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I've passed along and observed the objects of your worship. I found also an altar with the inscription to the unknown God. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

[4 : 08] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined the allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him, yet he is actually not far from each one of us.

For in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring. Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed in the art or imagination of man.

In the times of ignorance, God has overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 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. Now when they had heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, but others said, we will hear you again about this.

[5 : 38] And so Paul went out from their midst. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this time that we have now to be in your word. And you know what certainly my desire is from what I believe this text would teach us.

But Lord, I surrender any desire that I would have to what you want to accomplish in these moments together. You know everybody in this room and everybody that's listening or watching online. You know what we need to hear.

So come talk to us. Holy Spirit, speak to us. Empower, convict us. Lord, bring us to our knees.

In Christ's name that we pray. And God's people said, amen. You can be seated. As a child, he chewed off a quarter of his tongue.

And he didn't even know it. The doctors put a cigarette lighter underneath his foot just to see if it would blister. They ran needles up and down his spine just to see if they could get him to respond.

[6 : 45] And in all of these things, Steve felt nothing. Let me introduce you to Steve Peet. Steve, from early childhood, suffered from what's known as CIP.

It's a condition where he can't feel anything, especially pain. And because of his condition, Steve had to deal with a lot of injuries throughout his life.

He describes one occasion when he was playing at a playground at school, swinging back and forth. And he jumps off the swing, lands incorrectly, and shatters the bone in his right arm.

This is how he recalls it. Quote, I didn't feel anything. But there was a bone sticking out of my arm, which is a pretty good indication that I injured myself.

Close quote. Other kids at school would pick on him and they would say things like this. Quote, you say you can't feel anything. We'll wait till I get finished with you.

[7 : 51] On another occasion, Steve talks about how he sliced his finger while he was making dinner and didn't even notice. Throughout his life, he's had bad knees, fractured vertebrae, back problems, and many other physical issues.

And of all that, this is what Steve said. Quote, the thing is, a lot of people see me and they assume I'm healthy. But they have no idea that my body could give out at any time.

Doctors may understand the physical side of my condition, but they don't understand the human component of it. The psychology of what can happen when you grow up unable to feel.

I wonder if there's anyone here this evening like Steve. I don't mean that you suffer from the rare condition of CIP.

I mean this, and listen closely, Faith Family. You have lost your ability to feel. You do realize that that can happen in a lot of different ways in life.

[9 : 08] I mean, for example, sometimes we can hear so much about mass shootings that we just become numb to that reality. There are people that can become so depressed that they don't feel anything at all emotionally.

There are people that may live a certain lifestyle for so long that they can no longer relate to people who are struggling to make ends meet. There are people that get hurt in a relationship to the point that they don't feel anything towards the other person.

There are people that turn to alcohol so that they don't have to feel the pain of life. Or maybe it's just that you live in Minnesota where it's so cold you can't feel anything ever.

And all the Minnesotans said, Amen. Listen, whatever the case may be, all of us know this. It's a dangerous situation when you can no longer feel.

And that's not just true physically, relationally, or emotionally. Please listen to your pastor. It is dangerous spiritually.

[10:23] Here's what I mean. Faith family, it's a serious concern when Christians no longer feel the lostness around them.

That was a great place for an amen. It is a dangerous situation when Christians no longer feel the lostness around them.

That is, we become numb to the reality that there are people around us every day that we encounter all the time that do not know the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

And we just become numb to that. We don't feel that anymore. We lose the reality, the sense of the spiritual reality of the world in which we live.

And what we need to have happen to us is our spirits provoked to this reality. And that is exactly what happens to the Apostle Paul in Athens here in Acts chapter 17.

[11:26] In fact, look at verse 16. It says that while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, underline this, his spirit was provoked within him.

Why? Why? As he saw that the city was full of idols. Paul is in Athens and he feels something. His spirit is provoked within him. He becomes bothered by what he sees. He becomes burdened by what he sees.

He's in Athens. It's a place he never intended to go. He's only there if you read the earlier part of chapter 17 because of persecution that is in Thessalonica and Berea.

He's alone. He's waiting for Silas and Timothy to come join him. And he finds himself in one of the most influential cities of all the Roman Empire. I had the privilege for a second time when I took my sabbatical last year to spend some time in Athens.

[12:30] There I am literally at the Areopagus that we'll see in this text with the Parthenon behind me. And so Athens is a place I've been a couple of times. And so I can understand a little bit of what Paul would have experienced here.

So let's break this text down and understand first where Paul went. Let's understand a little bit more about Athens.

First, it's the philosophical center of the Roman Empire. This is a place where human wisdom and logic is the focal point of society.

And, of course, it doesn't take one long to just think historically what Athens has produced, the individuals that have come out of Athens, to understand how much human philosophy and wisdom was a part of their culture.

You think, for instance, of Socrates in 400 B.C. His student Plato or Aristotle in 300 B.C. Maybe one of the most famous ones to come out of Athens was a man by the name of Lloyd Christmas.

[13:37] I'm just kidding. That's not from Athens at all, right? Athens was a place of superior education. It had the Academy of Plato, the Porch of Zeno, the Garden of Epicurus.

Athens had one of the top three universities of all the Roman Empire. And then there's the crown jewel. There's the crown jewel of them all, the Parthenon. Athens was a place, a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena, who is the goddess of wisdom and reason.

So you put all that, just even that little bit together, you have a place of philosophers, of great universities, and you have the goddess of wisdom herself. It was a place of great philosophical debate and discussion.

Secondly, what you need to know about Athens is it was a pagan city. It was a pagan city. You pick up on that in verse 18. Notice what it says. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him.

So Paul mentions here the Epicureans. Epicurus, who we're talking probably 340s B.C., when he would have been in Athens, taught that the gods were not personal.

[14:54] And there was no afterlife. So the gods don't care what you do, and this life is all that you have. Now, that's going to lead to some big conclusions about how you live life.

Amen? I mean, if you want some kind of an idea of kind of how this would go, it's kind of like the phrase that we'll hear *carpe diem*. You know, gather ye rosebuds while ye may.

If you prefer a more simpler version, it would be like party on Garth, party on Wayne. You know, the gods don't care what you do. So you can do whatever you want to do.

And why would it matter anyways when there's no afterlife? If that's the case, then this should be your approach to life. Say, say, 2000, party over.

It's out of time. So tonight I'm going to party like it's 1999. I thought there are so many other modern examples I could give, but you've got to have Prince, right?

[15:58] I mean, we're from Minnesota here. So party like it's 1999. I mean, there's not going to be a tomorrow. Sound like Groundhog Day, right? There's not going to be an afterlife.

There's nothing coming. And the gods don't give a rip what you do. So party like it's 1999. I mean, live it. Listen, that's Epicureanism.

And so there was a lot of paganism, a lot of pursuit of all kinds of pleasures in Athens, because why does it matter? It's a place of great philosophy.

It's a pagan place. And then thirdly, it's a place of pluralism, of pluralism. What I mean here is that it's a place where they valued all different ways to truth, to truth.

We mentioned the Epicureans. Look back at verse 18. You'll see another group. It says, Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him.

[17:01] Well, the Stoics followed a man by the name of Zeno. Again, probably mid-300s B.C. And what he taught was the exact opposite of what the Epicureans believed.

And that is, what matters in life is not the pleasures of life, but the mind. It's how you think. In fact, very influenced with Plato, the idea was the physical body.

And some of you have heard me teach things like this before. The physical body and the pleasures that get expressed with that, that's wicked, that's evil. What really matters is your mind, how you think.

In fact, the ultimate goal, if you want to call it heaven, is that the mind is someday going to be released from this evil body. So you should avoid bodily passions and emotions like love and sex and pleasure and focus on the mind.

Don't you understand, silly rabbit? It's not to be enjoyed, life that is. It's to be endured. You endure until one day the mind can be released.

[18:08] So truth is ultimate, not pleasure. Notice this on the screen. Epicureans taught, live however you want. Stoicism taught, believe whatever you want.

Because what matters is not the body, but the mind. Are you with me? Not only is it a place of paganism and pluralism, it's a place of polytheism.

A place of polytheism. If Minnesota is the land of 10,000 lakes, Athens is the land of 30,000 idols. That is estimated about how many idols were in Athens.

Now, this is really difficult for us. I get that it's hard for us to relate to this kind of a culture or situation. I mean, one of my struggles as a preacher is I've got to bridge Athens to you.

And that is very, very difficult to do. Because you and I can't even fathom what it's like to live in a culture where education is exalted as an essential way of life.

[19:18] I mean, that's just very hard for us to relate to, right? We can't even imagine what it would be like to live in a culture that celebrates living for the moment and enjoying the pleasures of the now.

I mean, that feels like outer space. That's so weird to us. I can't even imagine living in a culture where truth is private and it can be whatever you want it to be.

And any god is fine as long as that's good for you. I mean, after all, aren't all gods in all ways equal? I mean, it would be impossible for me to have you understand what it would be like to live in a place like that.

Are you sensing the sarcasm? Because I am laying it on really thick. America is modern day Athens. America is modern day Athens.

Here's the mantra. Get a good education. Enjoy life while you can. And believe whatever works for you. That is Athens reincarnated.

[20 : 25] I don't believe in that, but just go with it. If there ever was a resurfacing of Athens, it is America. Which means, are you listening?

We're on the same mission today that Paul was then. That's where Paul went. Secondly, what did he see? What did he see?

As he's in Athens on this unplanned visit, which is often the case in the mission of God, what does he see? Verse 16. While Paul was waiting for them, that is Silas and Timothy at Athens, his spirit is provoked within him as he saw, what does he see?

A city, say it with me, full of idols. Now that phrase that he saw means he discerned. Notice this on the screen, Faith Family.

Paul's mind was never idle when it came to discerning idols. He was always thinking. He always had the ability to look beyond just what you could see to what was going on behind the curtain.

[21 : 31] He was able to see all of these physical expressions of a deeper spiritual reality. And as he observed Athens, he noticed a city full of idols.

That is a city given over to idol worship. And of course, if you were having a conversation with the normal Athenian, they would say, it's not an idol. It's just art.

It's not an idol. It's just sex. It's not an idol. It's just knowledge. But Paul was able to see that it went far deeper than that. It was actually something.

Listen, they worshiped. They worshiped. In fact, notice this on the screen. An idol is simply anything that you worship more than God. The biblical root of this is found in Romans chapter 1.

They worshiped the creation instead of the creator. And that is the central issue in the human heart. Because of our sin, we worship created things over our creator God.

[22 : 36] And of course, we don't call them idols either. We call them sports. This was such a great timed message for this weekend.

There are people tomorrow. Listen, I hope the Vikings win. I want to be on record. I hope the Vikings win. But there are people today and tomorrow whose entire year is going to be ruined based on the outcome of a game.

There are going to be people that go emotionally crazy on how a football team plays. You don't think there's something deeper going on there?

You don't think that there's a deeper attachment taking place than just enjoying entertainment? Oh, I'm not saying that everybody that's a Viking fan is an idol worshiper.

I'm saying many, or at least some, most certainly are. But let's not just pick on sports. It could be fashion. People just go absolutely crazy over fashion.

[23 : 40] It's their life. It could be just having fun with friends. Here's a big one in Minnesota. It could be family. You could be absolutely obsessed with family to the point that it determines your entire life.

Good things become ultimate things. Creation starts being worshipped instead of creator.

And we begin to live for these things. We begin to desire them more than anything. And we find our ultimate satisfaction not in God, but in them.

And Paul had the ability to discern this. Come here. Can you? Can I? It's a struggle to watch a movie, to read a book, to listen to advice, and discern what's behind it.

That you're not just looking at the surface, but that you can actually see. You can actually discern the worldview or the idol behind it. I've given this example before, but it really fits here.

[24 : 54] Many of you know and respect me for this. I grew up wanting to be Luke Skywalker. I did. I loved Star Wars. I wanted to be Luke Skywalker. And just a little more confession.

I thought, in addition to Daisy Duke from the Dukes of Hazzard and maybe Wonder Woman, that Princess Leia would be the perfect pastor's wife. I mean, I just, like, are you kidding me?

There is nothing more attractive and modest than hair buns. Like, come on. That is enough said.

And, of course, I'm devastated when I find out because I want to be Luke.

And I find out that Luke and Leia are brother and sister. But then I think, I'm from Tennessee. No one will even notice. So, no problem.

Some of you are like, really? Incest jokes? That's where he went tonight? My point is, is that I grew up loving Star Wars. And some of you loved Star Wars as well.

[25 : 48] And I remember as a kid having no idea of the worldview that's behind Star Wars. Star Wars is based out of Eastern mysticism, where all is one and light and dark are equal.

And it is entirely contrary to a Christian worldview. Now, that doesn't mean don't like Star Wars. It means know what you're watching. It doesn't mean don't enjoy sports. It's be careful that your heart doesn't get too attached to the team. In other words, notice this on the screen, Faith Family. Paul did not avoid culture. He discerned it. And that's really important because the church heritage that I grew up in would immediately take this sermon and say, that's right. Don't you ever watch a movie again? Don't you ever listen to music? I mean, delete your iTunes for Jesus. Like, stop it. It's not what Paul does here at all.

[26 : 50] The application isn't avoidance. It's discernment. It's learning to see what's going on behind the idol. See, the problem with many of us, myself included as a Christian, is that we are fish that rarely examine the water in which we swim. It's just TV, news, advice from coworkers. And we just, like, we're just swimming in this water and we never stop to see. There's more behind this that we must discern like Paul did in Athens. Paul is provoked because he sees not just a bunch of statues, not just a bunch of carved images. He sees hearts. That have become attached to them. He sees lives that rise and fall on what their gods do for them. And not only does he see a city full of idols, he sees a people full of questions. Pick it up in verse 19. There's so much here I need to speed up. They took him and brought him to the Areopagus.

[28 : 06] That was the place of debate, saying, may we know what this new teaching is that you're presenting? Because you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know, therefore, what these things mean. This is so insightful. Oh, it will preach. Listen, even with all their gods, they're still searching for more. You bring strange things to our ears. We don't know what this is that you're talking about, but we'd love to hear more. I mean, maybe we could add it to what we already have. I mean, you'd think 30,000 would be enough. I mean, this is like Minnesota saying, could we have one more lake? I think you have plenty. But this is what this will preach. And this is what this really reveals for us is this. Listen, listen. False gods never fulfill you. It's always going to leave you wanting. This is the problem when you put all your hope in the Minnesota Vikings. And I'm not even making a Viking joke.

[29 : 07] I'm really not. When you put your heart in a sports team or when you put your heart in a family or when you put your heart in anything created, it eventually lets you down. And now you need another one. You got to add another idol to the portfolio in hopes that maybe that will satisfy you. False gods never deliver on what they promise because they're false gods. Listen to what Isaiah says back in Isaiah 46, 1 and 2. Baal bows down, Nebo stoops. These were Babylonian gods, Babylonian idols. Their idols are on beast and livestock. These things that you carry are born as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop. They bow down together. They cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. That is exactly where your idol will take you, into captivity, where you become enslaved to that thing. And it could be your children.

[30 : 14] And now your entire life is determined based on the success or lack of success, the health or lack of health of your children. And that which is a good thing given to you from God for his glory becomes your God. And Paul had the ability to discern the heart attachment to these things. You with me? That's where he went. That's what he saw. Number three is what he felt. What he felt. I want to go back to verse 16. Verse 16 says, Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city full of idols. That is, Paul was emotionally affected. He was emotionally affected by what he saw. And the question for us is, do you find the lostness of the culture amusing or heartbreaking? Notice this on the screen, Faith Family. The danger of living in a culture full of idols is we can become numb to them. It's kind of like working at a funeral home.

Nope. Verse 17. Let's let Luke tell us what he did. Look at verse 17. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers conversed with him and said, what does this babbler wish to say? But others said he seems to be a preacher of divine, of foreign divinities because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

In one word, faith family, he engaged. What he felt made him act. Are you with me?

[37 : 39] What he felt made him act. He realized he couldn't just remain idle. And I don't mean that as a funny pun. He saw all the idols, which meant he can't remain idle.

I can't just sit back. I have the answer. I have the good news to this lost world. And Paul engaged. He went where people were gathered and he began to have conversation. The text says he reasoned with them. He had conversations about eternal things.

And these opportunities are around us all the time at the coffee shop, the hair salon, the ball game. Opportunities everywhere to engage the culture. So can I ask us this?

And listen, you know I'm not like some big legalist. Like, you know, the only thing that ever should ever come out of your mouth is, you know, is the Roman's road. Like you can't have conversations about sports or whatever.

[38 : 36] Yeah, these are gifts of God. But listen, what are we talking about? If we analyzed what most of our conversation is with people, if it's only sports and fashion and grandchildren, there are more important things to talk about, namely Jesus.

I mean, is there anything more important to talk about than the love of God that has been poured out through Christ the Son? I mean, that is the most important conversation and topic we could ever talk about.

It would be important for us, your pastor included, to do a serious analysis on the conversation we have. The problem is not that we talk too little. It may be that our conversations are too insignificant. The problem is not that we talk too little. It may be that our conversations are too insignificant. Paul went around and he shared and looked for ways to have conversations about Jesus Christ.

I'm not asking you to beat people over the head with a Bible. I'm not asking you to be a jerk for Jesus. That's not going to work anyways. I'm just simply asking you that when you go out, take some seeds to sow and just scatter them along the way.

[39 : 55] And you're going to have some people that say, you're strange. You bring some strange things to our ears. You babbler. And then you're going to have a few that would say, I'll meet you at Starbucks on Thursday because I'd like to talk more about that.

I've at least got some questions I'd like to ask. And I'd love to follow up on this conversation. It's where Paul went.

It's where Paul went. It's what he saw. It's how he felt. It's what he did. And then lastly, what he said. I'm going to give this to you very briefly because I think it can provide a helpful outline into how to have these conversations.

And I will go fast. This is a brief summary of what the apostle Paul did in terms of his gospel conversation. In fact, by the way, normal debates in the Areopagus would last about two to three hours.

So clearly, this is a shortened version. Be thankful for how little I preach. Okay. So here's the first. Let me give you this quick outline. First, we see is a bridge.

[41 : 05] That is, Paul finds a way to start with something they know and take it to what they don't know. Pick it up in verse 22. Again, I'm going to go fast, so put your seatbelt on.

Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, says, Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you're very religious. Do you see where he starts? Man, look at all your idols. You're quite the religious bunch.

Verse 4. For as I passed along and observed your objects of worship, I found an altar with an inscription to the unknown God. What therefore you worship is unknown. This I proclaim to you. Paul starts by saying, look at all the stuff in your life. Oh, I didn't realize you have grandchildren. Oh, I have grandchildren as well. I didn't realize you were a Minnesota Viking fan. I am too. I love to lose also.

Like, there's all different ways for us to, like, start with where people are and say, like, I see these things as a part of your life. I can relate to that. And it bridges the conversation.

[42 : 03] You don't have to just walk in and say, can I just tell you about Jesus? Uh, no. Just start a conversation. Hey, I see that we've got some similarity here.

And that will then open up the door to take the conversation further. Second is then he bridges what he sees about their life and culture to God. He shows them how God is different than their gods. Pick it up in verse 24. The God who made the world and everything in it, the Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn't live in temples made by man. He's not served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live in all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. And that he should, that we should seek God in the hope that we might feel their way toward him and find him.

Yet he is actually not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. So again, quick point here is he's able to say, man, I notice all the religious idols that you have.

[43 : 12] Let me tell you about the one true and living God and how he's different. He's the creator. And you can't shrink him down to a temple.

Because he doesn't need anything. He's self-sufficient. In fact, he's not in need of us, we're in need of him. Because he gives us life and breath and everything.

And without him we'd be nothing. Do you see what Paul did there? He started with something that was very common, something that they knew, and he bridges it to God. Here's one more thing. You know how all your idols can't be known? God has actually made himself known. The third thing is, quickly here, is sin. He addresses their idols as a sign of rebellion.

He addresses their idols as a sign of rebellion. In verse 29, being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed in the art and imagination of man.

[44 : 22] You see, we are to love God with all our hearts and have no other gods before him. But here's the thing. All of us have made idols. It's understandable, Athenians, why you would do this.

Because we all do this. We all are searching after things. Our heart is trying to find satisfaction. And do you understand that when our heart finds satisfaction in anything other than God, that's called sin.

That's called rebellion. That's Romans 1, worshiping the creation instead of the creator. And that's true of everyone. You've done that.

I've done that. He starts with what they know. He gets to God. He then gets to sin. Number three or number four is repentance. Repentance. He tells them the necessity of turning from their sin, from their self to God.

Verse 30. The times of ignorance God has overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. That is, simply turn to him.

[45 : 21] Turn your life to him. Away from yourself. Away from your disappointing idol. And to the one who can truly satisfy you. And here's why you need to do it.

Number five is because judgment is coming. Oh, we don't love this message in America. But the Bible teaches that judgment is coming. That there will be a judgment day. Verse 31.

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 the full assurance by raising him from the dead. That is, there is a judgment day coming.

Don't you see? I understand why your heart is searching after these things, but that's called sin. And if you would just turn from that and turn to God, you would avoid the judgment that is coming for you.

And then lastly, where does every good sermon end? Jesus. Jesus. Look at what he says. On what authority does Paul address this?

[46 : 20] Verse 31. Again, he's fixed the day on which he'll judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. And of this he has given assurance to all by what?

Raising him from the dead. Let me tell you about the grace of the Lord Jesus through the resurrection from the dead.

Let me tell you what Christ has done for you on the cross and through the empty tomb and how you can have the salvation of God.

God. That's a very brief outline of what Paul says. He starts with what they know. He gets to God, to sin, to repentance, to judgment.

