Meeting Jesus: Introducing Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 March 2018

Preacher: Bishop Charlie Masters

[0:00] As we remain standing, let's pray. Lord Jesus, we are grateful that you've promised where two or three gather in your name, you're in the midst of them. We stand amazed that it's possible and it's your desire to use even us in your great enterprise of calling people to yourself.

We offer ourselves afresh to you and pray that you'd speak to us in a way which would change us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's a delight to be at St. John's.
I am always grateful for every opportunity and I'm grateful for the opportunity today, especially today. I have been standing by with the joy and thanksgiving that you have taken this month period as a church to think about this thing of being a witness, to Jesus.
And I, you know, if there's one thing I pray for our diocese and for all our churches and all our people, it's one of them is that each one of us would be changed such that we would open our mouths and speak of Jesus to the people around us.
Because what's clear in the scriptures is that God's intention, as amazing as this is, I still can't get over it, God's intention is to use the like of you and me to promote what is so close to his heart, which is the salvation of people.
[1:40] The very name of Jesus speaks of the purpose and the mission of him, which is for the forgiveness of sins. Well, so we know this is a big deal for God and yet he's chosen to use us as the means, as the conduit through which the message goes out and then people can respond in faith.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 2.10, he said, So it's a great joy and I thank you as a church for taking this time.
This is well worth it. And I'm glad that not only are you doing this Meet Jesus sermons, of which this is one of them, but you also have your Tuesday night CCQ and I've been practicing all week to get it right.
I think it's connect content and questions. I get the two C's sometimes mixed up. But anyway, it's a pretty good thing and I'm looking forward to being there on Tuesday and I'm hoping many, all of you will be there as well for what I think is a very productive thing.
In your sermons, Meet Jesus, the last couple, I think, have made the point of why questions are important. For instance, in the Colossians 4, which was a couple of weeks ago, Paul talks about praying for an open door for the gospel.
[3:15] He prays that he would be faithful to declare the mystery of Christ accurately. But he then makes a shift, which is clearly to use you in the plural, which implies you and me.

And he says this in verse 6, Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.
The assumption is that in our interaction with people and our witness, there's going to be questions. And your responsibility and mine is to take the time to be ready, to give an answer and to do so respectfully and graciously, but not as wimps, not whatever you say, boss, that's what I'll say back. But in fact, there is a boldness and a clarity as well. And then last week, 1 Peter 3, verse 15 said this, But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.
Yet do it with gentleness and respect. Questions? Ready with a defense and doing so with respect and gentleness. Well, dear friends, I'm happy to say that in what Alita has read this morning in Acts 17, verses 16 to 34, we have an example before our very eyes of a question being asked of one guy, Paul, and how he handled that and how God used it to open a door for the gospel.
[4:56] And I find this an amazing and wonderful portion of scripture and I'm into superlatives. You may be not surprised about that. And if you like to tone it down, that's fine.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But I'm into superlatives because I think you can't overstate these things. And so I have a number of things that I consider to be amazing about this passage which I'd like you to think about.
First of all, the situation itself is amazing. What is the situation? You ask. Well, I'm happy to say that in fact in Acts 16, there was a very critical moment in Paul's life where they were trying to figure out what direction and the Holy Spirit said no to this and the Holy Spirit said no to that.
And now, sort of in a heap, that's my picture, that's the amplified version, there he is waiting, wondering what to do in Troas and he has a vision of a Macedonian who says, come over and help us.
Immediately, Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke concluded, this is God. And so they bought their tickets and they went across over to what is the Ignatian Way and they found themselves first in Philippi and there they witnessed and a church was begun but they ended up being turfed out of town.
[6:14] Then they keep going on the Ignatian Way, Amphipolis and Apollonia and then Thessalonica and they there preach the gospel and again a church is founded and again there's turmoil and again they're turfed out of town and they carry on to Berea and then eventually Paul ends up in Athens.

But he sends Timothy and Silas back to find out how these poor churches who were formed in the middle of controversy and persecution how they're doing. So there's Paul.
The situation then friends is Paul all alone in Athens in this great city with all the multitude of temples there's the Parthenon over there under the shadow and this incredible thing and all these gods who are being worshipped and sacrificed to.
And so verse 16 says now Paul while Paul was waiting for them in Athens his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city was full of idols.
It's not just that Paul was there which is amazing or it's not even so much amazing that he was provoked because he was a believer. He had the Holy Spirit in his life and he could discern the difference between darkness and light.
[7:34] but what is amazing is that that being provoked did not cause him to flee the city and say get me out of here Lord this is too dark nor was he like Jonah waiting to see God zap them all or like James and John praying you know for the Samaritan village send fire Lord would have made sense in many ways.

but instead of that this man who had the gospel on his heart had a sense of call and was provoked in another direction.
First of all he understood the gospel was the power of God for salvation and anyone and everyone says Romans 1 16 he said for I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
So regardless of your background regardless of whether your pedigree or your understanding of these things when you receive the message of the gospel by faith you're justified you're made right you're forgiven the blood of Jesus covers you and you're now forgiven forever you're part of the elect however you want to say that this is what happens and so Paul as he stood there in the sense of all these horrible idols and we know from 1 Corinthians 10 for instance that when people sacrifice to idols that's not just a neutral poor guys they've got it wrong Paul made it clear that they were actually though they didn't know this sacrificing to demons this is a charged and evil and horrific situation that Paul finds himself but there the gospel stands and there Paul in Christ is there but more than that he's also as a servant so 1 Corinthians 9 he talks about his attitude to these things he says this he says for though I am free from all
I have made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them to the Jews I became as a Jew in order to win Jews to those under the law I became as one under the law though not being myself under the law that I might win those under the law to those outside the law I became as one outside the law not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ that I might win those outside the law to the weak I became weak that I might win the weak I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings that's the way Paul was as he lingered in Athens in such dismay he was aware as a servant that he bore the gospel and therefore he had responsibility to these people who were so lost and under such darkness and under the thumb of Satan himself that's amazing thing number one amazing thing number two is that it drove him to to to do something so it says in verse 17 it says so he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and in the

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

marketplace every day with those who happened to be there now reasoned is a word that Luke uses to describe what Paul does he did that in Thessalonica in the synagogues he reasoned but there's something very incredible here in Athens because on the one hand he's reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout the believers of the Old Testament
[11:31] Gentiles who are believers so there was a whole rich thing of the Bible to draw on in order to help them understand it says for instance in Acts 17 3 what he said to the Thessalonians explaining and proving that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead saying this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ that's surely what he did in the synagogue but in the marketplace there was none of that rich Bible to draw on and yet he reasoned with them patiently persuasively persistently and not just once blurting out a sentence and then running for cover and praying that Jesus would come back before he ever has to do that again or something like that but in fact he comes back the next day and what he said stands and so now they have a shot at him again there is this incredible thing going on all alone in Athens reasoning with them and we find out that in fact there were some toughies there was those who were very articulate in various systems

Epicureans and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him and they mocked him I want to say to you that if you are going to be a witness to Christ I trust you have thick skin I hope that you're not looking to people just saying boy I'm so glad you said that because I needed to hear that well that's the best thing I ever heard ever ever ever once in a while you might hear that but there will be a lot of mocking a lot of pushback a lot of cynical oh come on you don't seriously believe that do you that kind of thing and so they describe him as a babbler and he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities and they're sort of jab jab to each other rolling of eyes and all of those things and yet in the midst of that out came a question it says and they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying may we know what this teaching is that you are presenting there's the question whatever their attitudes they now were setting him up in a place of great learning the brightest and the best minds were all there waiting to hear what he had to say is that not a miracle is that not the spirit of God working that's an amazing thing number two and in fact it's clear that 19 to 21 and he took them and brought him and it says now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new what a great opportunity here's Paul of who knows where well it turns out to be Tarsus and so now he gets his moment amazing thing number three is that the spirit of God having the question being asked having opened the door so that now he has a platform for speaking and answering the question with respect and with gentleness seasoned with salt is that God gave him a way in a connection point which was of the spirit of God see if you're going to be a witness you come as a servant which means you need to observe what's going on one of the driving forces for being well read
I would suggest to you today is not because you want to fill your mind with all sorts of stuff that you may or may not believe but in fact it is to equip you to understand something of the very people that you're trying to reach it says a servant that you need to be well read and you need to make your task and so Paul was and we'll see that he quotes Epimenides I practice these names and Aratus or Aratus so you'd be impressed and so but nevertheless this is the way it was but what was the hook now let me tell you a story of in 1993 for me personally I was my family and I spent six months in Europe and I was part of an evangelistic team that traveled in Eastern Europe and Russia it was just after the wall came down just after the USSR it was no longer the USSR so it was quite a thing to be in Russia and on this particular time we're in a place called Kaluga our team is five Russians and two Canadians and one of the Russians being a translator unfortunately for me it was my turn to speak and in this particular time we're in a city called Kaluga which is a university town about 250 kilometers south of of Moscow and we're in a small technical college
I don't know how this got set up but anyway there we and the vice principal brought us into the office you know what vice principals do they look down over their over their glasses you know and you've got the glasses for that and and they and he was just that and he said to us and unfortunately this was translated as well is that you're allowed to speak looking to me but frankly these are technical people who aren't going to like what you have to say and they may or may not put up with it they may give you some pushback I'm just saying and so okay okay I get it I get it and so I prayed as never before that the Lord would give a hook some way in for a guy like me who knows nothing about technical colleges and so on and Russia I suddenly thought of hockey because I'm a Canadian and I wanted to be a hockey player I know that's laughable but I had a anyway

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

I wanted to be a hockey player for many years as I grew up I worked I practiced you know for that goal and and as it happened the world tournament had just happened and the Russians had won and beat soundly the Canadians and so I could say you know and I knew many of the Russians by name their players and also could say most of your best players are now playing in the NHL and we follow them with admiration all that kind of stuff and then I said you know I wanted to be a hockey player I know that seems funny and so on and and but one day I heard the gospel again the gospel of Jesus Christ and I invited him into my life and suddenly all the things that seemed so important before seemed to fade away and there was only one thing it was knowing Jesus and making him known which is what became important and that's why
[18:28] I'm here and I said to these folks and then I tried to preach the gospel well it was a God time and in fact no one left no one shouted no rotten tomatoes and in fact at the end of this time the principal who came with this arm load of flowers I don't know where she got them anyway and and she deposited it on them and with tears running down her face she said to the student body for 70 years we've heard there is no God but today we now know there is it was one of those times and then she personally set up interviews with the student body coming and the opportunity to talk and pray with students well there was a hook there was a way and that's what happened with Paul in this in this passage as he said I realize that you're religious people that wasn't a put down that was just a statement of fact you couldn't it's the elephant in the room as you look around Athens and then what he says is but I've noticed as I've toured around your great city one altar which says in the inscription to the unknown God you see if you got a bunch of gods competing and all with their strengths and weaknesses and pettinesses and you're trying to apply leverage from one against the other to protect you against this and that but there's always the fear that maybe you neglected somebody you missed somebody and so there is the need for the unknown God to sort of cover that one who

I don't know your name yet but you know it's to you well imagine Paul standing acknowledging the fact that he saw this kind of obscure altar refers to it and then says friends learned friends it's my joy today to declare to you what you don't the one you don't know to the unknown God I'm now going to proclaim him see that's what Paul did that's who he is so for instance we can read in Colossians where he says I've got it marked I think he says this he said him speaking of Jesus we proclaim warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ for this I toil struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me see when Paul looks at you he looks past you to a person fully mature in Christ and his desire whoever you are is to see that happening in your life if you're not in Christ he's going to warn you and teach you so that you can hear the gospel with the hope that you'll respond by faith if you are in Christ he's going to teach you with this hope that you'll grow to full maturity in Christ and how does that all happen is by proclaiming
Jesus and he said that's what I struggle so that's what he's doing here and God gave him a hook so the third thing is amazing is that not only was the door open and a question was asked but God gave a way in to be able to proclaim Jesus number four amazingly this unknown God and let's face it if you are not in Christ for you he still is the unknown God he's still a name a concept a thought that you may admire or not but he's unknown and so for you there is the need to come to know and that's the good news of these next verses from 24 through 28 is that Paul is saying this unknown God is so different and he would have waved his hands and pointed to the great temple Parthenon and said verse 24 he said this he said the God who made the world and everything in it being the Lord of heaven and earth does not live in temples made by man even big temples even really impressive temples even ones that are going to stand and still have some of it still standing today temples that's not where God lives this God is in a whole different league all alone and he doesn't need what you have to offer you can't apply leverage by buying him off nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything he's the giver not the receiver more than that verse 26 from one man
Adam he brought the whole human race not long ago I was at Christ the King in Toronto and some of you would know the rector there Keith Ganser and he was preaching on what I consider to be a pretty obscure text Luke 3 23 to 38 which is all genealogy many of those names are not listed anywhere else in the Bible but in Luke 3 and why in the world Luke inserted that and so on but he asked that question and preached what I consider to be a wonderful sermon making it clear that Luke follows the trail from Jesus all the way to Adam because he wants to make it clear that Jesus

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

is for all of humanity not just the Jews stopping at Abraham for all of humanity and so it is that from this one man more than that he's not far verse 27 and 28 he says that they should seek God in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him yet he's actually not far from each one of us for in him we live and move and have our being that's the quote from Epimenides as even some of your poets have said for we are indeed his offspring quoting a poet apparently
Aratus or Aratus in a sense it's such a pathetic picture of sort of groping around with the hope that somehow somehow I find God and what he's declaring is that in fact if that's not going to work that's not going to work you'll never find God you got to be found by God and it's good news he's not far away at all it's kind of like Jesus in Matthew 12 said the queen of the south will rise up and condemn this generation because she traveled from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and someone far greater is right here and he's pointing to himself as he says that and so we find out that there is this amazing thing God creates in people an appetite a longing sows in our hearts a heart to know the living God because that's what we're made for do you remember the quote from Pascal there is in the heart of every man a God-shaped vacuum which can only be filled with Jesus Christ and Paul is looking in that direction verse 29 but idols are a disgrace being then God's offspring we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone an image formed by the art and imagination of man that is a disgrace and brings God down you cannot do that because of the way
[26:18] God really is and lastly he says we are accountable to this one verse 30 the times of ignorance God overlooked but now he commands all people everywhere to repent there is a time ahead of reckoning he goes on and says 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 this unknown God is one who in patience and love has withheld his judgment but there is a day there is a day dear friends when all because all humanity is accountable to him and don't misunderstand the fact that he's been patient all this time as if there will never be an accounting there will be Paul is saying and there's nothing wimpy about what Paul is he's respectful he's gracious but he's also faithful and he makes it clear this God this unknown God is going to hold you friend to account and if he stopped there that would be sad news it would just be saying

God sent him to condemn you but that's not what the Bible says in John 3 17 is it for God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him and so it is that in verse 31 we have this amazing thing because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he's appointed now who could that sorry who could that man be that he's appointed well it's obviously Jesus and we know that from what he says but it reminds us of at the baptism this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased God did not take a vote and say all those who think he's a pretty good guy signify he said this is my beloved son and at the transfiguration where Peter's saying let's make a booth for Moses and Elijah and you Jesus the father says this is my beloved son listen to him and all the others fade away and so it is there is a man and his name is Jesus who's been appointed and there is a day that's coming which has been fixed already but the amazing news is the one whose judge was raised from the dead what's that about it is to prove that the judge solved the problem of death that he was substituted in for in our place he died as we sang in that brand new song that's a wonderful his dying became your dying friend and his rising became your rising proving not only that he is God he is the one who's going to be coming as the judge but he solved the problem so why not draw close to him so that his appearing will be for you a day of joy as opposed to a day of fear and of judgment amazing the news of Jesus coming is good news he's not far off he's right there call out to him by faith and he'll be right there for you and you'll be right there with him forever finally what's amazing to me is there was a response not all of it was good it says verse 32 now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead some mocked at least there was a reaction at least there was a response and they got it they heard it and they didn't like it they mocked but others had said we will hear again about this just recently
I had an interaction with a person and after it she said I'm going to church because I need to learn I think that's a fantastic response and she said she's taking her family too this is amazing and wonderful but more than that it says but some men joined him and believed among whom are these guys Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them dear people of St. John's I think in this passage we have an invitation we have an example of how Paul dealt with a

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

tricky situation and a question and but it's more than that it's an opportunity to hear the gospel and it's possible that there could be someone even here today who unwittingly got dragged here by someone else perhaps and knows that for them still Jesus is the unknown God why not today call out by faith to him so that that day fixed in the purposes of God will be for you a day of joy and celebration but more than that there is an invitation to not to be provoked to be provoked to allow the spirit of God to give us a sense of how dire the situation we really are in but rather than bailing from it and opting out of it to choose to engage it because we carry the gospel which changes everything dear friends let's pray for the opening of the spirit of God let's pray for a way in for the hook and let's pray for an ability to bring the Jesus that people need would you stand with me Lord Jesus I thank you for this great church I thank you for each person here today and I thank you for the example of Paul as he stood all alone in Athens but he had you Lord and he had the gospel and whether we have few or many around us we also have you and we have the gospel Lord if there's any who want to call out to you by faith right today would you hear their voice and we know you will Lord Jesus I ask you to come into my life right now I want to be yours forever and for others of us who have been stirred by the example of Paul would you cause us to be provoked as he was which causes us to reason with people and would you give us ways in so that we can present Jesus because for now for them he's still unknown we pray in Jesus name Amen Amen

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host