

The Statue to the Unknown God

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Preacher: Hendro Lim

[0 : 00] Brothers and sisters, in Paul's day, Athens was still the symbol of great philosophers. This is the city where Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle earned their fame.

It's also known for its many statues dedicated to gods and goddesses. Pliny, one of the Roman historians, he reckons that in his day, it's about maybe the second century, he reckons that the statues in Athens, Athens has no less than 73,000 statues.

That's, I think, Edinburgh has to say, okay, you win. In this case, I will not defend you also. You have a lot, but they have 73,000 statues.

No wonder, Brothers and sisters, they have a god or a goddess for everything. They have a goddess for a virgin. They have a goddess for the virgin getting ready to get married.

They have a virgin for a woman married without children, married women with children, married women conceiving a child.

[1 : 15] They have every goddess for everything. So they have at least 33,000 statues. The Parthenon, this picture, the temple of Athena, the city's patron goddess, was built in 447 BC.

And it was still there in the time of Paul. Even today, you can see from the ruins that it was a very wonderful architectural wonder.

It was in this setting that we find Paul in this passage. But, brothers and sisters, Paul was not in a vocation mood. He was not there for visiting Athens for Athens' fringe.

No. Or Athens' hokmanai. No. He was there, and Luke wrote that actually Paul was provoked in his spirit. While Paul was there waiting for his friends at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him.

The Greek word used here is paroxinomai. It literally means that upset at someone or something involving severe emotional concern.

[2 : 26] But why, brothers and sisters, Paul's spirit was so troubled? In this beautiful city with all its prosperity, with all its richness, why he was so troubled?

He noticed that the city was full of idols, brothers and sisters. He noticed that the people living in the beautiful and wonderful city, educated and they were secure in political, economic, they were worshipping idols.

They don't know his living God. They don't glorify the true God. And that provoked Paul's spirit. He was deeply troubled by this fact.

So, brothers and sisters, Paul then get himself into action. If you look at verse 17, the word so at the beginning of the verse, Paul then gets into action.

It means that the fact that Paul was provoked in his spirit, it led him into action. So, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

[3 : 42] What we can conclude from this verse? He reached out, brothers and sisters, every day, day to day. He reached out everywhere, in the synagogue, in the marketplace.

This is, don't imagine it's like in Indonesia maybe. If we think of markets, it's a place like wet, muddy, very smelly.

You have piles of garbage everywhere. Here, maybe you don't have market like this. But don't also imagine it's a place like Asda or maybe Lidl.

No, it's not a place like that. Marketplace maybe is more like, maybe today like George Square maybe, or maybe Princess Street Gardens where people gather together. Or maybe, I don't know, maybe like in front of St. Giles where people gather, chatting each other like that.

It's a place where people gather and talk about everything. And a lot of them are like philosophers also there. So, he engaged with people every day, everywhere, and to everyone.

[4 : 45] To the Jews, to the devout persons or God-fearers, and to those who happened to be there. It means that to the passers-by, to everyone, to total strangers.

He come to them, he spoke to them. Some scholars said that because Paul was in Socrates' city, he used Socrates' methods.

And an ancient description of Socrates has him in the marketplace where it was most crowded. And then Socrates will converse with whomever he met.

So, is Paul here imitating Socrates? Maybe. But if we observe how Jesus was in his ministry, he always also engaged persons in deep conversations.

And then he went on from there. And I think Paul also did this in the whole book of Acts. So, he may be using Socrates' method, but maybe not.

[5 : 53] Maybe it's just his way of engaging everybody he met. Now, brothers and sisters, before we continue, I want to bring us to maybe our context.

How about us? How about us? We also live in great cities. Above, it's Jakarta. Jakarta with its icon, the national monuments.

We don't have that much monument, but we take pride in this one. We have 50 kilograms of solid gold up there. So, we take pride in our one national monument.

But I think in many ways, Edinburgh is a better city. And sometimes we forget that we live in such a wonderful city also.

It is clean. It's safe. It's beautiful. You have national health service. Okay, maybe some of you will say in your heart it's not well funded.

[6 : 52] Okay, I also read that in Metro. But, you know, it's much, much better than in Indonesia. In Indonesia, you will not hear ambulance going to and fro just in minutes arriving.

If an ambulance went by, people will quickly follow behind the ambulance. That's the password in the midst of the traffic jam. And you have to pay for the ambulance service.

If you don't pay, maybe they will not take you. They will say you take a taxi or something like that.

So, actually, you have a much, much better health service in most of the rest of the world.

And you have nice government funded schools. Students don't only learn theories but also practical skills. Even a year here, my daughter learned a lot, I think.

She's very proud of her handcraft made at school. He made a wooden mirror. And she said, you have to bring this home or else I'll be very angry with you.

[7 : 59] It's wood, solid wood and mirror, and it's very fragile and very heavy. I don't know how I'm going to bring it home. But she is very proud of it. And she said, you have to bring this one home.

You have social and youth centers funded by the government. And even as a guest for a year here, Leticia, my daughter, got to publish her comic.

That's wonderful. See, we don't spend a cent, a penny for the comic to be published, brothers and sisters. In Indonesia, even as maybe we faculty members or theologians, if we write something and we want to get it published, you better dig deep into your pocket to get the book published.

But not here. It's wonderful, brothers and sisters. You have University of Edinburgh, ranked fifth in the UK. You have Harriet Watt Napier. It's also worldwide known.

And you have Scottish shortbread. And of course, Haggis, Nip and Tatties. Cannot beat that. Yeah, I really like it, actually. Brothers and sisters, this is the wonderful world cities we are living in.

[9 : 17] And sometimes we forget that we also live among people who do not know God. I know this is a Christian country, if I can say so.

But just like in Jakarta, I think a year here, I met a lot of my fellow students, very wonderful persons. But they don't really trust God or God's word.

There are always people like that, including here in this city. Brothers and sisters, they found their security and confidence in other things. Maybe we don't have 73,000 statues in this city.

But we have hundreds and hundreds of thousands of reasons people do not believe in God and God's word. Brothers and sisters, are our spirit provoked within us?

How do we feel inside? As you walk along the road and you see people, maybe you see events that's not according to the word of God.

[10 : 23] How do you feel? How do you feel?

Nobody can say that everything is true. Everything is true. No, we cannot. How do we feel inside? And do we put ourselves into action? Do we seek the opportunity?

Maybe not every day, every week. Do we seek the opportunity with everyone? With at least maybe the people we meet in our office, in our class maybe, in our lecture classroom?

Do we then engage with nominal Christians? Do we engage with unbelievers? Sow the seed among them. Sometimes we think that what we do is not very important.

It doesn't matter. It doesn't really matter. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But we cannot be more wrong. In fact, everything, if we do that, it does matter. If we return to Paul then, Paul then gets the attention of the philosophers.

[11 : 49] Brothers and sisters, take Paul here. His effort did not go unnoticed. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And although they considered Paul a third-class journalist, they called him a scavenger.

Literally, they called him a scavenger. It means that these are one of the guys who have information. They don't know that he picked it from where. And he tried to talk about it.

He don't really understand what he's speaking about. That's a scavenger. And they then, after listening to this scavenger, they cannot but took him and brought him to the Areopagus.

The Areopagus or the hill of Arras was the ancient seat of the court of the same name. It was responsible seeing laws being observed in civil or religious matter.

Socrates was brought here in his days. And then he was condemned to death at Areopagus. The fact that Paul was taken and brought to Areopagus means that they really wanted to know more.

[13 : 00] And wanted the opinion of those with authority. Some people said that actually not in front of the council, not the people with authority. Only they took it to that place.

What for if the council is not there? And the fact that there's a man like Dionysius in the final verse that we read, he was there. The fact that Dionysius, one of the Areopagus, was there.

It means that perhaps it was a council. Brothers and sisters, they were puzzled by the gospel Paul brought. And this reminds me of a conversation I had with Kyle several days ago.

Kyle Lincoln with his wife Lizzie was here. You know them. Several days ago before he went home to the States, he came over and slept over for two nights.

And we have a wonderful conversation. And among the conversations is about a couple coming and living with them during their time in Edinburgh.

[14 : 07] This couple, not married, and then also kind of a little resistant against Christianity. But then when they come and they know that Kyle is a pastor, they start engaging in conversations.

They start to talk about faith. And Kyle said that they actually become interested. And they are considering. Brothers and sisters, you see that when Paul come out and reach out to them, somehow he got some attention.

And somehow people want to know more. And especially we remember that Paul was not like any of Jesus' other disciples. He was a Pharisee.

He was an expert in the law of God. And he mastered, he knows philosophies. So what he does, what he did was wonderful.

But at this point, maybe we want to say, hold up. Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Paul was a man specially chosen and appointed by God.

[15 : 18] I am just one Christian. I am not like Paul. It's Acts 17, 16 to 34 for everyone.

Maybe it's not for every one of us. I am a high school student. I am a university student. I am a worker. I am not a pastor like Pastor James.

It's not for me. It's for Paul. It's for Fergus MacDonald. It's for one of the ETS faculty members like Bob.

It's for Daniel. It's for John McIntosh. It's for missionaries like Catriona or Neil and Rachel Ray. Not for me.

Brothers and sisters, is this for everyone? I think the answer is an emphatic yes. This is for everyone. Although here, we see that the person who was provoked and who was in action was Paul.

[16 : 21] But I believe this is for everyone. Why? We have to admit that during Paul's time, there were not many educated and influential people among the Christians.

And Paul was only one among very few educated people. And we know that God chose Paul specifically to reach out to the Gentiles.

But today, the situation is different. Brothers and sisters, I think in most parts of the world, Christians are among those most educated, I think.

Church always have school, at least in Indonesia. When the missionaries come to Indonesia, they build schools. They build hospitals. They have cemeteries everywhere.

Everywhere. And as a result, one among the most educated persons in Indonesia are Christians. Among the luckiest, among the wealthiest in Indonesia are Christians.

[17 : 26] And that's one of the reasons why sometimes the rest of the people in Indonesia, they envy the Christians and the wealthiest. Because usually they are the minorities educated in churches, etc.

But today, we know that we are not like Paul's time. It's totally different. We can name a lot of philosophers.

I take from a book, Christian philosophers. We can name Christian scientists with flying colors like that. James Tore, he's quite famous in YouTube also.

And then we have Francis Collins. We have whoever. You mentioned them. And, okay, these guys are all Americans. Sorry for that.

But also, in case you notice, I also put some British names. You have John Lennox. He is a professor of mathematics at Oxford University.

[18 : 25] Simon Morris, a British paleontologist. You have Sir Collins Humphries, a former professor of material science from Cambridge University. These are all Christian scientists, scholars, people of influence among Christians today.

And I believe even some of them are here. I'm not kidding. You are the influential people in Edinburgh today.

You are the influential people in Edinburgh today. We are God's poles for today's better. The young people are living in unique youth culture out there today.

Who will engage them? You young people. Who will speak to young people about sexuality? Not Hollywood. No, not Hollywood.

And not Bollywood too. We will. We will. We will. And who understand the businessmen and professionals struggling out there. Maybe with Brexit.

[19 : 33] We will. We will bring them the good news of Jesus that our business, that our professional life, they don't end with Brexit. We still have more than that.

And we have Jesus with us. Who will struggle together with the atheists or agnostics? We will. We who have struggled with our faith also in this world. We have struggled with our faith.

And we have experienced God's presence and trustworthiness. We will share with the agnostics and the atheists. Who will engage with those struggling with creation and evolution? We will. We will burn the sisters.

However, we also notice that in this part, Paul was doing something very important. He did not engage with them philosophically and then stop there.

He did not stop there. If we look at how he did it after he spoke philosophically, he then moved on to Revelation. The fact that we cannot depend on our lives, our knowledge, and philosophy to win people over to God.

[20 : 37] We cannot. We don't believe that people can come to God without encountering God's word, without encountering God's revelation. Culminated in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

We cannot. So Paul, after he spoke philosophically, he then moved on. He spoke about repentance. He spoke about repentance. He spoke about God's judgment.

There will be a judgment for sin. He spoke about forgiveness in the risen Jesus. You will not find your forgiveness for sin anywhere else, only in Jesus.

Friends, sisters, in Europe today, I think, and even in Indonesia also, people started to speak, not in this term. They tried to play down sin a little.

A softened sin. Yeah. They called sin as some mistake you do. They call sin some kind of choice.

[21 : 36] We all have choice and we make choice differently. Yeah. That's sin. They tried to make it soft. And they also make God a sentimental lover.

A sentimental lover too weak to punish those who transgressed against him. They never speak about God's judgment anymore.

And the true story of Jesus who was crucified, resurrected, and thrown in heaven and will come, will return as the judge. They never speak about it anymore.

Any religion that's just the same, any believer just the same, don't be too fanatic. Some, they will say that. In Indonesia, we often have religious, inter-religious dialogue.

My sisters, we love to do that. But usually, sometimes, then they ask us, Christians, why don't we not talk about Jesus?

[22 : 39] You can talk about God is love. You can talk about God is good. But let's not talk about Jesus. Especially not talk about Jesus that he was crucified, that he was resurrected, and he was ascended.

Let's not talk about Jesus. But, brothers and sisters, of course, we cannot talk about Jesus who was crucified, who was risen, and who ascended into heaven.

We cannot talk about Christianity without Jesus. If we do, we will not be speaking truthfully about who God is, about his redemption, about his love.

Without Jesus and his death and his resurrection and his ascension, we have no true God's love in Christianity.

We cannot do that. And here, Paul cannot hold himself. These people, they don't know God in this term. They don't know God, Jesus himself, come, crucified, win, resurrected, and then ascended into heaven.

[23 : 48] They don't know, and that tore him apart. He was provoked in his spirit, and he just had to tell them that. Brothers and sisters, Paul cannot not take action.

He just has to do it. Now, let's see how the people responded. But before that, I will introduce our president. President Joko Widodo.

Maybe some of you have seen his picture. Not very convincing, actually. He is very skinny. Actually, he is a very skinny man. And he sometimes smiles, quote, unquote, sorry.

Not because I am not respectful. Kind of with silly face, you know. I have another picture you can see later. So, he is not very convincing. And he was a former carpenter, furniture maker like that. But this president, he was elected in 2014. We are going to have another election in 2019. He builds infrastructure everywhere.

[24 : 57] 73 years Indonesia independence. Mostly our development was done in Java.

We have Sumatra. We have Kalimantan. Sulawesi. And we have Papua. We have Maluku. We have other islands.

17,000 in all. And some of them are not even touched at all. Mostly are in Java. Mostly. Half of our citizens, Indonesia citizens, are in Java.

A sack of rice will cost hundreds of thousands. That's about 30 pounds. A sack of rice, 25 kilograms, costs 30 pounds.

Maybe you think it's not a lot. Then compare it with Java. In Java, you will get a sack of rice, 25 kilograms, for about seven pounds.

[26 : 03] Seven pounds for a sack of rice. But here, you will get a sack of rice for 30 pounds. A sack of cement.

You will get it for millions of rupiahs. Yeah. Even more. And brothers and sisters, a few, few.

Six thousand. Six thousand. Six thousand, maybe about 30 pence in Java. You will get it for about three pounds in Papua.

But during his time, he built a lot of infrastructure. He buys ships. And then, now, the price are equal.

In just this short three or four years. He built several thousands of trans-Kalimantan highways. He built highways trans-Sumatra.

[27 : 02] Not fully done yet. And he also built highways in Papua. Never done before in 70 years. Never done before. Brothers and sisters, people love him.

People love him. I also love him. I admire him a lot. Wherever he comes, people will flock and come and try to shake his hand. Yeah.

He's a very humble man. A lovable man. And you see, he can joke easily like that. However, brothers and sisters, not everybody is happy with him.

Some people said that in 2019, we will change our president. Let's vote for another president. Why? I cannot understand that. Why a very nice president?

Why on earth anybody want to change this president? I don't know why. I cannot understand why. Brothers and sisters, but then this, a reality like this, I think also speaks to us a lot about people's rejection toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 08] For us, we cannot understand why Jesus did all that he has done for us. What have we done to deserve this? We don't deserve it. We are so lucky.

We are so blessed to have him. But then, brothers and sisters, when we talk about Jesus, when we speak about Jesus to others, we cannot understand why you have to reject him.

Why you have to reject him. We cannot understand. And I think this kind of thing also happened among the Athenians and the people in Athens. The Bible said, verses 21 to, sorry.

Next slide, please. Yeah. I cannot understand why these people are eager to hear something new when they hear about resurrection, about Jesus.

They mock Paul. Maybe, maybe. Because they want to hear something new, but they are not ready to hear the truth.

[29 : 10] They are not ready to hear the truth. They want to hear something good, something to scratch their itching ears. That's Paul's term. He wrote it to Timothy.

The people just want something to scratch their itching ears. They are not ready to hear the truth. And then, they rejected Christ.

Brothers and sisters, maybe when we go out there, we will also find people who get really interested, and they want to accept Jesus. But maybe sometimes we are so reluctant to go out there because we thought maybe they will be there.

Brothers and sisters, don't worry about that. It has, it has happened in the past. It is happening now all worldwide, and it will happen again.

People will reject Christ, not because Christ is not good enough, but because they are not just ready. They are just not ready for the truth.

[30 : 15] What did Paul do? He did not lose heart. When people rejected Christ, what did he do? He knew that as a Pharisee, he knew that the Lord already said to Ezekiel, If I say to the wicked, you shall surely die, and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity.

But his blood I will require at your hand. As a Pharisee, I think, you know, this verse. And he must also know that Jesus gave his disciples the great commission.

And it was not the great option or the great omission. Brothers and sisters, Josephus lived during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem.

And he wrote that the Athenians severely punished those who initiated people into the mysteries of foreign gods. Forbidden by their law, the penalty against such people, including Paul, actually, was there.

Somehow, Paul got lucky. Or we can say that's God's providence. He was not punished as severely during that time. Paul knew the risk.

[31 : 40] But he also knew that Jesus promised his presence and his protection and with his presence. Victory. Paul was provoked into action. He had to come.

And now he went out from their midst. Is he desperate, maybe? I don't think so. I don't think he went out like so sad. Boo-hoo.

Too bad. So sad. I'm rejected. Not gonna do this ever again. I don't think so. We can see from here he moved on. And he preached on.

He was provoked into action. And he just cannot stop. The mission must go on. But brothers and sisters, maybe at this point, some people said that it's futile.

Is it at best a faint and fruitless effort? We are lucky to live in this era. We know that what Paul did was not in vain. We know that what the missionaries done for thousands of Christian history is not in vain.

[32 : 49] In one of the islands of Indonesia, Sumatra, tens and maybe hundreds of missionaries were butchered and eaten by one of the tribes in Indonesia.

We have about 700 tribes in Indonesia. And one of them, they literally eat everything. We said that everything, walking, with feet, they will eat at least, but not a table.

A table also have legs, but they will not eat table. Besides that, everything with legs, they will eat, including missionaries. They eat a lot of missionaries, brothers and sisters. But then come Ludwig Nommensen.

He came, and then he preached, and then he warned the people over to God. And among these tribes are many Christians in Indonesia today.

Brothers and sisters, the book of Acts shows us that in preaching the gospel, many will reject us. Many will take us for fools. They will mock us. They will humiliate us. And then maybe they will persecute us.

[33 : 58] But despite all of that, God's purpose will prevail. Look at Acts 17 here. But some men joined him and believed.

Among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagus and a woman named Damaris. Damaris must not be in Areopagus because it's forbidden for women. And also others with them.

You see, what Paul did, although he was formally rejected there, it was not in vain. It was not futile. Dionysius, in fact, became a believer.

And if you study early Christian literature, there are writings claiming to be writings of Dionysius. This fact, I think, means that perhaps this Dionysius, we don't close the possibility that there are other Dionysius, of course. But perhaps this Dionysius become an influential person.

[35 : 01] And that's why Luke put down his name. Otherwise, people will be confused. Who is this guy? Who is this guy? He put down his name because this guy is influential. And a lot of people, at least Luke's reader, know this guy.

And also Damaris and others with them. Brothers and sisters, we know that Paul suffered a lot in his ministry. But in Romans chapter 8, 18, he said this.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. He was provoked. He got into action. He got rejected. But he said, this is nothing compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Brothers and sisters, even Lord Jesus himself, he said this to comfort and to give us a guarantee. He said this. In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart.

I have overcome the world. Brothers and sisters, maybe this is my last opportunity also to share the word of God with you here. And I am really, really blessed to have this opportunity.

[36 : 09] Brothers and sisters, whatever we do here, we know that it's not futile. We know that in this world, we will have tribulation. But take heart.

Jesus has overcome this world. And I will have tribulation. . And I am really blessed to be here.

They are very conf body. But we do not live in darkness. Nicht se■? They are not so much in view.

Never will, dear. And we are here very much. Where we are. honor. Welcome back to the short story. I am. And I'm really blessed to have the true■. But I am a cruel position to order a place to think of it that it is to be made from a place.

And I know we will have to be there with the peace and we live here.