

¹⁴ *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;*

¹⁵ *And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

One way to look at verse 15 is to see death as the absence of life. So, there are people who go through life fearful they will miss out on something so they dedicate their lives to living for all the pleasures which they can attain. These people are in bondage to trying to live life to the fullest. You can see this all around us today.

Then there are those who are like the Stoics. They see God in everything. You have heard the terms "mother nature" or "mother earth" and what this often leads to is people worship the creature and not the Creator. Then there are people who believe everything is the will of God and we should just sit back and let it happen. They say, "God will work it all out." Whatever happens happens and it will be fine. This is fatalism. I have known people who argued with me that it is just fine to drink their whiskey or whatever alcoholic beverage they preferred. My response was, "Why would you expose yourself to that which is addictive?" They said God would never allow that to happen and if He did then it is His will. That is what the Bible calls "tempting God."

Matthew 4:6-7

⁶ And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

⁷ Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Notice Acts 17:18b.

Paul was called a "babbler" by these different philosophers. This is an interesting word. It means "seed picker." It would be like a chicken roaming the barnyard and picking up random seeds here and there to get a meal. So, these philosophers were saying to Paul, "You are just like a chicken because you have gone here and there and picked up seeds of information and have put it together and presented it to us." This was no compliment to Paul.

"It is said that the Athenians applied this name spermologos to those who made their living by collecting and selling refuse they found in the market places. In short, "seed pickers" were men of no account and were considered the scum of the earth, low and contemptible.'

Application:

Do not be surprised when people mock you for what you believe and for what you speak when talking of the Savior.

1 Peter 4:11-13

¹¹ If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

¹² Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

¹³ But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

When we live and speak for the Lord, we will eventually face some kind of persecution. In the persecution we can draw encouragement from the Words of Jesus.

Matthew 5:10-12

¹⁰ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Notice Acts 17:18 again.

They had never heard of Jesus and they had never heard of the resurrection. We cannot imagine people who have never heard the Gospel but I can tell you that there are people in our communities who have never heard of Jesus Christ and what He has done for them. There are many who have never heard and there are many who do not want to hear. They are content to live in their own little fantasy worlds in which created their own god in their minds. They are described in Romans 1.

Romans 1:18-24

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

¹⁹ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

²⁰ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

²¹ Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

²² Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

²³ And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

²⁴ Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

The philosophers who Paul was speaking to were all about wisdom. They prided themselves in being seen as wise and because of their desire for wisdom they stumbled over the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹ For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

²⁰ Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

²¹ For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

²² For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

²³ But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

²⁴ But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Conclusion:

Notice Acts 17:19-20

They brought Paul to Areopagus which was Mars Hill. It was and is a large outcropping of stone that is the high point in Athens. It was where philosophy, religion and law were discussed. This would be wonderful opportunity for Paul to share the Gospel with these people. We will look at Paul's message next week. In closing I want to point out something about these philosophers. They were always wanting to hear something new. This was a good thing here because it was the Gospel that Paul will preach. But their desire for wisdom had allowed their minds to be filled with false teaching over the years. I point this out just as a warning. There are many people in our world who are labeled as "wise" but they are lost and their wisdom is of the world. The sad thing is there are believers who like these philosophers are always looking for something new. Let us be content with getting our wisdom from the Bible then we will not be led into a false doctrine.

James 1:5

⁵ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.