

# Acts 17:16-34: A Speech for Gospel Work

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Thank you very much. Great, great words. I just hope they roll over your soul and encourage you for the week ahead. It's really good to be back. I've been gone, skipped church four consecutive Sundays. I'm glad to hear that you are still here.
- When I told my dad I was leaving church for four consecutive Sundays, he said, son, you'll be lucky to have a job when you get back. But it's great to be here. Had a great four weeks, two weeks on vacation.
- And the last two Sundays have been in the continent of Africa, the country of Kenya, the city of Nairobi, the sprawling slums along the Mathare Valley.
- Indeed, even in the church in Haruma. And so I have been blessed to be sent by you to our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- The church at AIC Haruma sends you greetings. And when they send greetings, each person takes greetings and they pass it to the next person.
- [ 1 : 1 1 ]     And by the end they pass it to you and you are, you're staggered. You're supposed to put their greetings in your pockets and bring them home. Well, they would have been heavier than the heaviest suitcase allowed.
- So all those greetings now come from my pockets and back to you from the other side of the world. The Mathare Valley, 500,000 people, two bathrooms.
- Haruma, with our brothers and sisters in Christ that we have partnered with now since 2002 or 2003. Over 50 of our congregants have been in that church.
- They love you. They send greetings to you. It was good to be with 32 pastors that live and work in that neighborhood and along that valley.
- It was great to meet a man who had a machete mark down his whole head, just over his eye, his left eye. A man that Stanlis Nambuki, the pastor of the church that we partner with, saved in the after 2007 political rebellion and unrest.
- [ 2 : 3 1 ]     The inner tribal enmity that has taken place between the Kikuyu and the Luo tribes in Kenya. And to see him.
- And to know that the work of God is going on in the very place that many of you have stepped. So may our partnership with the church around the world continue well into the coming years.
- I would love it if every regular attendee of Holy Trinity Chicago on the south side would find their way to the continent of Africa, to the country of Kenya, and to the church that we work with in Haruma.
- What a great thing that would be. It was enriching. But it's also good to be back. It's good to be back. And I want to take a look at our text today.
- We find ourselves in Acts chapter 17. In the midst of a summer series that we are celebrating life in the gospel.

[ 3 : 41 ] We spent the first four weeks on messages that would, in a sense, define what is the gospel. Then we spent about four weeks on messages that were the joyful, life-giving relationships or consequences of the gospel.

And today we begin what will probably be a seven-week journey or so in regard to commitments that we make in light of the gospel.

And the first is that we ought to be sharing this gospel openly and often. This is a consequence of the gospel.

And so we turn to Acts 17. Now, if you are part of the congregation regularly, you'll wonder what has happened to Pastor Helm. He's now preaching his third consecutive message from the same text of Scripture.

I've never done anything like this before. But this is indeed the third time this summer I am preaching from Acts 17, verses 16 to 34.

[ 4 : 58 ] You might say it's captured my attention this summer. And if you were to think about trying to enter this sermon in regard to the previous two sermons, I actually thought about, oh, yeah, the kids need to go.

Sorry about that, kids. I thought you wanted to hear this sermon as well. I came out of the gate ready. Or unready.

Four weeks away, forget to dismiss the kids to children's church. I thought by that much in the introduction, though, they would have wanted to stick around anyway.

Think of the three messages this way. The first message centered on verses 16 to 21. And if you have a Bible near you and you ought to, open it to Acts 17.

16 to 21, I would call Athens a setting for gospel work. Most of my comments dealt with the setting of that great city and what it might mean for our ministry in this setting.

[ 6 : 14 ] The second message, although it had some aspects from verses 16 to 21, it moved on into 22 to the end.

And in my mind, I would call it Athens, a strategy for gospel work. And we began to call from those verses a strategy of how to do gospel work in a great intellectual urbanized city.

Today, I want to confine my comments to verses 22 to 34. And I think I would call it Athens, the speech or our speech in gospel work.

In a way, I want you to know that these three messages for me, although raw and although in some sense draft form and unplanned for the summer, are becoming foundational.

Foundational for the way I am thinking and where I think our church needs to be moving. And so I hope that if you haven't heard them, you'll at least get the MP3s.

[ 7 : 31 ] And if you don't like MP3s, maybe somewhere in the course of the year, I'll write these up as a source of conversation. But today, Paul's speech, as construed by Luke, lessons for our speech in gospel work.

The first thing to be said about the Athenian speech pertains to its introduction. Verses 22 on into 23.

Let me read those. So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription to the unknown God.

What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. It's his introduction. What I want to draw from it is his ability to turn iconic cultural objects into conversations on the living God.

Indeed, the altar to the unknown God was nothing less than an icon and an object within their physical surroundings. And when Paul began to speak the gospel into a world that resembles the one in which you and I live, he demonstrates, by way of introduction, an ability to turn iconic cultural objects into conversation about God.

[ 9 : 19 ] I mean, he doesn't draw from a biblical text as he would have done in the synagogue. He didn't get up and immediately announce a reading from the Scriptures.

Interestingly, Paul, if he arrived at Athens by boat over water, which according to chapter 16, verse 14, seems to appear, then he would have disembarked along the rocky peninsula called Piraeus, which was five miles south of Athens.

And leaving the harbor there, he would have made his journey up to and toward Athens, which indeed was and is, in some sense even today, the great city.

The one by which all great cities ought to be defined. Now, we have a description of that very place and that very walk that Paul would have made about a hundred years later.

A traveler by the name of Pausanias and his works are now bound in the Loeb classical library.

[ 10 : 47 ] And they're under the title His Descriptions of Greece. And he wrote of his travels at about 175 A.D. and he records taking the footpath from the harbor to the city of Athens.

And he says that along that way there were, quote, altars of the gods unknown. I began to wonder, were they there even in Paul's day?

Most likely they were. But rather than selecting a text to expound, Paul lays hold of this iconic object that was part of the citizenry of Athens.

Athens. And he turns this altars to God's unknown into that which he sees as an altar to the unknown God.

And he makes use of that. Now, I want to make an observation on this for you and for me. I want a lot of this sermon to be applicatory. It should come as no surprise to those of us who are living here in Hyde Park to learn that Athens, which was the intellectual powerhouse of Greek civilization, was quite at home to be in a world that acknowledged altars of God's unknown.

[ 12 : 21 ] Literally, agnosto. From where we get the sense of one who is agnostic or agnosticism. Those of you who are in scholarly fields will certainly know that anyone worth their weight in salt in those fields must certainly acknowledge and be willing to cede that once you get beyond someone's particular area of discipline, there are lots of things that are unknown.

It's one of the hallmarks of living in this kind of a context. I love it when I talk to people, those even among you, and I ask a question and you'll say, well, that's not actually my area of expertise, so I can't really speak with any sense of authority on that.

But from what I understand, and you see there's this great degree of separation between that which you know and that which is unknown. And nobody in this setting would like to declare that all things are known.

Well, so too in the religious world. It should come as no surprise that when it comes to places like Athens or Hyde Park, there's a great willingness among its citizenry to say, I don't know.

That's a rather unknowable question. I have doubts. And I think they're reasonable. And I think anyone could be reasonably wondering about whether or not there is a God.

[ 13 : 51 ] and if the Christian God is the one God. I remember a few years ago, my Uncle Hugh was in town. He's a U of C grad. Masters or doctorate, I can't remember which degree program.

And we were driving along 55th. And we were passing St. Thomas the Apostle. Now, he'd been gone a long time. And we hadn't gotten to a point yet where you could even see the name of it.

And he said, Oh, that's got to be St. Thomas the Apostle. I said, How in the world do you know that? He goes, Well, we're really close to the university, aren't we?

I said, Yeah. He said, Well, St. Thomas, I mean, it's hard to imagine any college town with proximity to the Catholic Church where that particular church isn't named St. Thomas because in a university town, Doubting Thomas is the patron saint of all those who are learning.

I thought, Well, he might have something there. I need to go check. I need to do some traveling. But it shouldn't surprise us. And that's the observation I wanted to make.

[ 15 : 07 ] Van Til put it this way, Even among the cultured, it was in good style to recognize the fact that there was more in heaven and on earth than they had yet dreamed of in their philosophy.

The Athenians were perfectly willing, therefore, to leave open a place for the unknown. But this unknown must be thought of as utterly unknowable and indeterminate.

Well, in your speech, for the gospel, knowing that you ought to be declaring the gospel openly and often, do you have the capacity of Paul?

Does Holy Trinity as a whole have the capacity to take the iconic objects of religious thought and turn them into conversation on God?

This is certainly the starting place. It won't do simply to walk down the streets and open the Bible and call your text out, begin to expound.

[ 16 : 25 ] No, we need men and women, even high school students and junior high and those in grade school who are so aware of the idols of our day that they are capable and ready to grab hold of them and turn them to a conversation on God.

So they say to Paul, we want to know what you know. Please come and tell us what you know. And Paul says, well, let me begin with that which you claim is unknown, this altar to the unknown God.

There will be no platform for the gospel in your discipline or in your workplace or with your neighbors if you and I are not working mentally, intellectually, thoughtfully, reflectively, decidedly to take iconic objects that our city raises up as laudable and be able to go from those to the gospel.

We have a lot of work to do. The second thing I want you to notice about the speech not as that iconic object but rather his command of the grand sweep of biblical history.

Now, many of us can recall certain Bible stories, particularly if you might have grown up in a Sunday school class. Many of us who haven't even grown up in church who are here today probably still, just because of the culture in which we live, have certain events that we know would be biblical events.

[ 18 : 19 ] But how many of us have command of the grand sweep of biblical history? Paul had that and it's marked in his speech.

Could you do it in five minutes? Imagine if I paired everybody off. It'd scare you to death, wouldn't it? You'd have to talk to somebody here for five minutes? I said, okay, let's just spread out across the auditorium five minutes.

One person goes and then the other. When I hit the stopwatch and I say, go, begin, you've got five minutes to explain the grand sweep of biblical history. After five minutes, we'll turn it around and the other person will do it.

How do you think you'd fare? Paul's success in Athens is largely due to the fact that he had absolute command of the grand sweep of biblical history.

Let me show it to you. Verse 24, the God who made the world and everything in it being Lord of the heaven and earth does not live in temples made by man.

[ 19 : 29 ] Point number one, he begins where? At the beginning. the God who made the world and everything in it. We'll return to this later.

But the point I want to make now is he begins at the beginning. He begins with God creating the heavens and the earth. Look at verse 31. How does he end? Well, he ends at the ending.

Verse 31 reads, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

It's the beginning phrase of the verse I want you to see that he ends with there is a day fixed upon which God will judge the earth. So he begins at the beginning of biblical history.

He ends eight verses later with the end of biblical history. That is God not creating the heavens and the earth but judging the world in righteousness. And the eight verses that are in between eight short simple verses that undoubtedly are Luke's shorthand for his portrayal of Paul's ministry.

[ 20 : 41 ] Certainly much more must have been said. But in eight verses he goes from Genesis to Revelation. In eight verses his speech can move from creation to consummation.

And in between verses 24b and 25 he reveals humanity's great problem. Namely its tendency to worship the creation rather than the creator.

Or in biblical terms idolatry which is what he actually calls it later by verse 29. He's able to pinpoint with precision humanity's great problem.

God is not served by human hands nor does he live in temples made by man.

Verse 29 we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone. Isn't that amazing? Not only that but look at his emphasis in verses 26 to 28.

[ 21 : 52 ] He emphasizes humanity's great unity. He bundles all of humanity under one man under one condition under one search for the living God.

So he speaks the way the Bible speaks of all of humanity moving in one direction. Not only is he capable of doing that but he's able to tell you that God's desire is to be in relationship to him.

That's why the quotes are there from Epimenides and others. In him we live and move and have our being for we indeed are his offspring.

And he begins to show you that we are groping in verse 27 and yet that God is near and that God would have us seek him. So he shows you humanity's great problem but he shows you God's great desire that he would be in relationship with you.

And then verses 30 and 31 he explains the great culpability and our need for repentance. He says look I know to this point in time you might be ignorant of these things.

[ 23 : 06 ] That there is a God who created the heavens and the earth. That all of humanity is inadequate in its approach to him. That he desires you to know him. And of this you must repent.

Because your ignorance doesn't free you from culpability. And then he goes on in the capstone really of it all. As he puts it all on the weight of the resurrection.

Eight verses. Now what's most stunning isn't merely his ability to have command of the grand sweep of biblical history where all the great themes are there.

But his grasp of the world in which he is living is so strong that he speaks it to them in ways that they understand. Stunning.

Five minutes. I think we got our work cut out for us again. If we are to be speaking the gospel openly and often and often it will require not only an ability to deal with the iconic objects that are in our culture today and turn them into conversations about God but it will require of us a command of biblical history.

[ 24 : 29 ] And yet most of us are resting on isolated Bible stories and we're not quite sure how it all runs together into one story. If you struggle on that you just need to buy the big picture story Bible written by your pastor.

Because while I wrote this Bible story for children you're the home congregation of it you might as well know my subliminal goal was to teach parents the grand sweep of biblical history.

Can you do it? There will be no gospel growth until the church is equipped and capable to do it in ways that the culture understands.

It's amazing what Paul's able to do in this speech. Let me put a formal name to this grand sweep of biblical history.

What I'm telling you is you and I need to bone up on something they call biblical theology. theology. Don't let that scare you off. Think of systematic theology where you go through all the Bible and you take a category and it's systematized.

[ 25 : 44 ] What does the Bible have to say about this all the way through? Don't think of historical theology but biblical theology is this overriding progressively revealed unfolding story of the one story.

That's what Paul does in this speech. He starts at the beginning and ends at the end and in between he shows you humanity's great problem God's eternal desire to be in relationship with you the need for our repentance and he hangs it all on the resurrection of Christ.

I got a lot of quotes I could give you. It's 502 already. Well let me skip one on what is biblical theology.

I'll have to do that on the fourth time I preach from this text this summer. Let me take you back 12 years. While there was a small group of people praying about beginning this church in this neighborhood.

Pastor Dennis was in Cambridge, England at Tyndale House on sabbatical and he wrote of our need if we were going to plant an effective gospel church in this neighborhood.

[ 26 : 59 ] He wrote of our need for biblical theology. Listen to what he wrote. An amazing thing, he must have only been about 29 or 30 at this time. I love this. Quote, at Holy Trinity Church, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, biblical theology will be the first element of our evangelism.

The greatest need in our age in the area of witness is a return to biblical theology. theology. We will blaze with the excitement at the privilege of announcing him from all the scriptures that Jesus is Christ the Lord.

Young and old, man or woman, we will know the Bible. And we will know the Christ of the Bible. If this is a genuine need of our age in the area of witness, it narrows our energies with laser focus, we must ask God to birth in our midst, in Holy Trinity, a people steeped in biblical theology.

Together we must cry out to God for a people who have learned to hear the melodic line of the Bible. And together we must depend on the Holy Spirit to show us how the parts relate to the whole.

That's vintage Dennis. That's why he's your senior pastor. The grand sweep.

[ 28 : 36 ] That's the second thing I want you to see. Third, about this speech and its relationship to our speech is his commitment to relaying the central points of the gospel message.

You know, academicians who have studied Acts 17 for a long time have trumpeted a belief that there's very little in it that is Christian. They continually posit the notion that, and there certainly are stoic elements and other rhetorical elements involved, but I think they have overplayed their hand in saying, gosh, this is just a gospel that's unlike anything else he preaches anywhere else.

And is it even Christian? I am amazed at his commitment to the central points of the gospel message. And let me rehearse them for you.

There are five in the speech. First, God as creator. In fact, the whole idea of repentance depends on God being creator, because if he's creator, then your allegiance is owed to your creator.

So all Christian preaching, all gospel witnessing, when it asks people to repent, to turn, to think differently about God, to put themselves under Christ's word, to begin following Jesus, to trust in his work on the cross, and the question goes forth, why?

[ 30 : 09 ] The answer is simple. God created you. There's no gospel preaching without the central tenet of God as creator.

And in 24a, we see it clearly, the God who made the world and everything in it. In 26, and he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth.

Now, it's a bit more complicated in our day than in Paul's, and I need to acknowledge this. I mean, imagine today going out of here going, okay, the pastor told us, first tenet of the gospel message, I'm going to proclaim it openly and often.

I'm going to start telling people that God is the creator. Guess where that's going to get you? That's going to get you in a big old bailiwick. I mean, you'd be grasping the nettles on that thing in a hurry.

Why? Because you mentioned today to anyone on the street in Hyde Park that God is creator. creator. And what's that going to conjure up in their minds about you? Creationism is going to be equated.

[ 31 : 21 ] Six literal days is going to be thrown at you. A sense that you are one of those young earth people is going to land.

What do you do with evolution? Intelligent design? All of that. I mean, this discussion about God as a creator is very cloudy today.

And I think it's probably more challenging than Athens. You know, it might be a little tougher to do this work than in Athens today in our culture. But nevertheless, this is work that Christians must do.

And we must do it thoughtfully. And there are people in this congregation who could lead the way for us. And how do we speak of God as creator in our Athens without capsizing our gospel ship?

Because all of those other words are like barnacles on the side. And you don't wash those off first. You're not sailing home with the gospel message.

[ 32 : 29 ] We need a lot of thoughtful work here. And that's why I say these messages are foundational. In one sense, I want to say this is what you need for Monday morning.

But in another sense, I want to say to you as a congregation, these three messages are so foundational that they ought to require conversation and indeed some of your expertise to lead the way.

But we must speak of God as creator. But in this country, gone are the days when you can kind of simply affirm like John Adams in one of his great letters to Thomas Jefferson after the death of Abigail and in his mourning, he writes to Jefferson, I believe in God.

And I cannot conceive that such a being would make a species as the humans merely to live and die. This universe, this all, this totality, would appear with all its swelling pomp, a boyish firework.

Well, that sounds great. That's not going to help you today. You're going to have to be a little more sophisticated. I love C.S. Lewis. You probably like C.S.

[ 33 : 40 ] Lewis too, if you haven't read him, at least his movies, at least the ones they do well. I hope they do The Hobbit better than they've done anything else. But at any rate, Lewis had that great thing in The Magician's Nephew, where he talks about Aslan, standing with his face to the sun.

Oh man, I love this. His coat is shining and radiant. His mouth is wide open in song. And as he sings, green begins to form around his feet and spread out in the pool.

Then flowers and heather appear on the hillside and move out before him. Then Aslan begins to sing a more lively song. Showers of birds fly out of the tree. Butterflies begin to flit about.

There comes a great celebration as the song breaks into a wild song. And Aslan says, be still, be quiet, be living. Hey, that sounds great.

Throw that on the street today on 53rd down by Veloz. They'll say, yeah, you're nothing but a romantic. Because you talk about God as creator. Well, you got a lot of heavy lifting to do here before we can go forward.

[ 34 : 48 ] water. I'm not walking into your world on a great writer's capacity to show me butterflies emerging from the song of a lion. No, our work will be hard.

And yet, this is the work we must do. We must begin to speak of God as creator. And it must be done thoughtfully and reflectively. And it must clear us of the rocks that would sink our witness.

I got to keep moving. The second element that demonstrates his commitment to the central points of the gospel message isn't merely that God is creator, but that humanity is inadequate as worshipers.

Verses 24 and 25. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of the heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man. Nor is he served by human hands.

What's the central tenet of the gospel message that he is still holding to? Is that mankind's way of worship is whacked out.

[ 36 : 05 ] In other words, he says, God does not. And then he says, Nor is he. And think about our gospel witness today.

How often we rely simply on the language of affirmation. God has a great thing for you. God is what?

Love. And we never get around to, God does not, and God is not, nor is he. God is not, we have to begin to explain to the citizenry of Chicago that much of what they call worship of God is inadequate.

It falls short. That it in a sense is inverted. That what we really love is the creation, not the creator.

How many of us wanted to be outside today along the lake front, but doggone it, for some reason you knew you were supposed to be here at four o'clock because you wanted to be out in creation.

[ 37 : 13 ] But how many of the citizenry in Chicago are capable of loving the creator through creation? No, our worship is inadequate.



We love this world, this life, these pleasures, these feelings, these boats, these waters. Augustine put idolatry this way, he loves thee too little who loves anything together with thee, which he loves not for thy sake.

I like that. When our delight, our full delight, and you know your heart, when your full delight is relegated to something in creation, rather than through it finding its way to the creator, guess what that's called?

That's called idolatry, that's called inadequate worship, that's called something that you need to now hear that God does not nor is he served by you in those ways.

Third, third tenant of the gospel message in his speech, God nevertheless desires relationship with us. That's what he puts out in verses 26 to 28.

[ 38 : 35 ] He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. Why? That they should seek God in hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him.

Yet, Paul wants them to know he's actually not very far from us. For in him we live and move and have our being, even as some of your own poets have said, for we indeed are his offspring.

What's he communicating here? He's communicating that God nevertheless, although our worship is inadequate, still desires to be in relationship with us. What a great gospel presentation this is for Athens.

I mean, people must be told that they have gone astray in their approach to God. And there's a word for it, idolatry. But they must also know that God is not merely sitting up there in some righteous indignation, ready to judge, and that's all he has on his mind.

Can't wait to unfold my wrath on you. No! He's near! And the unbelieving scholar, or traveler, or writer, or worker, who in their own work in that day is so enthralled in something, there's almost a nearness to God that they experience.

[ 40 : 03 ] I don't know if there's a God, I'm not sure if there's a God, but right here in this moment, it almost feels as if he's just in the next room, like there really could be.

God will avenge himself in wrath, I mean, he actually doesn't hold that back from them in verses 30 and 31, he's going to make it very clear, but early in his speech, he wants them to know that God has not pulled back from you, God has not pulled away from you, God has not jettisoned you.

He reaffirms God's desire to be known by them. He's very tactful, isn't he? There's an end of a letter by William E.

Board of John Stott, talks about how you handle people in difficult situations, and this is a difficult situation when you tell someone your worship, by the way, I'd like to let you know your worship is inadequate.

Listen to the closing line of this letter, quote, the times when people's feelings are most sensitive are of course the times when the greatest care is called for, both as a matter of policy and also of charity.

[ 41 : 26 ] That's my summary of verses 26 to 28. He's aware that we are now at a moment where the people's sensitivities are going to be elevated. They have just been told that their worship is inadequate and what does he do?

He said, I better be very sensitive here and through their own language, I bet them let them know that God desires relationship nonetheless and that he's near not far and that he wants to love not pounce.

Does our gospel witness do that? Fourth, humanity's need for repentance. repentance. Verses 29 and 30, being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone in image formed by the art and imagination of man.

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. After showing them God's willingness to be in relationship, he shows them their need for repentance.

And don't you love that he uses that word ignorance? Remember, this whole conversation started back in verse 19, may we know this new teaching. Verse 20, we wish to know.

[ 42 : 49 ] And he says, okay, let me pick up the altar to the unknown. And then he comes back to that same word at the end. He says, now, by the way, you just need to remember something.

You can't stay in that. ignorant world for long, you know. You can't stay there forever. See, that's what scholars want to do, see. Scholars want to stay in the unknowable forever.

Every guy in Athens wanted to remain in regard to God while there are things unknown and unknowable. And when he says here, no, no, no, no, no, no, wait, now, after what I've told you, that there is a God in the heavens, after I told you that your worship of him is inadequate, according to what he's revealed to us, after I've told you that he still wants to be in relationship with you, you can no longer claim, agnosto, give me the God unknown, ignorance.

No, no, those days are done now. My gospel requires a decision from you, and that is one of repentance. Are you able to say that?

Think of Mortimer Adler. Adler taught right here at the University of Chicago, one of the most eminent philosophers of the 20th century, and he certainly designed the core curriculum under which every student at the University of Chicago comes through.

[ 44 : 23 ] And Adler became a Christian late in life. But before his eventual conversion, he was reluctant. Why? Because he knew that to become a Christian, he had to move out of the unknown God into, I repent and live under this God as he revealed himself to us.

Listen to what Adler writes himself from these streets. There's a great gulf between the mind and the heart, he said.

I was on the edge of becoming a Christian several times but didn't do it. I said that if one is born a Christian, one can be lighthearted about living up to Christianity. But if one converts by a clear conscious act of will, one had better be prepared to live a truly Christian life.

So you ask yourself, writes Adler, are you prepared to give up all your vices and the weaknesses of the flesh? Isn't that beautiful?

And he looked at it and he examined it and he did it. And some of you here today need to do the very thing to say, well, that puts me over the edge.

[ 45 : 41 ] I'm moving out of the unknown territory and I'm making a conscious act of the will that what I'm hearing is the true revelation from God, that he exists, that he's personal, that he wants to know me, that I've messed up and that I need to repent.

Some of you need to do that very thing today. Hey, you got Adler. Adler did it. You can do it. Boy, he looked like a gargoyle too, didn't he?

You ever seen pictures of him late in life? They could have stuck that guy up on top of Mandel Hall and you wouldn't have skipped a beat. I mean, that's the way he looked. So you can be ugly and be in too.

I'm glad for that. Well, let me finish. Don't know how I got into that. I'm skipping a lot, but the end is this, the fifth tenet of the gospel message, that he doesn't let go.

Not only is that God is creator, not only is that our worship is inadequate, followed by God's desire to be in relationship and our need to repent, but he moves finally to the reason for the basis for that repentance, the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

[ 46 : 57 ] The text mentions his resurrection. How does the resurrection become the central act of God in all of history? How does the resurrection actually put all of this together?

You need to know that the incarnation of Christ lets you know that God is personal, that he is with us, that he cares enough to come. That's what the incarnation teaches you.

The itinerant ministry of Christ lets you know that God is kind in all of his healings, in all of his dealings. He was tender, that he cares enough to comfort.

But the resurrection, the seemingly impossible act of the resurrection, what does that teach you? That teaches you that this Jesus must be God's son, and therefore his king, and that he cares enough to conquer all the enemies that keep you from relationship to God.

Sin and death. Now, think of the Athenian aspiration. The Athenian aspiration was to live life with some great grand purpose.

[ 48 : 15 ] That there was something for us to fulfill that went beyond the mere pleasures of our body. That there ought to be some elevated nature to humanity's goal.

That was the noble plan of the man or woman in Athens. And look what the resurrection proves. That God has a noble plan that must extend under the reign of his son, not only now, but into all eternity.

that you have a great cause to live for. You come here today wondering, what am I living for? The resurrection says, you have a great cause to live for.

God has some eternal purpose that he is fulfilling in his son. In a phrase, the resurrection meets the criteria by which any Athenian aspiration was to be judged.

And what's the result? Well, some mocked. Some said, let me hear you again. And some believed. And I want to speak to those of you today who are ready to believe.

[ 49 : 31 ] Verse 33. But some men joined him and believed. Who were they? Dionysius the Areopagite. One of the very leaders.

Don't you love that? You know, a lot of people say, oh, Athens, the speech at Athens. You know, no church planted. Not as good as what he got done at Corinth, you know. Or Thessaloniki or Ephesus.

Now, this is not good gospel preaching he did in Athens, because what do we really know happened? He just mentions Dionysius and Damaris and some others. Kind of ineffectual.

Are you kidding me? Dionysius the Areopagite believed. A man believed. And Eusebius tells us in his ecclesiastical histories, the great historian outside of the scriptures, that Dionysius, the Areopagite, became the first bishop of Athens.

Now, that's true. Not only did he get a church planted here, you got the bishop of the whole region here. what could happen if you believe?

[ 50 : 48 ] Maybe you're no Dionysius, but you might be Damaris, a woman who believed or others with them. Those are the results of speaking the gospel openly and often in a way that is effective and winsome as it was for Luke's portrayal of Paul.

May it be so for us. May God use your speech even this week to win some men and women to Christ from Hyde Park.

you say, wow, I'm not ready for that, Pastor. Well, then may you begin to go home and think about how you connect the iconic in our culture and turn it to a conversation.

And from there you begin to read and study and grasp a command of biblical history. And then you begin to turn that into the language of your culture.

And then you commit yourself to retaining the tenets of the gospel message that God created, that our worship is inadequate, that God desires us nonetheless, that we are in need of repentance, and that Jesus and his resurrection gives great purpose to life.

[ 52 : 14 ] Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we've covered a lot of ground on a hot afternoon. I pray that it would go to the very depths of our soul, that as we prepare to leave this meeting for ice cream in the next room, we would find our bodies refreshed and our friendships renewed as we discuss with one another our life in this church and in this city.

In Christ's name, Amen. Let's stand. Thank you.