

Gospel for all People

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[0 : 00] When you hear the name Athens, what comes to your mind? Is it the place where the Olympic Games, which many of us have been watching, stutter?

Or an excellent place to visit when we can travel again? Maybe it's a place you call home, a place related to your family and ancestry.

We have been looking into the second half of the book of Acts, seeing how Paul and his companion bring the gospel, the good news of Jesus' saving works through his death and resurrection to all people.

Last week, we were at Philippa, where Paul met with a businesswoman that traced purple quartz, a slave girl that was exploited, and a brutal drailer.

God's mercy reached out to all of them, all different types of people, and their lives changed. Today, we left Philippa and carry on traveling south.

[1 : 12] After passing through Thessalonica and Beria, where Paul speaks to Jews and Gentiles, men and women, we will get to Athens. Athens reminds me of the elites, the top of the tops, the best of the best, elite thinkers, elite athletes, elite cultures, the political and intellectual capital of the great nation of Greece.

We see from last week that God's saving grace is for all people, the upper class merchandisers, the lower class slave girls, and even the middle class jailers.

But God's gospel is also for the elites, the thinkers, the government officials and politicians. God's gospel is for everyone, for all people.

To the God-feeling or the religious, men and women, ordinary or prominent, Paul proclaims the same gospel to all these people.

But not all of them have the same response as Lydia and the jailer from chapter 16. Please turn with me to Acts 17 and go to the St. Paul's apps for today's outline.

[2 : 35] Let's find out how God's gospel applies to all people and how should you respond. Luke, the author of Acts, told us at the beginning of the chapter 17, when Paul and his companion come to Thessalonica in verse 2-3.

As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days, he listened with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and raise from the dead.

This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah, he said. This custom of Paul going first into the synagogue, the cultural and religious meeting place of the Jews, is shown in verse 1, verse 10 and 17, in Thessalonica, Berea and Athens.

This meeting place were not exclusively for Jews only. They also have God-fearing prominent Greeks.

Jews and Greeks were together learning from the scripture, the Old Testament part of our Bible today, about the Jewish God.

[3 : 58] They had to go to the synagogue to learn about the scripture because they were not as privileged as us, who has readily easy access to the Bible.

On the other hand, they have the privilege of meeting and physically interacting with each other to learn about God, which I believe many of us long to be in for our current fight against COVID.

God sent Paul to the early Christians to make sure they do not just know him intellectually. He wants them to interact with him relationally.

Moving them from being persuaded to joining as fellow disciples of the faith. God's intention for all people to be interacting with him relationally never changed.

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Throughout his journey from Philippi to Athens, Paul proclaims Jesus Christ as a savior and speaks about the necessity of his suffering and resurrection.

[5 : 14] The topic of suffering always seems to come to go hand in hand when a discussion about religion and God. I believe that reflects one common narrative of human being.

All people, being good or bad, intelligent or simple-minded, Western or Oriental, whatever background, whatever culture, all share the common goal in life.

I may have to ask Randy to help me go to the next slide. Thank you. We ask the common question, how can we avoid unnecessary suffering and have a good and happy life?

If you ask anyone, even the words of the criminal, do you wish to be happy? No one would say, I do not wish it. If you ask a criminal, why do you commit the crime?

He or she may say, so I can have what I do not have. But why do you wish to have what you do not have? Because it feels bad not to.

[6 : 30] They think getting what they want will make them happy. They want to be made happy by what is wrong and terrible is the least of their worries. For it is good to be happy.

Whom Paul encounters in the marketplace of Athens typify this pursuit of life's common goal.

In verse 16, while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he listened in the synagogue with both Jews and Godfingd Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, what is this Babylon trying to say? Other remarks, he seems to be advocating foreign gods.

They say this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Paul met two groups of philosophers in the marketplace in a very simplistic way.

[7 : 52] If you ask the Epicurean philosophers, what makes a happy life? They will mostly answer, the pleasure of the body.

And to the Stoic, what things makes a happy life? They will say the virtue of the mind. There are two groups of people who sit at the opposite end with competing views.

But they both pursue the same thing, the happiness of life. And because of this common pursuit, they are never mutually exclusive.

All humans fall between these two ends. One end promotes that God has no interest in or influence on the affair of man.

The gods are supremely happy and serene for they are not bothered by humans. There is nothing to fear or worry about God or afterlife.

[8 : 58] When one dies, all is over. Both body and soul are gone and no future punishment to worry about. The Eastern religion of Taoism and some New Age religion that pursues tranquility of soul sits at this end.

They understand the world around them by sense perception. Truth is what they can feel and touch. What is natural to their senses must be true.

The world is a garden, not a jungle. Enjoyment of life and happiness comes from a community of good friends as their essential pleasure.

Men and women with equal status in a standard way of life helps them to shelter and protect the fearful.

We find it very hard to bear to be restricted from staying in contact and enjoying close interaction with friends and other humans, which is most likely because this kind of value in our mindset.

[10 : 18] If at this end is the enjoyment of life, the opposite end is to endure life. When the goings get tough, the toughs get going.

Kind of attitude. The body and physical world are evil and stop us from thoroughly enjoying the spiritual, where our mind will return to after death.

So we should work hard at putting our minds over our body. However, life is also based on fate. We are all actors in a drama chosen by the author of life.

If it is a short drama, then in a short one. If it is a long, then in a long one. If it is the author's pleasure that you should and as a poor man, see that you will act it well.

Or a disabled person, or a ruler, or a private citizen. Your life is to act well the given part, but you have no business choosing which part to play.

[11 : 30] to play. The supreme God, or guiding principle, determines everything that happens in the world. So, whatever will be, will be.

To them, God is not just playing with our lives, but also embedded in everything we can find in this world. It manifests itself into a different God for different people and culture.

People at this end tend to be very religious. And a lot of world religions fall into that. Religious people, no matter from the East or the West, tend to think that to ensure prosperity and blessing for their life is to do good deeds or offer up offerings.

If God is happy, human will get happiness and good fortune in return. Otherwise, we will get what we deserve for upsetting God.

We all live through life trying to find a happy middle. And in our current climate, it is much harder to come by.

[12 : 54] Paul's speech at the Aragogos in Athens and what he said to the Thessalonians and the Berians explicitly and implicitly point to a different perspective of life.

And the ultimate answer to our shared pursuit of a happy life. to the Jew and God-feeling Gentiles in Thessalonica and Beria, Paul spoke explicitly in verse 3 to say that this Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah.

And the summary by those unfriendly Jews in verse 6 to 7 say this, this man who have caused trouble all over the world have come here saying that there is another king one called Jesus.

In Athens he spoke implicitly without mentioning his name or quoting any scripture that Jesus is the only answer.

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the area of this and said people of Athens I see that in every way you are very religious for as I walk around and look carefully at your objects of worship I even find an altar which was which this inscription to an unknown God.

[14 : 34] So you are ignorant of the very things you worship and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temple built by human hands and he is not served by human hands as if he needed anything rather he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

Paul deals with the superstition of religious people straight away. God of the Bible is the world's creator and is not limited to one location.

The Lord of heaven and earth is not easily manipulated by humans or need humans for anything. He himself gives life and breath and everything is us human that needed God and God is all that we need.

From one man he made all nations that they should inhabit the whole earth and he marked out for there upon the time in history and the boundary for the lands.

God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far from any one of us. Paul carries on to point out that God is not far from each one of us and he ruled for us to seek him and find him.

[16 : 18] The word perhaps in between seeking and finding highlights God's God's sovereignty does not diminish human responsibility.

Perhaps reach out for him in first that without reaching out humans will not find him. The gospel unites God's sovereignty and human responsibility in a brilliant mystery.

What we are to reach out for is not the pleasure of the body or the virtue of the mind. We are to reach out for God and to live out his purpose for our life, to honor and glorify him.

These two verses provide the best answer for anyone that are uncertain or anxious about the purpose of their life. the answer to a good and happy life is God.

There is nothing more rewarding than to have a vibrant relationship with the creator of this world. What can make life happier than communion with God?

[17 : 31] God is the answer to the common pursuits of all people. When we understand our purpose and find our answer of happy life, we will be able to stop doing those meaningless things.

Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image made by human design and skill.

The conclusion to Paul's speech is since we are made by God in his image, we must not think that we can create an image and call it God.

it is not a small matter to make ourselves objects of worship and robbing the created God of his glory.

Paul continued to say, in the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

[18 : 37] God has set a day to judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him up from the dead.

All people have the same destiny. God has set a day to judge the world with justice. We all have to face a judgment demonstrated by the man who has resurrected from the dead.

That man is Jesus Christ. Given this inevitable future day of judgment, God commands all people everywhere to repent.

You might think, what am I to repent of? Theologian J.I. Packer explained, repentance means justice.

changing your mind so that your view, values, goals, and ways are changed and your life is lived differently.

[19 : 44] The change is radical, both inward and outward. Mind and judgment, will and affections, behavior and lifestyle, motives and purpose are all involved.

Repentance means starting a new life, life, to live a new life. The new life lived under the new king, Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' death and resurrection, this new life starts by believing, believing in Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Paul preached the same gospel in three places.

Each places, verse 4, 12, and 32, some believers allow themselves to be persuaded and believed and followed.

we also see some scoffers who mock and sneeze and willing to wait out and accept the evidence like in Athens.

[20 : 53] And the worst of the characters is a jealous Thessalonian Jew who ran up hooligans to form a mob and start a riot to stop Paul and his companion from sharing the gospel.

not just willing to believe themselves, they also stop others from looking into it. In Thessalonica, some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas as a large number of God-feeling Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

But other Jews were jealous, so they round up some bad characters from the marketplace, form a mob, and start a riot in the city. And at Beria, in verse 12, as a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Beria, some of them went there too, agitating the crowd and stirring them up. And then in verse 32, when they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneezed, but others said, we want to hear you again on this subject.

At that, Paul left the council, some of the people become followers of Paul and believed. we have those who believe and follow and those who scoff and sneeze in response to God's command to change their mind about him, to repent and start living a new life with views, values, goals, and ways based on his teaching.

[22 : 43] We also have those who doubt, who say, we want to hear you again on this subject, ever inquiring, but never embrace a conclusion.

What kind of a listener are you? What is your response to God's calling today? Now in the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received a message with great eagerness and examined the scripture every day to see if what Paul said was true.

As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek and women and many Greek men. Many people in Berean believed because they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scripture every day to see if what Paul said was true.

They embraced and received the message and they go to a scripture positively to confirm Jesus' identity as our king and savior.

To become a believer and grow as a disciple of God, it's not enough only to sit and listen. The Berean examined the scripture every day after they received the gospel.

[24 : 11] Unlike us, we have easy access to the Bible. The Berean would be examining the scripture daily in fellowship with others in the synagogue.

And through this fellowship and interaction, living daily under the lordship of Jesus, his death and resurrection enabled them to repent and change their perspective on life and the world they are living in.

The way a faithful Christian will grow is through daily Bible reading and prayer, a regular devotional time with God in fellowship with others.

our current situation makes it more crucial for us to maintain our connection and fellowship with other believers. believers. Have you connected with anyone recently?

Have you responded to the gospel call for you to repent? Are the changes in your life reflect your acknowledgement of Jesus as your savior and his life lived out in faith under his lordship?

[25 : 26] Do you know who you are worshiping? are you worshiping a thing that you made up? Or are you worshiping God, the creator of the world, the lord of heaven and earth?

From one man, God made all nations that they should inhabit the whole earth and he marked out for their point of time in history and the boundary for their lands.

God did this so that they may seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far from any one of us.

God is not far from you. Reach out, feel your way for him and you will find him. Jesus is all you need. Believe in Jesus.

Worship him alone.