

Called in a Market Place of Ideas

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Date: 17 September 2017

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[0 : 0 0] called in a marketplace of ideas I thought what does that mean and I do agree with Jim Jim said about prayed about alpha not just being an exchange of ideas and I thought us being called to a marketplace of ideas is not merely about us adding to the exchange of ideas called to the marketplace of ideas is our calling is to witness to the gospel witness to the good news of Jesus Christ and to proclaim the truth so we don't just add another idea into the melting pot and let them all mix up and settle together our calling is to come in and to speak truth and proclaim the good news to people and so I thought okay if our call to that marketplace for ideas is to witness to the truth of the gospel then I took the word witness that just happens to have seven letters and I started to think about all those self-help books out there that are seven habits of the most effectively successful amazingly beautiful gorgeous people in the world

I thought well that's obviously talking about us witness we are going to look at seven habits of the apostle Paul and how he witnessed and I've used the word witness as an anachron so if you remember anything today you might just remember one letter the letter that what I'm going to say related to it speaks to you the most okay so I'll give you permission to just remember one letter or you can remember all seven it's up to you so in the reading that Kate read we see Paul in Athens and the reason he's in Athens is because he's been preaching around Greece and every time he preaches with Timothy and Silas and all the rabble rousers start a riot and get them kicked out of the town that they're in and so eventually he ends up in Athens on his own and while Timothy and Silas have waited have stayed in Berea where he was before and Paul is in Athens simply just waiting for his friends to come and join him and while he's there he gets this opportunity to go to Mars Hill and to speak at the Oropagus of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus that was his marketplace at that time in Athens while he was just waiting for his friends so we're going to look at the tools that he used in the hope that we will then be equipped to use those tools that are available for us when we are in our marketplace so W in Athens Paul was watchful he didn't just go down the beach and have a pint and kick back his heels while he was waiting for his mates to turn up he may have done at some point but what we read in Acts 17 is that Paul went around looking at all the statues that were in the city and the Roman author Pliny records that there was 73,000 idols in the city

I think Paul would have had sensory overload at all that idolatry that was going on but he didn't just look and get disgusted and indignant and leave he allowed what he was seeing to be discerning in his spirit and the word tells us that the NIV says he felt distressed but the King James says that he felt stirred up in his spirit now I read that not that he was just fed up and miffed about it but actually he was stirred up and he was as he was looking around watching how the people live and watching what they do he was starting to get excited and he was like bring it on this is an opportunity for me to speak to these people the truth because then as we read eventually in the passage he even sees a statue to the unknown God and straight away Paul's mind and spirit is on it thinking well they might not know who they're worshipping but I know who he is so

I want to just encourage you wherever your marketplace is to be watchful and discerning and to discern the spiritual temperature that's going on around you he didn't stop there he decided that he was going to speak to these people and in his speaking to them he was totally and utterly inclusive that's my eye he was inclusive he spoke to the Epicureans and he spoke to the Stoics now the Epicureans believe that the universe is the result of some big cosmic accident that gods are simply atomic compounds like all the other objects and that actually these gods prefer to live in blissful happiness than to interfere with humans or the world in any way the Epicureans believe that the sole purpose of human existence was pleasure and that this could only be achieved by avoiding all competition which often causes jealousy or failure and is not pleasurable or any intense emotional

commitment that could result in pain and turmoil also not pleasurable

I'm sure if we think we all know someone like that in fact they probably come to your mind right now that person who always takes the path of least resistance the one that will do anything for a quiet life never wants to get involved always wants to just stay in the background and enjoy whatever it is they enjoy and on the other extreme Paul had Stoics in front of him they believe in materialistic and deterministic beliefs to them God was just a force a principle acting on the material world always present in all matter that we can touch nothing to them existed outside of their own material world and everything that happened was just for the fate a result of fate for the good of the world evil didn't exist to the Stoics because even the natural disasters that we've prayed about today they saw them as a result of providential fate and also believed that ultimately it would be for the good of the universe in some way and I think we all know people like that as well que sera sera people whatever will be will be they don't have any sense of purpose or direction or feel any motivation to affect change in any way because what's the point?

[8 : 02] what's going to happen is going to happen so in those two extremes and probably everybody in between on that momentum Paul was faced with those in his marketplace as I'm sure we all are and we might be thinking well what's you know how can we share the gospel with people like that?

how can we share the gospel with people who just want an easy life when we know Christ is going to ask them to deny themselves take up their cross and follow him? how can we share the gospel with people who believe in fatalistic happenings in their life when we know that God calls us to be vessels of change and to implement change and God wants to bring transformation through us nonetheless Paul included all of them and was willing to answer all of their questions so I want to encourage you don't be exclusive in your marketplace be inclusive include everyone now the marketplace to Athens was a place where the marginalised and what the Greeks called the low life rabble rousers hung out they were people who very often had no employment and so they would just hang out in the marketplace all day hoping that someone would eventually give them a day's work and earlier in chapter 17 we actually read that the people Paul was speaking to go to the marketplace and get all these rabble rousers together and incite them to cause the riot so I just wanted to drop that in that wherever you are there are going to be marginalised people somewhere in your marketplace and I want to encourage you to include them and to just not overlook their presence and not be frightened to share the gospel with people who you may not otherwise associate with

Paul was watchful he was inclusive and he was also typical this was a typical day for Paul verse 17 tells us that he went day by day this was his regular habit it wasn't a once a year occasion or only when he really had to when he couldn't wriggle out of it this was his normal everyday expectation that he would come across people that he would have an opportunity to share the gospel with and this is how we build up our spiritual muscle by making it a habit if we're frightened to witness I want to encourage you witness more because you get less and less frightened of it the more you do it I'm petrified of the gym I never ever go to the gym people tell me if I went I would love it I'm not sure about that but I am telling you the more you witness the more you see the point of it and we sang in one of the songs the sound of hearts returning to you that's what witnessing is about when you get to hear that a heart returning to the Lord and you realise that actually

God is asking us to witness not because he's testing us but because he loves them and it's an excuse for a party who doesn't love an excuse for a party I love a party I love music I love to dance and I feel like that's what heaven is like just waiting for a heart to turn back to the Lord because the word tells us that every time that happens the angels in heaven rejoice and they throw a party and we get to be part of that that's what witnessing is about it isn't a test of you of what you know and of how good you are it's God's heart for the person that he's put in front of you to speak to because he loves them and he wants their heart to return to him Paul was watchful inclusive typical and he was non-judgmental he preferred to commend rather than condemn he commended the Athenians for their religiousness and their piety he didn't condemn them for idolatry he said when he got the opportunity to stand up and talk to them he said

I see that you're all very religious because you've got 73,000 statues to gods in the town he didn't say you're a bunch of idol worshippers he didn't condemn them if we want people to listen to us we can't condemn them we have to start where they are we have to find a point to connect with them on that's why I felt really deeply in my spirit today that the Lord was not wanting to condemn us

when we speak about witnessing people straight away think oh I'm going to get told off because I don't do it enough that isn't what this is about this is about looking at how the Apostle Paul does it and saying oh yeah I could do that and taking those tools and equipping ourselves to do what I think actually we all really want to do deep down we want to share the good news of Jesus because we know it's good news so he didn't judge but he was eager he was eager and ready to answer the questions that were thrown at him and to explain exactly what it was that he believed

[14 : 15] I thought about answering questions I thought can we really invite people in this season of invitation that we're in at church can we invite people to a counter-cultural accountability because that's what I think we're doing in the world people are used to pleasing themselves doing what they think is right living autonomously and what we're asking them to do is join this family of God join a community that actually holds accountability very highly we are accountable to God we are accountable to one another and nobody seems to be asking that I don't get many non-Christians come up to me and say can you tell me where I can go to be accountable or who I can be accountable to so I wondered can we answer questions that aren't even being asked but then I thought well Paul did the Athenians were quite happy to worship an unknown God they didn't seem bothered that they didn't know who he was but Paul came and answered that question without them asking it and questions can be really scary because what we think of is I'm not going to know the answer

I don't know that I'm not knowledgeable enough and they can frighten us but the Lord told his disciples in Luke 21 make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict God has promised he'll tell us what to say and it isn't always the answer to the question that's being asked years ago I used to run an open coffee morning in the church and I saw a big motorbike pull up in the car park one morning and a man got off took his helmet off and stood in the middle of the car park and looked around and he looked clearly lost he was a tall fair haired handsome young man and he just kept looking around this little car park so I went out to him and I said morning can I help you and he couldn't look at me he looked up straight away and he started mumbling and I immediately thought he's not well there's something troubling him so I said to him what's your name and he said my given name is Carl but my real name is the pale horse rider death of the apocalypse and he couldn't look at me he was looking like this my real name is the pale horse rider death of the apocalypse at which point my heart started pounding my palms started sweating

I felt the blood draining from me and I said to him like every good British person would do you want to come and have a cup of tea so he came in the church with me and I made him a cup of tea and he sat down and I rang across to the office and got one of the male pastors to come over and I was just quietly praying while Carl was just pouring out his heart about how God had called him to be the antichrist and he didn't want the job but someone had to do it and he needed to know what the call involved what did it mean to be the pale horse rider death of the apocalypse and the male pastor that I'd asked to come tried to explain revelation to him but I actually don't think the pastor had a clue what he was talking about and didn't know anything about what this young lad was asking and he was really deeply troubled and serious about what he wanted to know and at a certain point I thought I've got to stop this so I said to him Carl I said can I tell you what I know so he looked at me all hopeful and he said yeah and I said to him I don't know anything about the pale horse rider death of the apocalypse but I do know that you are not him I do know that God has a plan and a purpose for your life that is for your good and not for your harm I do know that he loves you and he wants to be in right relationship with you and I just began to speak to him about what I do know not what I don't know about who would do that who would talk about what they don't know nobody wants to do that but I thought I do know the truth and I do know the gospel and I just began to share that with him and I watched his demeanour change and this heaviness lifted off him and he began to just kind of sink a little bit his shoulders went down he relaxed his face relaxed he stopped babbling and he began to just listen and at a certain point

I said to him can I pray with you and we prayed and it was a really powerful encounter that he had with the Lord and he went off peaceful a few weeks later he came back just to tell me that he was well and he'd obviously been off his meds then but after I'd prayed with him he could think clearly and he was able to go back to his doctor and he got back on some medication and he he came well and said to me I just wanted to say I have never heard anything so powerful in all my life as those things you were telling me the gospel the good news and how simple is it we know that Jesus came

