

**"The Second Missionary Journey"****Part 13****Acts 15:41-18:22**

**Introduction:** Tonight, we have the privilege of examining Paul sermon that he preached in Athens. Paul went to Athens as he escaped the persecution from the Jews of Thessalonica as they pursued him in Berea. To escape this he fled to Athens, which was a city given to idolatry. As Paul surveyed the city, he found the synagogue and there he conversed with the Jews. He also went into the market and discussed the Scriptures with the philosophers. In Athens he encountered two groups of philosophers. One group was the Epicureans, and the other was the Stoicks.

The Epicureans were atheists who lived for the here and now. Their motto was "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we perish." The Stoicks on the other hand believed God was in everything. They prided themselves on apathy and the ability to just sit back and take whatever came. They were fatalists. They would resist nothing but instead just let everything happen and believed that God was in all that happened. When these philosophers heard Paul speak of the resurrection that took him to Areopagus. This was where philosophy, religion and law were discussed. It was meeting place for the Areopagus Court, the highest court in Greece for civil, criminal, and religious matters. These people had never heard of Jesus and did not believe in the resurrection.

**Notice Acts 17:18-21**

In verse 21 we see that they were always looking to hear something that was new. This came from their desire for wisdom and the pride they had in their wisdom. But the Truth was they had no Godly wisdom. Their wisdom was worldly.

**1 Corinthians 1:21-23**

<sup>21</sup> *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.*

<sup>22</sup> *For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:*

<sup>23</sup> *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;*

**James 3:13-18**

*<sup>13</sup> Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.*

*<sup>14</sup> But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.*

*<sup>15</sup> This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.*

*<sup>16</sup> For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*

*<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

*<sup>18</sup> And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*

➤ **Paul's Sermon on Mars Hill**

**Notice Acts 17:22**

The word "superstitious" here means "religious." These people were certainly not atheists. They had many images representing all the gods they worshipped. Paul was not trying to insult these people he was just making an observation. Notice the words of David Thomas on Paul's opportunity here.

*"The Areopagus has been already described. He [Paul] is now on the heights, behind him is a crowd of citizens who have followed him from the Agora; in that crowd there are philosophers and artists, poets, warriors, and judges. Before him lies Athens in all her beauty, natural and artistic; the Acropolis lies on the east of where he stands, abrupt and vast, covered with the noblest monuments of Grecian art: temples, and theatres, and statues, and sculptured groups, rising up in majestic beauty to the sublime Parthenon, the masterpiece in the glory of ancient architecture. On the other side, hard by the Agora, rises the Pnyx, the place of the assemblies of the people, where stands the famous stone on which the orators addressed the assembled multitudes, and from which Demosthenes had often rolled his thunders. What a position for a poor foreigner—an obscure Jew like Paul—to take! Yet he takes it, and thus begins his sermon."*

God had opened a great door of opportunity for Paul here in Athens. He would not let the opportunity get by but he would use this situation to share the Truth of the Gospel knowing that it could result in a painful outcome. He had no idea how these people would respond. But he had a responsibility and he would be sure to fulfill it.

**1 Corinthians 9:16**

*<sup>16</sup> For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*

**Notice Acts 17:23**

The word "devotions" here refers to their idols or objects of worship which they had throughout the city. There was one that caught Paul's eyes that he would use to introduce the Truth to them. It was an altar that was dedicated to "The Unknown God." There were so many gods which they worshiped in Athens and there were altars for all of them, but they worried that they may have missed one god that they did not know about and this was the altar that was dedicated to that god. They did not want to offend this god so they erected this altar to please him, whoever he was.

As we continue to look at Paul's sermon let us understand how blessed we are with having this sermon recorded to study. Paul is speaking to a group of pagans who had never heard of Jesus Christ. They knew nothing of the Old Testament so in this sermon we will find no references to the Old Testament. How do you introduce the Gospel to people who are basically ignorant of the Scriptures and the fundamental Truths? We will see Paul's method in this sermon. I need to also point out that there are people who say that Paul failed here in Athens. He did not do a very good job and he went on to Corinth lamenting what he did in Athens. The reason people believe this is because there was no church started in Athens. But we know that a lack of converts does not mean that a person's ministry is a failure. If that were the case then we would need to say that Jeremiah was a failure as well as other prophets.

Paul will now declare unto these people the God that they do not know.

**Notice Acts 17:24**

Paul begins his message at creation but he does not stop there. He gives three points to these people in this verse.

1. **God is the Creator of the world.**
2. **God is sovereign over all of His creation.**
3. **God does not dwell in temples made with hands.**

It is very interesting to notice something here. Before Paul was a believer, he persecuted the church and we first met him when Stephen was stoned. He was there that day and he heard the words of Stephen. Did they make an impact upon Paul? Notice the words of Stephen.

**Acts 7:48-50**

<sup>48</sup> Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

<sup>49</sup> *Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?*

<sup>50</sup> *Hath not my hand made all these things?*

Paul heard the words of Stephen and never forgot them. Let us understand that when we share the Truth of the Bible with people they may not agree and it may cause them to be angry, but you never know how it will impact them at a later date.

### **Isaiah 55:8-11**

<sup>8</sup> *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*

<sup>9</sup> *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

<sup>10</sup> *For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:*

<sup>11</sup> *So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

### **Hebrews 4:12**

<sup>12</sup> *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

**Notice Acts 17:24 again.**

The words of Paul here would have cut into the beliefs of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks. The Epicureans believed that matter was eternal and had no beginning. The Stoicks were people who believed that God was in everything and He could not have created Himself. Paul began his sermon with Divine revelation about who God is. It may not fit with the theology of his listeners but it is Truth and it must be declared. Paul did not take one of their talking points and attempt to prove them wrong. He would avoid that kind of discussion because it would accomplish nothing. He would simply state the Truth about

God and allow the Spirit to use it how He desired. Notice the words below by an unknown writer.

*"I would add that if you as a true follower have bought into the **lie of evolution**, then you have bought into the **lie of Satan!** And you need to beware if you teach this lie to your children, lest they develop a "resistance" to the truth of God as the Creator of everything! If you as a believer have "bought" into evolution, I pray you take a moment to read Ken Ham's online book **The Lie: Evolution**. And remember that if your children are attending a public school, you need to be aware that most public schools are **required by law to teach evolution only!** Whoever said Satan plays fair! You need to counter this anti-Biblical, anti-creation bias with lots of time in the book of Genesis with your children."*

**Notice Acts 17:25**

Now Paul explains that God is self-sufficient and He therefore needs nothing from man. God is the Provider; He is not in need.

**Psalms 50:9-12**

<sup>9</sup> *I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds.*

<sup>10</sup> *For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.*

<sup>11</sup> *I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.*

<sup>12</sup> *If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.*

**James 1:17**

<sup>17</sup> **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights,** with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

God does not need anything from man. The world and all the goodness of the world is His.

**Psalms 104:13-15**

<sup>13</sup> *He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.*

<sup>14</sup> *He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth;*

<sup>15</sup> *And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.*

**Notice Acts 17:25 again.**

This verse would have shocked Paul's listeners. They were all involved in works which they believed were pleasing to God. Notice the words of Arnold.

*"God is the giver and does not have any needs Himself. Pagan idolatry taught that men had to please the gods, bring gifts to the gods, make sacrifices to the gods, and serve the gods. However, the true God is the giver of everything, and He in no way needs man, but it is man who desperately needs God."*

**Conclusion:**

As we close this out this evening, we all need to be reminded of something. God does not need us for anything. He does not need me to pastor and he does not need you to pray or teach. This church is not about me it is all about Jesus Christ. He promised to build His church and He said nothing about needing me.

**Matthew 16:16-18**

*<sup>16</sup> And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

*<sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

*<sup>18</sup> And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.***

He can accomplish His will without you and me. On the other hand, in His grace and lovingkindness, God has chosen to allow us to serve with Him. And when we begin to get a clear view of this, we find ourselves amazed with an overwhelming sense of gratitude that He would use us for anything of eternal value! But it gets even better! Not only has He prepared good works for us in Christ Jesus. He even promises to reward us for these good works! That is surely amazing grace! Dear Lord please allow these incredible truths to sink into our mind and heart and deepen our love for You. Then motivated by Your love and Your glory we may go forth in the power of Your Spirit to serve You.

**2 Corinthians 3:5-6**

*<sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;*

*<sup>6</sup> Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*