

Paul in Athens

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn to that second passage of scripture that we've just read, the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 17, and reading at verse 22.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Heropagus, said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.

But 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. Which you therefore worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

Paul here is on one of his missionary journeys, having to go from place to place, because everywhere he went he found himself being attacked, stoned, cast aside as dead, being persecuted for the gospel that he preached.

[1 : 32] If Paul had preached anything else, he would have been applauded and lauded as one of the greatest orators of his day. But he preached the Lord Jesus Christ.

Preaching the Lord Jesus Christ, not only as the saviour for the Jews, but also for the saviour of the Gentiles, a saviour for the whole world. And that's where he came into complete conflict with his own nation.

The Jews thought they had a particular claim on God, so that no one else was allowed to worship him, no one else was going to be saved by him. And here was Paul preaching a gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ had communicated to him, that the gospel was to the whole world, not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles, not only to the bond, but also to the free.

And that, as I said, brought him into complete conflict with the people whom he had been raised with. And so he makes his way from Phippolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica, then on his way down to Birea.

Now his great message and all that he preached was that Christ, it was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.

[3 : 02] And he says, this Jesus who I'm speaking about, this Jesus who I'm proclaiming to you, he is the Christ. And as he spoke to the Jews, the Jews knew exactly what he meant by saying he is the Christ, he is the Messiah.

He is the Messiah that the Jewish nation had been waiting for generations for. And here's Paul saying, this Jesus of Nazareth, this despised Nazarene, he is the one I'm proclaiming to be the Christ.

And there he goes on down to Birea. Birea, there's something very noticeable happens. As he goes to Birea, he finds that the men there were those who received the word with eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were true.

That is the mark of all those who are students of God's word. Not only to hear what is being said from pulpits, but also to examine if these such things are true.

Doesn't matter who's saying them. Doesn't matter how famous or how great the oratory or how eloquent it might be said. We have to examine the scriptures to see if these things are true and only if these things are true from the scriptures.

[4 : 17] Do we accept them? And do we apply them to our daily lives? And so Paul then finds his way here into Athens.

Now as we live out our lives here in this world, all our spiritual enjoyment is to equip us to serve the world in which we have been brought to live.

We have been brought to know the Lord Jesus Christ. We are brought to know him and to own him as our Lord and as our God. And in that knowledge we are to be a servant.

we are called to serve Christ to be his witnesses to bear testimony of all that he has done for us and for our salvation.

That is our calling as Christians to tell the world about the God who so loved us that he gave his son for us.

[5 : 26] Offered up his son for us that we might be saved. the Christian church is the only organization in the world which is for the benefit of others.

There are many clubs and many organizations and many of them are set up to establish their own point of view or their own agendas. The Christian church was established with the direct reason that they would be for the benefit of others to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that he might be known and that all might be saved.

And so as Christians we exist only for the benefit of the unbelieving world for the benefit of all unbelievers. We are commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to go and with the great commission all authority in heaven and earth has been given unto me therefore go and make disciples of all men teaching them all things that I have taught you and as you go and as you teach them all that I have taught you so I will be with you.

There is the thought there that if we don't go if we don't communicate what has been taught to us if we don't become witnesses God will not be with us.

his blessing will not cover us our churches will not grow and perhaps that's the reason why we are asleep that's perhaps the reason why we are not growing we no longer go we no longer tell we no longer communicate what the Lord has done and what he's established us as his church for.

[7 : 16] the world in which we lived lived today has changed in comparison to New Testament times in comparison to the Reformation times in Scotland in comparison even to the 19th century when there was a great evangelical uprising throughout the whole of Britain things have changed dramatically we live today in a secular society society really which is post-Christian society which no longer believes in God the world in which we live today conducts business without any reference to God or his laws or his precepts or anything else to do with the declared will of God in fact not so very long ago perhaps just long ago now in the lives of some someone said we don't do God we don't refer to

God in anything we don't refer to his laws we don't apply ourselves to his work we just don't do God now the disciples when they went out to preach the gospel preached against the background of the Old Testament whereas today that for us is impossible even in churches the Old Testament is almost a closed book people don't know what it contains they don't know its significance they don't know what it has to teach us as regarding the fulfillment of the New Testament it has been said the Old Testament is like a darkened room you know there's a space there you know there are objects in that room but you have no idea what they are so only in the New Testament when the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ is revealed that we see what is there we recognize all that the

Old Testament has to teach us and to say to us and to bring us to know as regards our own salvation now today we live in a post Christian Scotland virtually the same challenge as was faced by Paul has to be faced by us in the day in which we live the Athenians had no Bible they had no teaching they had no regard for anything to do with God's laws or God's scriptures and we are beginning to get to such situation today that we are entering into just such a state in the world in which we live we live in a privileged town and a privileged island perhaps even in privileged Scotland but more and more throughout

Scotland and the whole of Great Britain God's word is no longer looked at or read or even discussed or if it is it's only in the cause of ridicule so how does Paul then approach his gathered congregation almost by way of insulting them he begins to talk to them I perceive that you are overly religious I perceive in fact you are just superstitious you go about worshipping every type of God there is walking through your streets and through your towns everywhere I see statues and engravings and shrines even there is an altar there behind which stand twelve images and this is the altar to the unknown God almost as though they wanted to break through that if they were missing any

God this would be a place whereby any God they haven't thought of could be approached and worshipped and it's to this particular altar that Paul here makes mention of I believe you are too religious I believe you are too superstitious and this is his starting point he is saying you know absolutely nothing about the Bible and nothing about the God of the Bible something we've got to acknowledge is that these pagans are not irreligious everyone has to worship something pagans down through the ages are worship of the sun or the moon or animals or some aspect of gold or wood or stone they're not irreligious they just have no knowledge of

[12 : 46] God they are totally ignorant of God but as Calvin wrote at one time he said in every man there's a seed of religion and Paul makes this point of contact with them whereby he says that there's an inborn sense of religion that we're all born with Pascal a French philosopher one occasion said we are all born with a God shaped void and we are incomplete until that void is filled by God himself and so here Paul is saying that we're all born with this inborn sense of religion every human being is surrounded by the power of God as we look around us even if we have no knowledge of

God we have around us the heavens the sun the moon and the stars we have the seas all the great creatures in the seas and the unknown depths of the seas we have also the animals that surround us the cattle on the thousand hills they're all gods and all this is a visible assurance that a God exists that God brought all these things into being that he is the God of creation and so Paul doesn't start to talk to them about philosophy no doubt that's exactly what he the people there would like him to do they were philosophers they want to talk about ideas and thoughts which transcend the world in which they live and talk about what might be and what might not be but he doesn't start to talk about philosophy he doesn't try to prove the existence of

God he simply states it as a given fact he says there is a God and that's the same for all of us we can't prove the existence of God we just accept as a statement of fact that God does exist that all things that today you see around us he brought into being by the word of his power in the space of six days and all very good he made them and the greatness and the power of God is seen there in the creation and straight away Paul tells them about the great doctrines of the Old Testament the one he concentrates on of course here is the creation but there's also the great doctrines of providence and the great doctrines of salvation and the great doctrines of justification but he in the main he speaks about here the doctrine of creation he's got two different types of people there before him epicureans we're told and stoics now the epicureans believed that matter always existed not as though we have anything new in that today people also say matter always existed but there were also people who lived entirely for pleasure people who wanted an existence free from pain or anxiety and worry and that's what epicureans were and in one of the vows that ministers take in their ordination they deny epicurean doctrines also there were stoics here stoics were people who thought they could rise above life hardships and difficulties didn't really affect them if something happened they would just go through it if death or disaster overtook them they would continue living life as though nothing had happened and again there was this freedom of will and freedom of movement and freedom of everything from

God today our contemporaries those whom we live with and the generation in which we live think that some man somewhere has proved the world has come from somewhere they think that he has proved where this world has come from and so the whole question of origins and where the world comes from is not new today we have the great experiments going on in Switzerland somewhere where some collider is trying to discover the milliseconds or fractions of a second microseconds after the big bang first created and how the world came into being modern man doesn't have a belief and so we have to get try and get our point across in a challenging courageous but also a courteous way no one has ever been converted by winning an argument

God is the only person who converts a man or a woman or a boy or a girl but our duty is to bear testimony of who God is and what he has done for us and how he has turned our life around if you remember what the people there were saying about Paul and the disciples they have turned the world upside down they've come here also they turned our way of thinking upside down they are closing down our amusements they are causing our statues to be ignored they are causing our statue makers to go into liquidation because they're no longer being bought they're turning the world upside down with their doctrines and that's what our calling is as Christians to turn the world upside down by the way we live by what we say to the places that we go to by how we relate to each other that the world might know that you are mine when you love one another and when you support one another pray for each other and strengthen one another so our duty here in this world is to tell people that the world doesn't come from nothing the world doesn't come from some lump that somehow brought to be all the majesty and the beauty and the differences that are in the world today the world came from a creator god a loving god the act of creation is not some just simply a great work of power the act of creation is a great work of love a love work of love towards you and toward me he created the world that we might live in it he created a world that we might be born into it that we might serve him and proclaim his truth to the ends of the earth so that his name might be glorified and so the creation it all comes from a living and a loving saviour god and then paul speaks about the unity of the human race god has made of one blood all nations of men and the differences that mankind places between man and man has absolutely no place in the world in which we live not jews and gentiles not the bond and frees not barbarian scythians bond and off none of these differences should exist in the world in which we live the greeks had no times for the jews the whites had no place for the blacks the man of 2016 is no better than the man of 1966 or 1866 or even the new testament times we are all of one blood we've all been created by god for his glory and for his purpose see the word of god attacks every human pretense to someone being superior to someone else or unique from everyone else and so here we have this statement that paul makes we are all of one blood we are all made by god human beings are different to every other aspect of creation in the world in which we live but human beings are all of one blood we're all made in the image of god all called to serve him all called to serve one another then paul

[22 : 33] describes the uselessness of pagan religions telling them that the ethnic religions are groping after god like blind leaders after god as paul says that you perhaps might feel after him feel after him like like blind men groping their way but groping their way towards god because there's no other no other deity in this universe after whom we might grope or we might seek and find paul doesn't say there are a hundred ways to god as people have been trying to say for the past 50 or 100 years there are many ways to god there are many gods you can go to heaven in any way that you choose he says there's only one way only one way to god only one way to know god only one way by which god can know us but we are always to allow our fellow human beings the freedom which we claim for ourselves people don't want to believe are determined in that unbelief well we've got to allow them their freedom people want to worship a false god or a false prophet we can't forbid it although in up until the beginning of the 19th century somewhere around 1810

Roman Catholicism was forbidden in Scotland since that time any religion is allowed to worship any god that they so wish we allow other people the same freedoms that we claim for ourselves we can't claim liberty of conscience for ourselves and then deny it to others we must show them the same tolerance we must tell them politely and forcefully god's word about them what is god's word about them they are an abomination they are accursed of god they have denied god they made him a liar and as such they are an abomination to god and then paul deals with the judgment of god see that's the great staple doctrine that paul preaches again and again the judgment of god the judgment to come in every man's experience is appointed unto all men once to die and after that the judgment none of us can escape that whatever plans and hopes and aspirations we might have in this world the judgment will come and we shall face the god of creation we shall face the saviour of the world and he shall ask us what we have done with our lives what do we think of christ what have we done with the opportunities that he gave us what are we going to do when we face such a god when we have to look him eyeball to eyeball see god made the world god made man to be in this world and one day there will be a face-to-face meeting of judgment with our god to receive of the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil and then paul finally here comes to the point of the resurrection of jesus where he's about to show them their only hope and what we have here as we can see throughout the new testament we have snippets of conversations and meetings that not only paul or the apostles but the lord jesus christ also has with many of the people who he meets with and this is just a snippet of what we are told paul comes to the resurrection and he's just about to show them what the resurrection means when they interrupt him but paul must have had some sort of opportunity to speak about the resurrection of the lord jesus christ he tells them times of ignorance god overlooked but now he commands all men everywhere to repent that word repent is something that the lord himself began his ministry with in the gospel of mark in the very first chapter he says the kingdom of god has come the kingdom of god has come because the king has come christ is here the kingdom of god has come therefore repent and believe we are living during the era of the kingdom of god because the king has come and in the words of the lord jesus christ not the words of any pulpit or any preacher the words of christ repent and believe god does not want any to perish but all to come to faith and repentance

that they might be saved so here is paul in his very first sermon at the europagus and he's telling them about the resurrection that christ has risen from the dead for the forgiveness of sins today today we say we don't want to tell anything anyone anything outside of that experience but paul does it in his very first sermon he doesn't lead up to it gently he does it in his very first sermon and he gives it to them straight you must believe you must believe because there is a time when we will rise from the dead and we will have to face our god face to face what are the responses some mocked we're told not unusual and the gospel is being preached it happens every day in every walk of life if we speak about the gospel some mocked yes paul with a burning zeal for their souls telling them about christ and some mocked some procrastinated put off to a more convenient season that's what he says we'll hear you again another time see paul didn't become a christian because of some need that god met paul became a christian because god drove into his heart christ rose from the dead on the way to damascus paul had this life changing experience he wasn't looking for something to meet some lack in his life but god came to paul with this with this demonstration that christ has risen from the dead now we perhaps won't have that demonstration in fact we will never have that demonstration that paul had but in the scriptures and by the witness and the testimony of those who we know by the services we attend we kept the assurance that christ rose from the dead he rose from the dead to die no more and he is coming again to judge those who have been quickened and those who are dead in their trespasses and time trespasses and sins the last thing a preacher has is time paul's time ran out he had to leave and he went away to corinth we're told time of time of the mercy had passed there in

Athens paul moved down dionysius and one other they believed and perhaps some others but their time had come and their time had gone and for this preacher the time has come the time has gone you've heard the gospel the time has come for you to believe the gospel to assent to the truthfulness of that gospel the power of that gospel and to believe to bow the knee and to confess that Christ is your Lord may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us then conclude our worship singing to God's praise in Psalm 145 which you'll find on page 444 O Lord thou art my God and King thee will

I magnify and praise I will thee bless and gladly sing unto thy holy name always to the end of the verse mark 7 five stanzas to God's praise O Lord thou art my God and King thee will I magnify and praise thou art things climbing I

[33 : 32] CHOIR SINGS Almighty acts sure done by Thee, I will seek of the glorious grace, and honor of Thy majesty.

Thy wondrous works I will reward, Thy men of mine shall be extolled, Of all Thy dreadful acts, O Lord.

And Thy light greatness will unfold. They hath, O Shabbat, abundantly, The memory of Thy goodness be, And shalt sing praises cheerfully.

Whilst may Thy righteousness relate. Thank you.