

Paul in Athens

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- [0 : 0 0] Thank you very much for the welcome. It's good to be with you again to come before the Lord in worship.! We're going to begin our time of worship by singing to the praise of God in the sing-salms and in Psalm 67.
- So Psalm 67, sing-salms. We'll sing the whole psalm there. We're going to sing to the tune-converse. So to the tune-converse, Psalm 67.
- God, be merciful and bless us. Shine upon us with your face, that the earth may know your actions and all lands, your saving grace.
- O God, may the peoples praise you. May all people sing your praise. For you judge the nations justly, ruling over every race. May they sing with joy and gladness. May they all rejoice as one.
- And let us come before the Lord in that spirit as we come and worship, coming with joy and gladness. And not just our tongues, but our hearts. O God, may the people praise you as they all unite in song.
- [1 : 0 9] Then, you have this great climax to the psalm. Then the land will yield its harvest. God will pour his gifts abroad. God, our God, will surely bless us.
- All the earth will fear our God. And that is what we seek and that is what we pray for. And that's what we'll sing as we sing the whole of the psalm there, Psalm 67.
- God, be merciful and bless us.
- Shine upon us with your face. O God, may the people praise you.
- May all people sing your praise. May all people sing your praise.
- [2 : 4 8] God, may the people praise you. As they all unite in song.
- Faith, the land will yield its harvest. God will pour his gifts abroad.

Lord our God Lord surely bless us On the earth will fear our love We'll bow our heads now and we'll come before the Lord in prayer Let's pray Almighty God We come even as we're singing there acknowledging you as the God of all mercy and we do pray that we would know something of your mercy as we gather here today and as well as we sang there that you would indeed shine your face down upon us We have been blessed with the sun itself shining over recent days and as we gather together in this time of worship we pray that it would indeed be your face that is shining down, blessing us We ask oh Lord that we would be very much aware of your presence with us be near to us as we seek to engage in this act of worship as we seek to worship the one who has created this world created it in all its beauty and we have and we do see so much of that in these days and we ask oh Lord that you would open our eyes to that and help us to respond to these things with that spirit of adoration with that spirit of worship as well but we also look around us and we're acutely aware of the fact that this is no perfect creation that we live in a world that is broken a world that yes we still see the traces of the signature of the Almighty and what we see but yet we also see evidence of the handiwork of the enemy in the way in which we live in a fallen world a world which sees sin all around us and indeed within us and as we come we come aware of that fact as well aware of the fact that we sin in thought in word and in deed and even during the very act of worship itself we allow ourselves to fall into transgression and sin but we give thanks that we come as we said to one who is full of mercy and we come pleading the blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ asking O Lord that that blood would wash and cleanse that that blood would atone for our sins and that even now that as we gather together just now as a congregation of fallen sinful people that our worship might be accepted to you through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ himself we ask that you would go before us as we continue in this time of worship help us to lift our hearts our voices in praise and in prayer and speak to us speak to us in the way in which only you can the God who knows all things the God who sees all things the God who is also all powerful and able to save so continue with us now cleanse us we ask and we ask it all for Jesus' sake

Amen Amen Well just to speak to the young ones for a few moments before you make your way out Now today I'm feeling a little bit sore and especially my legs my legs are feeling a little bit sore today and the reason for that is because probably like you I don't know if maybe some of you had your sports days already but in Harris it was the Harris Sports Day a couple of days ago and as you know as well remember during Sports Day you also have a parents race where the mothers will race and well down in Harris anyway the mothers had a race and the fathers had a race as well and I took part in the fathers race and it was chaos there was people falling and people tripping and people slipping but some of us thankfully we managed to get to the end we managed to finish that race but after that race when I was thinking back about that race and feeling the pain in my legs the day after and today as well I was reminded of something the Bible tells us about the Christian life the way in which being a Christian is a wee bit like running in a race and the parents day race reminded me of this in different ways so for example at the beginning of the race when I started when the race started and the person said go started running and you're feeling quite strong and you're feeling quite fast and you're thinking

I can do this this seems pretty easy I've got lots of energy I think I'll definitely get to the finish line and like a Christian sometimes when we begin in the Christian life when we put our faith in Jesus at the beginning things can seem very easy we can be full of energy everything seems to be going well we can feel so strong and you're coming to church and praying and everything so easy and we're so full of energy but if I go back to the parents day race a little bit on into that race I wasn't quite feeling so good I was getting very tired I was getting out of breath I was getting sore and then that's when other people started falling around me as well and I was wondering am I even going to get to the end?

[8 : 25] Am I going to reach the end of this race? And again if we think about the Christian life sometimes it can be like that as well so it might be easy at times or feel easy at times but there's other times in the Christian life when you know being a Christian is hard it's not always easy sometimes it can be quite hard sometimes it can be hard to just keep going forward and to pray and to come to church and to live like a Christian it's not always easy but thankfully when that's the case God is there helping us because we run that race and we're looking to Jesus that's what the Bible tells us and we're being helped along by God by Jesus so even those times when being a Christian is quite hard maybe you get a hard time from friends or other people God is there to help us to keep going he's encouraging us to keep running this race of faith and to go back to the parents day race when I got through that difficult period in the middle of the race then I got to the end of the race I managed to reach the finish line and I was very happy that I reached the finish line very relieved full of joy as well and when we think about the Christian life being a Christian what's the finish line for the Christians the finish line for the Christians is heaven itself that's ultimately where we're running to and that's that's going to be a wonderful experience for us as we enter into heaven and cross that finish line as God's people and the thing is the Bible tells us that everyone who has their faith in Jesus will make it to that finish line because some of the parents on parents day didn't make it to the finish line but this race the spiritual race that we are on if our faith is in Jesus all of us will absolutely make our way to the finish line and the amazing thing as well is you know the races that you have in your sports day there's only one winner there's only one one winner only one person can get the prize but in this spiritual race of the Christian life everyone who puts their faith in Christ everyone is brought to that finish line and everyone receives that prize that crown of life eternal life itself so you remember next time maybe you've not had your sports day yet if you haven't when you're doing your races you think the way in which even racing can actually remind us of what it's like to be a Christian sometimes it can feel easy it can be full of energy other times it can be hard it can be a struggle but at all times the Lord is helping us and for all who have faith in Christ we'll reach that end and we'll all receive that prize of eternal life and the Lord Jesus Christ so you remember that next time when you're doing your races okay so I think at this point we'll say that the Lord's prayer together okay so we'll say the Lord's prayer our Father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever amen amen well we're going to sing again now to the praise of God and this time we're going to sing in the Scottish Psalter so the Scottish Psalter version of a

Psalms 19 Psalms 19 page 223 and this is going to be to the tune Moravia so Psalms 19 and we're going to pick up from verse 7 this is a Psalm yes I was referring to in prayer this is a Psalm where the the Psalmist initially is looking to creation looking around them at the wonder of creation and seeing in creation evidence of something of the glory of God and we see that picked up in the New Testament as well that creation itself communicates to us something of the Lord this power and his Godhead and as I was suggesting maybe especially in weather like this we're aware of that something of the power of God but of course creation itself the revelation of God in creation is not enough to save for that we have to take our eyes away from looking up at creation and to look down and specifically to look down at the word of God and that's what we see there in verse 7 God's law God's word is perfect and converts the soul and sin that lies it's the word of God it's his revelation in scripture the very gospel message itself that actually does something inside converts the soul and sin that lies

God's testimony is most sure and makes the simple wise the statutes of the Lord are right and do rejoice the heart the Lord's command is pure and of light to the eyes impart unspotted is the fear of God and of endure forever the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous all together they more than gold yea much fine gold to be desired are than honey honey from the comb that droppeth sweeter far we'll sing those verses there Psalm 19 verse 7 to 10 to God's praise and the kids can make their way out during the singing groan and makes the simple wise.

Because that is all the Lord our might, and there rejoiced the heart, the Lord's home and wish pure and love, light to the ice in fire.

Unsawedded is the fear of God, and that they do forever.

[15 : 11] The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous all together.

The Lord and God, yea, much I know, to be Israel.

And honey, honey, come welcome, that the best we dare far.

If you can turn in your Bibles now to Acts and chapter 17. Acts and chapter 17.

And picking up from verse 16. So, Acts 17.

[16 : 33] And reading from verse 16. There's the account of Paul in Athens, and in the Areopagus as well, which, God willing, we'll spend some time looking at today.

So, from verse 16, let us hear the word of the Lord. Now, while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him, as he saw that the city was full of idols.

So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout Persians, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him.

And some said, What does this babblers wish to say? Others said, He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities, because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears.

[17 : 40] We wish to know, therefore, what these things mean. Now, all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For 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, the God who made the world and everything in it. Being Lord of heaven and earth, does not 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 allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God in the hope that they might feel their way towards 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. And even some of your own poets have said, For we are indeed his offspring.

[19 : 05] 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.

The times of ignorance God 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 heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, but others said, We will hear you again about this.

So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Aropagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Amen. And we pray for God's blessing on that portion of his holy and inspired words. Let's bow our heads again in a word of prayer. Let's pray.

[20 : 10] Heavenly Father, we give thanks that you are the God who, as we sang about and thought about a few moments before, not only reveals yourself to us in creation, but that you reveal yourself to us in your word.

And we ask, O Lord, that as we have read it there, and as we think about this word, that you would indeed open our hearts and our eyes to see and to hear things from above.

Help us to learn about the kind of God that you are. Help us to marvel about the kind of God you are. And we pray, O Lord, that even for those of us who are your people here, that you would help us to continue to grow.

As we thought about in that picture with the children, we know the Christian journey is like a journey, a race. And there are times, as we mentioned, that things can go so well, and it can be as though we're on those mountaintops of blessing, and things seem to be perhaps so easy for us, and it seems as though you're continually feeding us with an abundance.

But there are those other times when it is like the valleys, and where the running is much more like a very slow walk, and there are even times when it feels as though we're even at a standstill itself, such as the spiritual heaviness of what we might be experiencing and feeling, different trials that we might be going through.

[21 : 36] And perhaps that's the case for those in here. You know everyone's situation. You know everyone's different experiences and thoughts and anxieties and worries. And we pray, O Lord, for those perhaps who are in those valleys just now.

We ask, O Lord, that you would help them to keep putting that one foot in front of the other. We know that that is sometimes easier to say than to do, spiritually speaking. But we know that with the Lord at work in us, with the Spirit of God dwelling in us, we are able to overleap a wall.

And very often the great barriers and stumbling blocks that we see ahead of us in the distance, things that we think that we can never cross or get over. By the time we get to them, we find that you have enabled us to pass through these things.

And you are the God who helps us in so many ways, in more ways than we can even begin to articulate and number. But help us, each one, to keep moving forward and help us to be a support to one another as well.

We pray that that would be the case for the congregation here. That they would learn to share one another's burdens. That they would be there for one another. That you would unite them together. That they might have those strong bonds in the Lord.

[22 : 43] That's a picture we have of the Lord's people of old, even as they walk through that wilderness journey. It is never a walk in isolation. It is never a walk alone. It is a walk along with the Lord's people.

Sometimes, some of them will be tired. Other times, others of them will be tired. But all together supporting and helping each other to make progress in that wilderness journey. And may that be the case collectively here, even in this congregation.

Pray for Calum Mordo as he seeks to minister in the congregation. We ask, O Lord, that you would strengthen him with all the added responsibilities and duties that's on him. Especially during this time of vacancy as well.

We ask, O Lord, that you would encourage him. That you would equip him. And that you would likewise equip those who are in leadership here as well. Help them all to work together for the furtherance of the cause here.

And ultimately, for the glory of your most holy name. Be with the children as they've gone next door. What an encouragement and delight it is to see so many of them going next door.

[23 : 43] And to learn from your word. And we do pray that you would bless the parents as well. We know how difficult a time this is in recent history to raise children with all the different attacks and pressures that there are.

And we ask, O Lord, that you would help us, even as congregations and churches as well, to do all we can to support those who are parents. And to prayerfully encourage them as well.

Especially when we see them bringing their young ones out to church as well. What an encouragement that is for everyone. And all of us of all ages to see the young coming and being found under the power of the gospel.

So continue with us now. We do pray, O Lord, that you would bless us throughout the rest of this day. This day of rest and worship. Help us to direct it to you, the God who is worthy and deserving of all our worship.

Cleanse us now from our sin. Grant us that spirit of repentance as we come. Continually pleading the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. In his name we ask it. Amen.

[24 : 47] Well, we're going to sing again now. And we're going to sing this time in Psalm 115 in the Sing Psalms.

So Psalm 115 in the Sing Psalms. This is a psalm that's about the issue of idolatry. Something that we clearly see there in that passage that we read in Acts.

And here, the psalmist is really contrasting the idols of the day. The dead, deaf, dumb idols of the day with the Lord. And showing the way in which these idols, you know, they have mouths but they can't say anything.

You know, they've got hands but they can't handle. They've got ears but they can't hear. And yet so many people are worshipping these idols. We'll just read from the beginning there. So Psalm 115 verse 1 to 9.

Lord, not to us, O not to us. To your name be the praise. Because your love and faithfulness endure, O Lord, always. Why do the nations question us? Where is their God, they say?

[25 : 47] Our God inhabits heaven high. And over all holes sway. And then you have this list of all the things about these idols. How they have noses but they can't smell and so on.

And then in verse 8, you have solemn words where the psalmist says, their makers and their worshipers will all become like them. An important lesson. That which we worship, we become like.

We see that in the world around us. The things that people worship, they become like these things. But the opposite is also true for us. As we come to worship the true living God, what we find, even in the act of worship as we're engaged in it even today, we're actually conformed more into the image of our Lord and our Savior.

And that's a wonderful truth and a reality as well. And remember that as we're worshipping, we are being conformed to the image of our Lord himself. So we'll sing down to verse 9 there to God's praise. Lord, Lord, Lord, to us, O Lord, to us, to your repeat the praise.

Because you're a powerful faithfulness, and to your Lord always.

And when that's the case, you have to factor that into your evangelism. You have to do that. You have to take account of who it is that we're actually seeking to reach out to.

And that's absolutely the case here with Paul. Paul knew that. He knew that he had to adapt and to change the way in which he was communicating, depending on who it was that he was speaking.

He never changed the gospel. The gospel remains the same at all times. He never compromises the gospel. He never does that. But you do see him adapting. You do see him adapting to surroundings and circumstances and the cultures that are around him as well, as he seeks to scatter that seed of the gospel.

And it is important, I think, that we take heed of that, especially when you see the cultural landscape changing somewhat. We have to take heed of some of these things and use some of this learning for ourselves as well.

[34 : 32] And you definitely, when you look at this passage here, this encounter that he has with the Athenian philosophers here, this is absolutely something that we can learn from.

The way in which he's adapting and the way in which he's actually communicating the good news. He's becoming all things to all men. That concept that he models so well. And what I want to do today is very simply, I want to look at two scenes, two points really.

And the two scenes, first of all, are Paul in Athens, at the beginning of the narrative, and then Paul in the Areopagus. So Paul in Athens, as he comes in, and we'll see him there, and then specifically Paul in the Areopagus.

So let's begin with him arriving in this great city of Athens here. Now, Athens was one of the great cities of culture back in the day. I mean, lots of the great philosophers came from Athens.

Now, it wasn't quite, you know, at the New Testament stage, it wasn't quite the Athens of days gone by. It has, by this point, had its heyday, probably a few hundred years, really, before this point.

[35 : 37] But still in all, it's still a city of remarkable culture and remarkable learning. It was a big city. And Paul, or Saul, as he was called growing up, he would have been growing up hearing about this city.

No doubt he would have heard about it. And perhaps, speculating now maybe, but perhaps there was some kind of a desire in a very young Saul to go and visit a place like this, you know, this great city of Athens.

A bit like us when you're growing up and you're hearing about London. You know, we learn about London and we hear about the sites in London. And we see the pictures of the famous buildings and things like that in London.

And it can develop a desire in you to go and see that place, you know, to go and witness that place, to see all these things, all these things that maybe you've heard about and learned about in school when you were younger.

And here is Paul, and here he is in this city. So he's in this great city of Athens. And it's not just that he's in the city, but he's got time on his hands. He's got time on his hands here.

[36 : 34] We read that there in verse 16. We read there that Paul was waiting for Timothy and Silas to arrive. So he's in this city and he's got time on his hands in this great city.

He's got a few days to spare. And maybe if that was us, maybe we'd think to ourselves, well, take some time off from my missionary journey. You know, I'm quite busy in all the mission that I'm engaged in. I'm in this great city.

Let's just do the touristy thing. Let's just spend some time in the city. Take some time off of ministry and enjoy this great city of Athens. But of course, that's not how Paul thinks at all.

That's not the kind of thinking that he has here at all. And you see him there in the passage. He's walking around. And is he there in awe and marveling? Well, in a way, yes. But he's doing that in disgust.

He's horrified. He's utterly horrified at what he sees around that city. He sees the city covered in idols. Again, we see there in that verse, verse 16, the city was full of idols.

[37 : 35] The city is a mass with them. Idols of all different kinds. Loads of different idols here. And again, if that was us and we saw that, sadly, and we do see that in many parts of our nation, many of the cities, we see idolatry taking hold.

Sadly, when we see that, we're hardly touched by it. We can see that and just get used to it. Just, oh, well, this is the way it is. This is the way in which our day is. But again, for Paul, he didn't have any apathy towards us.

When he saw this, he got angry. It provoked him to anger, as it ought to provoke us as well. When we see idolatry rampant, it ought to provoke that good anger, that godly anger in us.

And that's exactly what it does here. Paul is jealous. He's jealous for the glory of God. And when he sees the glory that ought to go to the Lord, worship that ought to go to the Lord, when he sees that glory going to these idols, he's angered.

This deep anger within him when he sees all of this taking place. And what does he do? Well, after seeing that, he goes to the Jewish people in the area.

[38 : 41] That tends to be his practice. He'll first of all go to the Jews in the place. But then after that, after his time with the Jews, then he goes to the marketplace.

And he starts visiting the marketplace daily. And he goes there, of course, to preach the gospel. We read that there. He goes there to tell people about Christ, to tell people about this resurrected Savior, to tell people about the way of salvation, the only way of salvation, that way that is through the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And imagine you going to a place like that, a market. You all know, even in our day, what a marketplace is like. It's an incredibly busy thing. There's lots of things going on, that busyness about the place, lots of heckling.

And here, as Paul is preaching and sharing, there was going to be heckling. We know there is. We literally read that there was, and we'll come on to that in a moment. But you see that.

That's a very difficult place to minister, a marketplace environment with all that's going on. And not just the environment itself. Also the fact that he's coming into a culture that's so different to what he's used to.

[39 : 50] This is alien to him. This is an alien culture that he's seeking to speak into. And I think there's a lot of relevance there for us today as well.

Because, as I mentioned a few moments ago there, if we were to walk around the cultural map of our own nation, we'd say the same.

How alien it is to the Christian heritage of our forefathers. It's a culture that's, generally speaking, and you don't even have to go too far away.

Let's be honest. We can even detect it here, even in our own island as well. It's a culture that's losing grasp of that Christian faith, losing grasp of that Christian foundation.

And because of that, as the Lord's people, you can very much feel like an outsider. And very much, it can feel as though you're trying to communicate this good news, this gospel message to a society and a culture.

[40 : 48] That's just on a completely different wavelength. That they're operating absolutely with a completely different worldview. And that's hard. It's hard, actually, to come in and to speak into that kind of environment.

And we find ourselves, as I said there as well, just surrounded by idols. Surrounded by them. Different to this day, not statues of gold and silver and stone.

But idolatries. Absolutely rife. Whatever kind of idol it is, whether it be wealth or appearance or pleasure or all sorts of ideologies as well.

All these things that become idols to people. Idols that cannot provide purpose to people. Cannot provide real lasting purpose. Cannot provide real lasting peace at all.

And the idols of this world, what they do is they ask so much from people, but they give nothing. That's the way in which idolatry works. Idolatry, it asks so much from you, but it gives absolutely nothing in return.

[41 : 54] And that is, sadly, the situation that a lot of people are caught up in today. They're sucked into the idols of this world, and they're giving their lives to these things, serving these things.

And they're ultimately getting nothing in return. And that's sad to see. It should hurt us to see that. Many of us were in the grips of that at one time ourselves. It should make us angry. Not angry with the people, but angry with the situation.

Angry with the presence of the idolatry. That's rife. And, again, similar to our day as well, maybe like these philosophers who come later on in verse 18, the Epicureans and the Stoic philosophers there.

Like them, many, many people today as well, when they hear about salvation and they hear about Jesus, they think it's nonsense. They think it's nonsense. And you see there these philosophers saying, what does this babblers wish to say?

When Paul is there preaching Christ, the response is, what does this babblers wish to say? And that is something we know about.

[42 : 57] That response, those outside of Christ today, they may well turn around to us. And when we're coming with the gospel, they'll turn around to us and say, why do I need your Jesus?

I mean, look at all that the world offers me. All the idols that are dangled before me here. Why do I need your Jesus? Really, why do I need your Jesus when all of this idolatry is available to me?

Why do I need Jesus? And certainly, why do I need him as a sole object of my worship? Really? Is that really what I need? And ultimately, that is the question that Paul, in the Areopagus, in a few moments' time, he's going to address this question.

This is the very question that he's going to gather his thoughts around. And actually, even the Epicurean philosophers themselves, you know, trying to connect this again to our own day, even their belief system was actually very similar to what you see today as well.

Because the Epicureans, they were a people who thought that the world just came about by chance. Everything came about by chance. Just a random movement of atoms that brought about what we have here.

[44 : 08] You know, that's a viewpoint that's very much prevalent today. They don't see any kind of concept of a judgment to come. They don't think of the afterlife and that kind of a thing.

And their mindset is very much, well, if that's the case, let's just live for today. Let's just pursue pleasure, pursue pleasure, pursue what feels good. Let's do that.

Because what's the point in doing anything else? Let's just live for today, enjoying our life today. And again, I know we might look around and think, well, there's no Epicureans around today.

But when you look at their belief system, there is, isn't there? That is how a lot of people think today. They wouldn't realize that these are the kind of philosophers that they're borrowing some of these things from.

But these are the kind of things that are there. And here they are, these Epicureans, these Stoics as well. And they're mocking Paul. They're calling him a babbler. But interestingly, as well as doing that, as well as mocking him, they're also a little bit interested in what Paul has to say.

[45 : 09] And you see that because they invite him to the Areopagus. And that's interesting. They're mocking him, but at the same time, a wee bit interested in what it is that he has to say.

And again, this is something that maybe you'll come across in your own lives as well as you seek to make Christ known. There'll be some people who resist the gospel. They resist Christ, sometimes even with an aggression.

They aggressively resist the Lord Jesus Christ. But even in their aggression, there's something, a wee bit in them, that's actually quite interested. A wee bit in them that wants to hear more about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is actually something that's becoming more prevalent in recent years. Some of you will be aware of that YouGov poll that came out a few weeks ago about church attendance in England.

I don't know if you saw that, you know, the church attendance being up so much, 50% rise or something like that in the last six years. And in those statistics, there was interesting evidence there, not just on the church attendance side, but there was also interesting evidence on those who had no background in the church, no background in the gospel, particularly young people, who were wanting to hear.

[46 : 24] They were wanting others to speak to them about Jesus, wanting others to actually invite them to church. And that's eye-opening to read that. People are more open to these discussions than they have been in quite some time.

And it's important that we, as the Lord's people, we recognize that, that our eyes are open to that, that we're aware of what's going on in the wider culture. And when we see that opportunity, which clearly is beginning to manifest itself in a way in which it wasn't even five, ten years ago, when we see that, it's absolutely imperative that we act on that, that we react accordingly.

And here you have this idea, the philosophers, they're at a distance, but a little bit, they're wanting to hear. They're wanting to hear what it is that Paul is teaching. So they bring Paul to the Areopagus, which was the place really where the big ideas of the day were discussed.

And that leads us, that brings Paul to the Areopagus itself. And this brings us to the main event, really, of this narrative. And our second point, so we've seen Paul in Athens, we've seen what's happening there.

Now we come to the Areopagus. And there he is in the Areopagus. And here he preaches this sermon. And it's unlike any other sermon he preaches.

[47 : 45] It's quite different, you know, when you look at it and you contrast it to some of the other messages that he gives. And he begins the sermon here, really, by drawing attention to their idols.

That's how he grabs their attention. And he's good at that, just going straight in there, grabbing the attention. He points to their idols and he's telling them, you know, I was walking through your streets and I saw how religious you are.

So religious that not only do you have all these multitude of statues to all these multitudes of gods, but you've even got a statue to the unknown god. And the idea there was that they wanted to cover themselves, make sure that they got a statue for all the gods and just to make sure they didn't miss any.

They've got this statue here which says, to the unknown god, to the one we might have left out. And, you know, when we're reading that, it sounds ridiculous.

And it is ridiculous. It's laughable, really, that that's the case. But they were serious. It says you had this statue to the unknown god, just to sort of cover themselves. And Paul is saying to them here, oh, you're religious.

[48 : 50] I can see that. You're religious, all right. Religious to the point of being utterly ridiculous. And Paul tells them that, yes, you might worship a god who is unknown.

You might worship the unknown god. But I have come, and I have come to preach to you the god who can be known. The one true living god.

That's why he's come. So he's setting his stall out. That's what I'm doing here. Not just one god out of many. The one true living god. And at that point, you would think, oh, he's going to go to the Messiah, the cross, the resurrection, those sort of things.

But he doesn't. He might have done that if he was maybe in a different setting, speaking to Jewish people. But that's not what he does. What he does is he begins to build up this comprehensive theology of god.

And to do that, he logically goes to the beginning. That's where he begins in this sermon. In verse 24, I proclaim to you the god who made the world and everything in it.

[49 : 50] So point one, if he was going to have points in the sermon, point one is God is the creator of the world. I'm sure he would have had a better heading to the point on that.

But that is basically it. God is the creator. That is a very important fact to get across. You need to get across the bigger picture. People have to understand that. People have to understand the bigger picture.

Because if you come and you tell people about Christ, generally speaking, those who have no background at all will respond to that and think, well, okay, that's good for you.

But he doesn't really have anything to do with me. Jesus really has nothing to do with me at all. See, they don't trace it all back to creation. They don't follow the dots back to creation.

And that means that we have to do that. In our evangelism, as we seek to make Christ known, we have to do that. We have to go back to the beginning. We have to go back to creation itself.

[50 : 46] That's point one. God is the creator. And then point two that he makes is God is the sustainer. He's not only the creator. He's not just there at the beginning. He is the sustainer. Verse 25. So he's telling them, this God who created the world, it's not that he just created the world and then disappeared.

It's not that he created the world and then handed over the management to a group of many idols and many gods. That's not the case at all. Everything you have is from him. Everything.

The breath that's in your body, the very beating of your heart, every single aspect of your life is from him, dependent on him. And when this theological picture of who God is is built up, you quickly realize that God isn't just someone you can just ignore.

That this is absolutely something that's connected to absolutely every single one of us. So God is the creator. God is the sustainer. He sustains life today. He sustains your life today.

And then the third point that he has there is all mankind comes from one man. So in verse 26, he says there, and he made from one man every nation of mankind.

[52 : 05] Or more specifically, we have been made from one man. So everyone you see, same, everybody, all different people. We have the same ultimate source.

We come from the same bloodline. We're not separate groups of people. We're not created by different gods in different parts of the world with different religions and different backgrounds and languages and things like that.

We are one. We are one family. One family. All people on earth. One family under our one God. So he's building this picture up, trying to connect all these things together for these philosophers as they're thinking these things through.

And then he comes to the fourth point. And he says, effectively, in that fourth point, God has a purpose for your life. Because of all these things that I just said, God has a purpose for you.

A purpose for your life. And you see the purpose there in verse 27. What is a purpose? Well, the Lord has done all that he's done so that we will seek him.

[53 : 12] So that we will seek him. Everyone, every person in this world today has a purpose. You all have a purpose in life. And that purpose is this.

To seek the Lord. The one who is, of course, your creator. To glorify. To enjoy the Lord forever. A purpose that all of us have.

Every single one of us. So you see Paul's logic here. You see what he's doing. How he's building his case here. He's telling the people, God has created all things. God sustains all things.

He's telling everyone, you're all connected to the same origin. You're all connected to the same God. And he's got a purpose for you. You are to seek him out.

But then there's a massive problem. Because we can't actually do that. It's our purpose. But we can't do it. Left in our fallenness.

[54 : 12] Sin has resulted in us not being able to seek out the Lord. Not being able to glorify the Lord. Not being able to live out the purpose for which we were made.

And now we find ourselves at enmity with the Lord. Opposed. Opposed to the Lord himself. And the thing is, because we've been made in order to worship. What happens is, because we're blinded from the reality of who God is.

And the reality of who we are. We've still got that design of worship. So what we do is, we use that design of worship. And we direct it elsewhere. We direct it towards this thing or that thing.

Constantly chasing something to serve. Constantly chasing something to worship. Because it's in us. We're made that way. We're made to worship. We're made to serve. So when we're failing to worship the Lord, we direct that energy elsewhere.

We're trying to fill this God-shaped void that we often speak about. This is God-shaped hole. And when we do that, what we're basically doing is groping about in the dark.

[55 : 13] That's what he says there in verse 27. It's like we're going around in the dark. We're blind. We still want to worship. We still want to serve something. Because we don't worship God, we end up groping, chasing after all these false gods.

And Paul here in this sermon, it's like he's pointing to all these idols. Like he's pointing to all these false gods. And he's telling them, look, look at what you're doing. You know, you've got this purpose in life.

You've got this purpose to seek after the Lord. But you're just stumbling about in the dark. It's like you're blindfolded. And you're just trying to grab something to serve. And you're grabbing whatever it is you can find in life. And you're taking these things to yourself.

And you're serving these things. But you're serving the wrong things. You're seeking to worship these idols instead of the true living God. And then he says to them there, do you not see?

God is not far from you. You see, even in your desire to worship, that God, God is not far from you. And to prove that point, he does something interesting here.

[56 : 16] He quotes something. Now, we're used to him quoting the Old Testament. Lots of Old Testament quotes. But this time he quotes not the Bible. He quotes one of their own.

He quotes one of a philosopher that these people here would have known. And he says there in verse 28, he says, this is the quote from one of their philosophers.

For in whom we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said. For we are indeed his offspring. So he's using their own poets, not scripture, to highlight what it is that he's actually teaching, the points that he's actually making.

And you see Paul there, yes, this culture's alien to him, but he's engaging with it. He understands it enough to be able to use it to communicate with these people.

And that's a very fine balance. Not being swallowed up by the culture around us, but at the same time understanding something of it in order to speak into it. Our danger is always getting swallowed up by it.

[57 : 16] That's the error that we fall into. But we have to ensure that we don't do that and at the same time understand it enough to be able to speak into it. Just like Paul is able to do here.

And then he comes to the climax point, his fifth point in his sermon, where we find that God is merciful. So he's built all this up, the purpose, all these things. And then the last one is God is merciful.

And you see that in verse 30, because he's saying there, now he commands all people everywhere to repent. And he's speaking about judgment. He's speaking about the coming of the resurrected Christ.

And all of that, that call to repentance, that implies mercy. That call to repentance, that implies that salvation is available here. Mercy is available.

That there is a way back. Because God is a God who is full of mercy. And how do they respond to that? How do they respond to the logic of this argument, the presentation of the gospel, the way in which he's presented it here, and then the call for a response?

[58 : 20] What is it? Well, you see there at the end of the passage, some of them respond by mocking. And that will always be the case. Because no matter how we communicate the gospel, they'll always be in some that response of mocking the things of the Lord.

It's the idea of the gospel and salvation. It's laughable. Laughable to many. Maybe it was even laughable to us at one time. Maybe many of us in here, we thought of this as laughable at one time.

And that seems to be the case for a good number of the people here. They just laughed it off. But others, they responded in a different way. Others responded by saying, we'll hear you again on this matter.

The procrastinators. And there's many of them in the pews throughout our land. Many of those who say, it makes sense what you're saying.

I'll maybe hear you again on this matter. I'll maybe give it some more thought and maybe come back to it. And maybe you've been doing that for a long time, years, decades of saying that. Decades of procrastinating and thinking.

[59 : 19] Maybe next week. Maybe next month. Maybe next communion. The procrastinators. But, thankfully, in verse 34, you also have those who believed as well.

Those who believed. Those who the Lord worked in their hearts and took away that blindfold. Enabled them to see. Brought about life from where there was death. And he did that through the preaching of Paul there in the Areopagus.

And when we look at this, we have to respond and say, well, what is our response? How do we respond when we think of this message of the gospel? This message that tells us that you've got a purpose.

So you've been told where you're from, your origins are, and you've got a purpose in life. There's a reason why you are here. To worship God. To seek out the Lord. And then we're told that because of our sin, we can't do that.

Because of our sin, we're not actually able to do the very thing that we're designed to do. But then we learn here that there's a way of salvation. There's a way of forgiveness.

[60 : 23] And the call is for us to come and to repent. To repent of our fallenness and our sin. To repent of the way in which we're directing that desire to worship towards other things.

To come before the Lord. To repent of our sins. And to put our faith and trust in him. And the promise is very clear that when we do that, when we come in faith and trust, the Lord will find the Lord's hands are wide open, ready to receive.

And my prayer is that that is how we would respond. That we would respond not like the mockers, not like the procrastinators. But that we would respond in faith. That the Lord would work in our hearts to enable us to do just that.

And then for those of us who are the Lord's people, to hear this and to think to ourselves, I need to communicate this message to others. I've received it and it's done amazing things in my life.

It's given me life eternal. It's given me abundance of life in the here and now. And now my duty is to go and share that with others. And therefore I need to understand how to do that. I need to understand how it is that I can share this message with different people.

[61 : 29] Share it with different cultures and different backgrounds of people as well. That is a responsibility that we have. Yes, it's the Lord who saves. But we have to seek to scatter that seed of the gospel in the best possible way we can.

Knowing that we can't save. But at the same time knowing that we're called to do the best that we can. So let's seek to do that. To understand how best to reach out. Not to get swallowed by the culture. That's the risk on the extreme end.

But to understand it. To see what's going on. To have a feel for it. And to be able to communicate the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because it is ripe for it. Like I was saying, those statistics that came out a few weeks ago.

They show us that. Things are ripe for the gospel. And it's imperative that we, not just ministers or people who are preaching. But all of us as the Lord's people. We seek to go into society with that message.

A message that people need. Even though people might not realize that they need it. You might think of others who shared that gospel with you at one time. Well, it's our responsibility now to share that good news with others too.

[62 : 28] May the Lord enable us to do just that. Amen. We'll bow our heads. We'll come before the Lord in prayer. Heavenly Father, we ask, O Lord, that you would strengthen us in the faith.

We give thanks that you are the God who saves. And that you're the God who works in every age, in every culture, in every society. And even as we see change going on all around us, we give thanks that you are the God who does not change.

You're the same yesterday, today, and forevermore. And we know that your word does not change. We know that the gospel does not change. But what does change is the people around us and what they think and how they think.

And help us to learn from that. Help us not to get swallowed up by it. Help us to remain distinct and holy. At the same time, may our eyes be open to discern opportunities and to discern when it is that we're able and how it is that we can reach out with the good news to those who are in need.

[63 : 41] Psalm 126 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 126, Scottish Psalter, page 419. This will be to the tune Denfield.

When Zion's bondage God turned back, as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

When Zion's bondage God turned back, as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth.

The Lord have done great things for us, whence joy to us is brought.

Now, may the grace of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit continue with you all now and forevermore.

[67:10] Thank you.