

# Reasoning in the Aeropagus

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, thank you, Ruth, for reading. So, Paul finds himself here in Athens. It's a beautiful city.

! It's full of wonderful things. It's a real cultural centre. Wonderful art there, wonderful things.! But there's one thing that Paul notices. I say one thing, actually hundreds, maybe even thousands of things. Here's one, Hera. They're over there. And there's another called Apollo over there. And then he goes around here and he sees all that there's Hermes over there and Dionysus over there. And then he walks over here and he sees Artemis. And then another one, Poseidon. And then Zeus is over here. And Athena. All over the place. There's no blue tack for that one, so that can lay on the floor. He sees them all over. What name might you give to these things?

Yeah, Gracie. Idols. He sees idols everywhere. Turn with the people around you just for 30 seconds or so. And can you see how does Paul feel about all these idols? Have a chat amongst yourselves for 30 seconds, I'll see.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[ 1 : 57 ] Okay. Okay. How's Paul feeling about all the idols? Yeah. Gritty again. Distressed. Distressed.

He's feeling distressed. There's a strong word. He's feeling sort of provoked. This is causing him trouble.

He looks around everywhere and there they are. All these idols of Athens. Yes. Apparently, a translation you could make of this chapter is that the city was flooded with idols, submerged in idols. Like a great, great pig pool of water. It's full, flooded with idols. They're everywhere. Every place you look.

Idols all over. And he feels distressed about this city. I wonder how we feel about our own city.

[ 3 : 04 ] Do we feel like it's flooded with idols? Idols. I don't take a walk and see Zeus and people like images like that around.

But we do, in a sense, see some sort of idols going on. A shop set up with the idol of money going on.

The idol of going to drink coffee, of exercise, of entertainment, of education. Good things. People towing and throwing to them, but perhaps not giving any thought, though, to the Lord God of heaven.

And I wonder how we feel about that. Do we feel like Paul? Do we feel sad and distressed that people are throwing themselves into all these things, but not giving a care for the Lord?

Well, that's how Paul is feeling. And Paul decides to do something about this. We're told this in verse 17.

[ 4 : 10 ] Have a look. He reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace, day by day.

He goes and he discusses with people. He goes to the center of where discussions can happen. It's in the marketplace. And in Athens, there were a lot of clever, brainy people.

They know lots and lots of things. It was a city which was known for producing philosophers.

So people like Plato and Socrates would have spent time in Athens. He was spending time with brainy people. People who knew a lot of information and loved to talk about the latest ideas.

And we get two groups of people named for us in verse 18. Have a look. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

[ 5 : 20 ] You may think that sounds strange. Who are they? Well, just a very quick guide to who the Epicureans and Stoic people are. The Epicureans were people who believed that the world came

about by just random chance.

Perhaps you know people who believe that too. Perhaps you yourself did or do believe that. And they also believe that whilst we're living here, life's all about getting lots of pleasure and we shouldn't have any pain.

So that's who the Epicureans are. The Stoics, they're a bit more logical and they reason things out. And they believe that God was to be found everywhere.

So that's a little guide to who these people are. We could say much more, but we won't. In all their beliefs, I think that they have this sense that there is something bigger.

Something bigger than just themselves. Some sort of meaning that they can find in life. And perhaps you sense that.

[ 6 : 36 ] Perhaps people you speak to sense that there is something bigger. And so Paul tries to introduce Jesus to them. Tries to introduce the one true and living God to them.

Tries to introduce Jesus who for the Epicureans can give them the pleasure of their sins being forgiven. To the Stoics who can find in Jesus the only way to come to God.

And so he tells the most brainy people of the day all about Jesus. But their reaction doesn't seem very clever to me.

From some of them at least. Have a look again with the people around you. What do they describe? What do some of them describe Paul as in verse 18?

Have a chat amongst yourselves for 30 seconds again. Nice. Anyone got it?

[ 7 : 57 ] We've come to you a lot greasier. Let's see if anybody else has got it. Maria. Go for it. They call him a babbler. To them he's just going blah, blah, blah.

Babbling on. That might be how you feel about me this morning. But that's certainly how they feel about Paul. Blah, blah, blah. This makes no sense. Apparently that word babbler, a better word would be seed picker.

Let me try and explain to you what's going on there. One of my biggest fears is these. This might be something you want to see when you're in Brighton.

But I don't. Seagulls. I get scared every time I eat any sort of food around seagulls. If I'm having an ice cream and there's a seagull watching.

I'm very protective and very scared and probably just want to run away from the situation. Because seagulls are known for just diving in and stealing your chips, your ice cream, whatever else.

[ 9 : 03 ] But I don't think they really know what they're doing. All that they know is apparently they've evolved to believe that human food is good food.

But they don't know how precious my ice cream is to them. They don't know how special it is. And for Paul, being called a seed picker here.

You've got to imagine a bird picking up a seed or as we face nowadays, seagulls taking your ice cream. And not really knowing what they're doing, but just finding a way to get some food.

And for Paul, they're saying, you've just got this little bit of information, this little seed, this little stolen ice cream.

And you're sharing this brief thought and it makes no sense to us. You don't even understand it. It's not a compliment telling him he's a babbler.

[ 10 : 02 ] But Paul divides opinion. As some people are listening to him and think, actually, we think we want to know a bit more about what he says. And so he's got an opportunity to speak.

Have a look there in verse 19. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting place of the Areopagus where they said to him, May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting to us?

And so he's taken to this place, Areopagus or Mars Hill, as some people call it, a place where he can share all about what he believes, the God who he believes in.

And people will listen to him. People with those big brains will listen to what Paul is talking about. Because as we see there in verse 21, all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent much time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.

People love to hear new ideas and they want to hear what Paul says. Notice it doesn't seem to particularly change their lives. They just want to talk and gain some more knowledge.

[ 11 : 15 ] But perhaps Jesus will change some of their lives. So Paul takes them up on the invitation to speak.

And he rather masterfully does it. Have a look. Let's read verse 22 to 23. Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and he said, People of Athens, I see that in every way you're very religious.

For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, we can see them around. I even found an altar with this inscription.

To an unknown God. To an unknown God. Let's put this altar up in front of me, shall we? To an unknown God.

That's what they see. That's what he sees. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship. And this is what I'm going to proclaim to you.

[12:26] So Paul, as he traveled around, he saw this. An altar to the unknown God. And he thinks, I could tell you about him.

I can tell you about the God that you don't know. It's rather clever, isn't it? And we can learn from Paul here.

Because he finds in their city, in their way of life, a way to connect something to the God that he believes in. And we can do that too.

In different ways in our lives. Through different points of interest we might have with people. So I know there's a lot of football fans here this morning.

And there's a lot of football fans across the country. Thousands of people will have gone to watch a football match over this weekend. And some will be singing their praises and rejoicing.

[13:27] And some will be really sorrowful. Not mentioning football fans this morning. But for the Christian, watching football isn't what life is all about.

For us as Christians, we know something more. That when our team loses, it's okay. Because we're a follower of Jesus. And if we're on Jesus' team, we know that Jesus has won the victory for us. And we know we're going to go to heaven. We're going to live with him forever. So on a bad day, when our team loses, it's okay. And we can point others that we know who just live and breathe football.

Who are so downcast when their team loses. It's like the world has ended. We can say, it's us. But I know something better.

And maybe that's a way we can begin a conversation. Like Paul here says, I see this. And well, let me tell you a bit about God. Or perhaps something else. Perhaps you're into video games.

[14:40] I think we've got an amazing wealth of video games. And it's amazing. You can see people's creativity. Artistic stuff. And we can say, you know what?

God has given us a sense of creativity. He's made us in his image. And you know what? He's made this world for us. Isn't it good? I know we've got lots of artists amongst us.

As you chat with your other art friends, you can say, yeah, God's given us this gift of creativity. He loves creativity.

He loves art. Look at the world he's made. And in a few weeks' time, at Mill with a Meaning, Courtney Smith will help us talk about bodybuilding and Jesus.

How will those two link? Well, come and find out. It's amazing what Paul does here. And we're going to see exactly what he says in a moment. But firstly, we're going to sing another song.

[15:43] Hear the call of the kingdom. A song which helps us to say to the king of heaven that we'll answer the call. We'll follow you. We'll proclaim salvation in Jesus' name.

So when the band are ready, we'll stand and sing together. Thank you. Thank you.

Well, we've seen Paul filled with passion and filled with power to proclaim salvation in Jesus' name here.

And it's only just getting going. So let's see what happens. But before we dive back into the passage, one Christian leader, so a story goes, has often had people come to him and say, don't tell me about God.

You can't convert me. I don't believe in God. To which he replies, well, tell me about the God that you don't believe in. And then people start to describe the sort of God that they don't believe in.

[17:18] And they say, well, well, he's some sort of a power hungry God who's a bit like Zeus throwing out thunderbolts. Or he's some sort of old man in the sky stroking his beard, that kind of thing.

To which he can reply, well, that's not the God I believe in. So let me tell you about him. And here in this passage, it's like Paul is doing that.

You believe in all these gods. This is what you think God is like. But let me tell you about this one. The God that you don't yet know and don't yet believe in. For this is going to be amazing. This is the true and living God. So let's see what Paul tells us about God.

By the way, this is a really quite significant chapter. So many people see. Many books have been written. And I've had countless sermons on it. So if you want to go away and explore more, I can suggest a couple of things to you.

[18:23] Let me know later. But let's have a look. Firstly, Paul says, God has made himself known to everyone everywhere.

Or made himself known everywhere to everyone. Have a look. Verse 24. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth.

And he does not live in temples built by human hands. You hear that? God has made the world. He's made everything in the world. You can look at a tree and you can say, God has made that. Look at a flower in its beauty and say, God has made that.

God has stamped his mark on this world. He has made it. A bit like when an artist paints a picture and they might sign their name in the corner.

[19:26] Well, that's what God has done. He's made this world and he signs his name. He says, I have made that. And so, Paul says, because God has made this world, you don't need all these little gods living in temples.

You don't need to make a home for him in that way. Verse 24. In other words, Paul is saying, there's no point going off to that temple and giving your God some food.

God doesn't need anything. He's created all things out of nothing. God doesn't need a thing. In this country and around the world, you can go to some impressive church buildings.

Like big churches, big cathedrals. I quite enjoy looking around a cathedral. But it's not going to get us closer to God by building a big impressive building.

He has made everything. We can see his creative power everywhere.

[20:57] And he goes on to say that he's made time and he's marked out who should live in time. So, verse 26. From one man, he made all the nations that they should inhabit, the whole earth.

And he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their land. For you today, he's made you to exist in this year, 2025, and all the other years that he gives to you.

He's not only made the world, but he's made time and he is sovereign over it. He's keeping hold of this world. And he knows all about the appointed times of the past and of the future.

This is a big God that he's talking about. And so, those people that he's talking to who are aware that there is something bigger than themselves. Paul is saying, well, this is who it is.

It is God. God, this morning, the world and history doesn't revolve around you. You and I, we're not the center of the universe.

[22:07] God has made the world. God has made all the things in it and all of history. And it's all in his hands.

It doesn't revolve around you and me. There is a God. Not all these little gods. But a God who holds the world in his hands.

And he is the reason everyone is here. He is the reason human beings are here. Have a look at verse 25. Paul makes it really clear.

He is not served by human hands as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

The reason why you're living and breathing this morning is because God has given you the breath to breathe. God has given you your life. And Paul goes even further in verse 28 by saying, For in him we live and we move and we have our being, as some of your own poets have said, we are his offspring.

[23:23] He even quotes from something their own people have said, showing that there is this awareness in people, that there is something bigger.

Well, let me tell you whose offspring you are. You are made by the living God. You are given life by him. That's amazing.

And so we're invited in by Paul here to see a God who is interested in us. Who has made himself known to us in the creation of the world and in making us.

We're invited in to see a God who even knows the numbers of hairs on your head. He is interested in you for he has given life to you.

And he says, And he says, Because we're made by him, we shouldn't then try to make him ourselves, like these idols around Athens.

[ 24 : 29 ] Have a look at verse 29. Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone.

An image made by human design and skill. These gods of Athens sure look impressive.

Apparently, there was this big statue to the goddess Athena. Apparently, you could see the point of her spear from about 40 miles away.

It's impressive what they did. But God's not like this. Don't make God in how you think he should be made.

God has made you. And we're told in the Bible, in which he reveals himself to us, that he is three in one.

[ 25 : 36 ] He is father, spirit and son. Which means he has a perfect relationship with himself. And as we've been created in his image, we too have been made for relationship.

We have relationships with one another. Here in this place, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we have relationships with our friends and our families and whoever else.

We're made for relationship. But we're not just made for relationship with other human beings. As we see, when God first made the world in the book of Genesis, we see that Adam and Eve have this wonderful, perfect relationship with God.

We're told at times that they walk with God in the call of the day. But we know that that relationship with God was spoiled.

And so it's like now, all of us, as we go through life, putting the different pieces of the puzzle of our lives together, it's like all of us have this God-shaped hole within us.

[ 26 : 50 ] And we're trying to fill it. We're made for relationship with God. We know that that's been broken. And we try and fill that God-shaped hole with all sorts of other things.

So the people of Athens tried to fill it with all these gods we see around. The people today try and fill it with trying to get lots of money, or success, or power, or turn to other religions.

But the pieces just don't seem to fit in place. Not even that. It is close. But it doesn't fill that God-shaped hole until you find a relationship with the true and living God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then that God-shaped hole can be filled. And we can begin to have a relationship with Him and grow in that relationship with Him.

Instead of filling our lives with other gods, other idols, as the people of Athens do. And so, Paul says to them, therefore, God commands everyone, everywhere, to repent.

[ 28 : 16 ] God commands everyone, everywhere, to repent. He has made this world, He has made the people of the world. We have gone astray, but there is a way back to God from the dark paths of sin.

And it's through the Lord Jesus Christ. The next event that we as human beings, as world history is waiting for, the next huge, big event is the coming, the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul wants to tell these people in Athens, and we want to tell people today, that we need to be ready for that day. We need to turn to God and repent.

Do we see that here in this passage? Let's have a look. Verse 30, in the past, God overlooks such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent.

And here's the day that we're waiting for, verse 31, He has set a day when He will judge the world with His justice by the man He has appointed. And He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead.

[ 29 : 43 ] So no wonder Paul is so keen to share with the people of Athens about Jesus and His resurrection.

No wonder as he looks around and sees all their idol worship, all these other gods that they're trying to fill their God-shaped hole with, no wonder he feels distressed.

Because there's a day coming when God will come and the world will be judged. And if we haven't put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who has died for us and risen from the dead, then we will not stand on that day.

And so Paul wants to warn them. A question for us is, are we distressed for the people of Brighton?

