

The Simple Message Of The Gospel

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[0 : 00] Please take your Bibles and open them up this morning to the book of Acts. The book of Acts. We're pausing our series this morning.! We're going through the book of Genesis regularly on Sunday mornings, but we're going to pause it just for one week this morning to spend time in Acts chapter 17, verses 22 through 34.

If you don't have your own Bible with you, that's okay. We provide them in the seat back there in front of you, and I would just encourage you to have a copy of God's Word open. And if you don't have a copy of God's Word at all, then please take that one home with you as our gift to you. We want to make sure that you have a copy of God's Word available to you. So the book of Acts, chapter 17, verses 22 through 34. And when you've found that, let's stand this morning in honor of the reading of the Word of God.

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

Whereas 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.

[1 : 22] 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, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

Yet he is actually not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. As even some of your own poets have said, For we are indeed his offspring.

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed 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.

[2 : 47] So Paul went out from their midst, but some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius, the Areopagot, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Father God, we praise you for the simple message of the gospel.

And we praise you for the efforts of Paul to go to Athens and to proclaim this gospel message. We praise you that this gospel message is going forth throughout the world, even this very moment.

And we pray your blessing on the preaching of the word. Would you make it clear to us? Would we respond to you in faith? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated.

Imagine with me for a minute that you have come to a worship service. Not making you work too hard quite yet. You have come to this worship service gathering because, well, you're not exactly sure why you're here.

[3 : 53] Maybe a friend has invited you. Maybe you saw a Facebook advertisement. Maybe you were just driving by, and you thought that it would be a good idea just to stop on in. And you're not really sure what to believe about all of it.

You think that probably maybe you believe in some sort of spiritual something out there, but you're not quite exactly sure what. I mean, to be honest, you're a little bit confused.

And maybe you pass by five or six other places of worship on the way here. And so it seems like there's so many different opinions out there on which God is the right one. How does He desire to

be worshipped?

How would you even know? And maybe it doesn't even matter. You're here. You're doing your best. And you feel like it's probably wise just in case. Make sure you have God or the gods, whoever it may be, in your corner.

And so you go. You participate. You sing the songs. It feels good to be here. You enjoy hearing the speaker talk as long as he doesn't go too long. If you come on a special occasion, you may even get a meal out of it.

[4 : 57] Who knows? But if you're honest, you don't really have a clue what's going on. It all seems a little bit strange and a little bit complicated.

You're not quite sure where you stand. And it would be nice if somebody would just stand up and make it all plain and simple. I can almost guarantee that this imaginary scenario is not so imaginary in many churches throughout the country this morning.

And in fact, it may not be so imaginary for some of you. The truth is that we live in an age of great religious confusion. People don't know who to worship or how to worship or why to worship.

If they ought to worship at all, it's all just a little bit confusing. But it's not just our age. What we see in our passage this morning is that this type of religious confusion is nothing new at all, is it?

In fact, we see it all the way back here in the first century in the book of Acts in Athens, Greece.

Here in the book of Acts, the apostle Paul is journeying throughout the ancient world, proclaiming the message of the gospel.

[6 : 13] And he's come here to Athens, Greece. And what he sees when he gets there is all sorts of religious confusion and uncertainty. It's chaos.

And so what does Paul do? Paul stands up here in our passage and he tries to very simply, very clearly clear up all of this religious confusion.

And what is the message that he brings to them? What does he say? He gives them the simple message of the gospel. His goal and my goal for us this morning is to make sure that all of us have heard the simple message of the gospel.

We want to make certain that you have heard the good news. And so we see it here in our passage in four parts this morning. Four parts. The gospel is a message about God.

It is a message about man. It is a message about Christ. And it is a message that demands a response. Let's take a look here at each part.

[7 : 19] First, we see the gospel is a message about God. Look there with me starting in verse 22. Now again, Paul is trying to bring some clarity here. He is interacting with these deeply confused Athenians.

And where does he start? The first thing he starts talking about is God. Look there to verse 22. Paul says, He says, He says, I see all of these objects of your worship.

I pass by all of these different synagogues, all of these different altars. It is clear that you are very religious. But it is also clear, y'all are real confused. And so let me make this clear to you.

He says it with absolute certainty, doesn't he? There is a God. You know, depending on who you speak with, that type of certainty is hard to come by, isn't it?

Some people claim to be atheists, meaning they don't believe that there is any sort of God. Others claim to be agnostic. That's a little bit more fashionable now, these days. Where they claim, well, maybe there is a God.

[8 : 41] Maybe there is not a God. But I don't know. And how could we know? But Paul here speaks with absolute direct certainty. He says there is a God.

How can he be so confident? You know, if you're here and you're not a believer, you might wonder as you speak with your Christian friends, as you come to a Christian worship service, we stand here every single week proclaiming the truth that there is a God.

Maybe you wonder, How in the world can all these Christians be so confident? No one's ever seen God. No one's ever touched God. No one's ever sat next to him.

How do you know that there is a God? I think Paul would answer that question in two ways. For one, he would say, Look around you. Look around you.

Greece is one of those places where I would love to visit. Maybe some of y'all have been there before. I've never been. I would love to go. But everything that you hear about Greece is that it is just absolutely breathtakingly beautiful.

[9 : 44] You have Mount Olympus over here. You have Elephanisi Beach. I don't know if I'm pronouncing that right. Elephanisi Beach over here. It's got this pink coral sand. And then the light blue, breathtaking, clear waters over here.

If you go dive into the waters, there's over 500 species of marine life there in the water to see and explore. You have loggerhead turtles and parrotfish and all sorts of octopus there.

There's Samaria Gorge up here. Some of the best hiking in all of Europe. You have volcanic landscapes over here. Everywhere you look, there is natural beauty all around you.

And I promise y'all I'm not trying to sell you a trip to Greece this morning. Although if you want to go, I'll go with you. The point is, this type of beauty in creation and in nature, it has a message.

All of it proclaims that there is a beautiful, supernatural creator who made it all. One way that God makes himself known is in and through his works of creation.

[10 : 51] This is where Paul starts, isn't it? He says, The God who made the world and everything in it, this God I proclaim to you.

Psalms 19 tells us, The heavens declare the glory of God. They have a message. The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies above proclaim his handiwork.

Day after day, they pour out speech. Night after night, they reveal knowledge. And listen to this. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.

In other words, everyone in creation, everyone in this room, and everyone in the world has heard this message loud and clear. There is a God.

We can know there's a God because we live in his creation. And Paul keeps going. He says, Verse 25, This God gives to mankind life and breath and everything.

[11 : 50] It all comes from his sovereign hand. Not only this, this God actively rules over his creation. Verse 26, He determines the allotted periods and the boundaries of all the dwelling places of all the peoples of the earth.

God is actively at work in his creation. All his creation proclaims who he is. We have to start here. There is a God, and we live in his world.

But there's another second answer that Paul might give to that question. If you were to ask him, Paul, how do you know that there's a God? He would say, creation, that's one, but also, and especially, proclamation.

Proclamation. See, the Athenians, they weren't atheists. They weren't even agnostics. They worshipped as many gods as they could possibly think up.

They were religious pluralists. They had those coexist bumper stickers long before we did. They thought that all of these different gods, all of these different religions could play nicely together, and we just kind of take a piece of truth from here and a piece of truth from here, and we can worship all of them, right?

[13 : 03] And there's an old argument that people make, and they give this example of an elephant. Maybe you've heard this before. And they say, well, what if each religion is just kind of looking at the elephant from a different perspective?

And so Christians, they're looking at the side of the elephant, so they describe it as tall, and they describe it as long. But maybe the Muslims, maybe they're looking at the elephant from the top view, and so they describe these tusks coming out from the front, and the long trunk, and the hair running down from top to bottom.

And maybe the Buddhists, maybe they're looking at it from behind, and so they describe these sturdy hind legs, and they describe the wagging tail. But really, all of us, we're all playing the same game here.

We're all worshipping the same God. We're all describing the same thing. We just all have different perspectives, right? The response that we would give to that sort of argument would be, well, what if that elephant can speak?

What if we're not left to figure it out with our own limited perspective? What if the elephant can actually speak and reveal to himself what he's like?

[14 : 13] We believe that's exactly what God has done. The God who created all things has spoken. He has revealed himself through his word.

His holy word reveals his holy character and his plans for his creation. And even more than that, we have the supreme revelation of the person and the work and the character of our holy God in his Son, Jesus Christ.

The very word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God. Friend, if you are confused or uncertain, if you want to know about God, spend time in his world, but also and especially spend time in his word.

Paul begins his message simply telling us there is a God. He is our creator. He is our ruler. He has revealed himself in his world.

He has revealed himself in his word. But he doesn't stop there. Second, we see also this gospel message is also a message about us.

[15:27] The gospel is also a message about man. John Calvin, he starts off his institutes with this now famous line. He says, Nearly all wisdom that we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists in two parts.

The knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. This is important. We need to not only understand who God is, but in light of who he is, we need to rightly understand understand who we are.

And we should know that it is not good news. Not yet at least. Calvin goes on to say, well, when we truly see ourselves, when we pop open the hood and look and see what's inside, what will we find? He says, we are going to find a teeming horde of infirmities. To put it plainly, the gospel, the bad news of the gospel, it tells us that you and I and everyone else, we are all deeply sinful.

There is a God and we are at odds with him because of our sin. There is a creator God and we have not honored him as we ought to honor him.

[16:44] What do I mean? Well, consider the Athenians. Paul tells us plainly, for one thing, like the Athenians, we are deeply confused about the value of religion.

Paul goes through the city. He's bothered by what he sees. There's idols all over the place. There's temples everywhere. There's worship being offered up to every sort of false god that you can imagine.

And he says, man, y'all are really religious. It's clear that simply being religious in and of itself, it may not be a good thing, is it?

The religious devotion in and of itself, if it's misdirected, is not a good thing. Our Muslim friends, they are deeply religious.

Our Hindu friends are deeply religious. Some of y'all college sports fans, right? Deeply religious. We're wrong to think that religious devotion in and of itself brings us any closer to God.

[17:50] You know, you don't earn any brownie points with God this morning for being here, for singing the songs, for coming to church, for doing all the religious things.

Apart from genuine repentance from your sin, and apart from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, your religion is empty. Not only this, but like the Athenians, we have all worshipped idols. I remember when we lived in Charlotte. Amanda and I, we went on a walk. It was snowing outside, and we decided to go for a walk, and we came up to the Charlotte Buddha Temple, and we were feeling adventurous that day, and so we decided to walk inside and just take a look.

They allowed us to go in and do that, and I will never forget what I saw when I went in there. The walls were lined from top to bottom, up and down with statues, images, idols, and there were people there bowing down to them, head on the ground, arms outstretched, praying to these figures, and I just thought, somebody made these things.

Somebody pieced these together, and somebody placed them up on a shelf. Somebody painted the faces on them, put them right there, and how foolish it is for these people to bow down and to worship some created thing, but the truth is, we are all guilty of this exact same thing.

[19:23] I'll quote Calvin again. He says, the human heart is an idol factory. Constantly, we are cranking out idols in our hearts, so no, we may not bow down to a statue, but we make idols of sports, and we make idols of sex, and we make idols of money, we make idols of success, we make idols of the approval of others, we make idols of our children, we make idols of our marriage.

No, we may not lay down with our face to the ground and pray to these things, but we give our lives to these things, and we put them in a sacred place in our heart that belongs to God alone.

That's idolatry. Paul says, how foolish is this? Don't you see? Verse 29, don't you see?

He says, we are the offspring of God. We are made in the image of God. Some of your own poets have recognized this, and if that's true, then why would we ever think that God, our creator, is like gold or silver or stone?

Why would we ever fall down and worship the created things when our creator is the one that's deserving of our praise? Not only this, but like the Athenians, we have all walked in pride.

[20 : 53] Paul humbles them a little bit here in verse 24. Look there. Paul says, this God who created heaven and earth, he doesn't live in your temples. He's not served by your hands as though he needed anything.

You realize God does not need anything from you. What a prideful thought. But again, in our sin, this is our default mode, isn't it?

We want the universe to be about us. We want to be in control of our life. And if we serve a God, if we worship a God, we got to have a God that needs us, needs our service, needs a little bit of our help, one we can pick up and put down exactly where we want so we can be in control.

Paul says, no. What we need is a bigger view of God and a smaller view of ourself. We have all walked in pride.

It keeps going. not only this, but also like the Athenians, we have all sought independence from God. Look at verse 25 and verse 26.

[22 : 03] Again, Paul says, God has given you your life. But have you lived your life for him? God has given you your breath. He sustains your life this very moment.

But do you consider that every breath you take comes from him and belongs to him? Have you offered back up every single breath, every single breath you've taken for your entire life?

Have you offered it back up to him in worship? God has given you everything, he says. But do you give everything to God? None of us have.

And not a single one of us have done this perfectly. And I say all because this is me too. We all have sought independence from God. That's the essence of sin.

Ultimately, what this means is that we have all failed to live up to our purpose for existing in the first place. Are you all depressed yet? Thought you'd come in here and have a peppy Easter message?

[23 : 08] Think again. We'll get there. Verse 27 says, God made us that we should seek him. God made us that we should seek him.

God made you that you should seek him. Have you sought him? Have you sought him perfectly? Have you always sought him?

If not, then friend, join the club. You are a sinner just like me, just like the Athenians. This is bad news. And to make it worse, Paul says, verse 31, that there's a time of judgment coming against the world.

Paul says, God has fixed a day of judgment to address every sin. Look there to verse 30. He says, 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. So we see there is an infinite gap between the glory and the holiness of God and between our sin.

[24 : 26] There is a problem to be dealt with. There is an issue. God's wrath is against us in our sin. There is a coming day of judgment. What can we do about this?

The command is clear. He says, friend, repent of your sin. Repent of your sin. This is the bad news of the gospel, but tucked into this bad news is some incredibly good news.

I wonder if you saw it. And it's the good news that we celebrate here at Easter and that we celebrate every other Sunday for that matter. Third, we see the gospel is a message about Jesus. Did you catch it? Read it again. He says, sinners everywhere are commanded to repent of their sins. Why? Because God has fixed a day of coming judgment.

God will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. Who could this be? God has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead.

[25 : 33] Who could this be? who is the God appointed, resurrected, coming judge of all the earth? It is the risen Lord Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus is right here at the very heart of the message of the gospel. And it's the only hope for sinners like us. In fact, this seems to be at the very heart of Paul's message.

Even before he gets up there at the top of the Areopagus, verse 18 says he was preaching about what? What does it say? How does it sum up his preaching? He was preaching about Jesus and the resurrection.

This is right at the heart of the Christian message. If you want to know what Christians are all about, we are all about Jesus and the resurrection. Look at how they responded to this message.

They thought he was crazy. Isn't it interesting? They sat through all that stuff about God making all things. They sat through all that stuff. The hard talk about his rebukes of their idolatry.

[26 : 37] They endured that well enough. But verse 32 says when they heard about the resurrection of the dead, now they mock him and they say that's crazy. You realize it's no different today?

Do you realize how absurd it sounds to claim that somebody actually rose from the dead? If you zoom out of our Christian bubble here for a minute, when you go and talk to a non-believer and you tell them that you actually believe that some 2,000 years ago this man named Jesus who's not actually just a man, he's God in the flesh, he lived perfectly, he died on the cross, he actually died, he was laid in the tomb, but then he actually got up from the dead.

Do you realize how crazy we sound? It sounds absurd. And because of this, some religious groups, entire denominations that claim to be Christian, they no longer teach that the resurrection actually happened.

They minimize it to an idea or some spiritual lesson about perseverance or something about Christ's example living on after he died.

You may be tempted to minimize it like that. You may think that it sounds crazy, but I promise you, I am convinced, every member of this church is convinced that Jesus actually, really, truly, physically got up from the dead.

[28 : 09] And in fact, if Jesus is not actually, truly, physically, really risen from the grave, not just as an idea, not just as an inspirational lesson or some nonsense like that, but really, truly, physically, alive again, none of this matters one bit.

The resurrection isn't just something that is just a make-believe story that we celebrate once a year because it's kind of traditional and it's just what we do. No, everything hangs on this.

Everything hangs on whether or not Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead. God. This is what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, this famous chapter on the resurrection of Jesus.

He says, I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve, and then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive.

In other words, if you have any questions, go ask them. friend, when we say Christ is risen, and the church responds, he is risen indeed, this is a historical claim, not primarily a moral claim, or an ethical claim, but actually, we actually believe, I got to make this clear to you, we actually believe Jesus rose from the dead, you know that, right?

[29 : 53] Billy Graham says, there is more evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived, or that Alexander the Great died at the age of 33.

Charles Spurgeon says, the resurrection is a fact better attested than any event recorded in any history, whether ancient or modern. There were so many witnesses to behold it that if we do in the least degree receive the credibility of men's testimonies, we cannot and we dare not doubt that Jesus rose from the dead.

Do you believe it? I just marvel at this fact for just a minute. Here we have over 500 witnesses, and not to mention the dramatic change in the apostles, they went from fumbling and bumbling, scared and uncertain, and now to giving everything for the sake of preaching Christ resurrected.

How do you explain that? How do you explain the apostle Paul? You know this is the same Paul who used to go around arresting Christians and who hated the spread of the gospel, who wanted to bottle it up and kill them and wipe them off the face of the earth, and now he's going around from town to town risking injury, risking death, suffering, in order to proclaim that Christ rose from the grave.

How do you explain it? How do you explain the sudden shift all throughout the ancient world where believers all of a sudden now move their day of worship from Saturday now to Sunday?

[31 : 24] Why? That's the day of the Lord's resurrection. Not to mention to this day all anybody would have to do to just make all these Christians be quiet, go dig up the body of Jesus and bring it to me.

And they can't do it. Why? Because the tomb is empty. Christ has risen. death is defeated.

Paul says this is the whole point. This is what Christ came to do. And this is at the very center and heart of the message of Christianity. And if you fit into that category of center, which guess what? We all do. The message of the gospel, the good news, is that Christ Jesus has come to live in our place, to die and bear the wrath of God that we have earned and to rise again from the dead to crush the powers of sin and darkness.

It's proof positive for us. Paul calls it assurance. And that Jesus is in fact God in the flesh as he claimed to be. His resurrection is proof positive for us that his sacrifice was acceptable to God.

[32 : 40] His payment for our sins was sufficient once for all. his resurrection is proof positive. It's assurance that sin and death and the devil himself have been conquered.

Christ has won. His resurrection is proof positive that every word of the Lord proves true including his promised coming return. The resurrection of Jesus is everything for us.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ is still in the tomb, we are still in our sins. If the tomb is full, then all this religion stuff is empty.

If he is dead, then so is our hope. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. And this is the basic message of the gospel.

God is our creator. We have rebelled against him. Christ has been offered up as the one time sufficient payment for our sins. He lives and reigns now in resurrection.

[33 : 47] But we can't stop there. Because fourth, we see this message demands a response. This message demands that you respond.

I wonder if it would surprise you to know that the devil believes everything that I've talked about this morning. all the demons in hell know the truth about God. All the demons in hell know the truth about our sin.

All the demons in hell know that Jesus has risen from the grave. They know it better than most. Simply knowing the truth will not save you.

You must make a grace-enabled response to the truth. Paul here, he gives them the gospel as plain and simple and clear as he can make it.

God is the creator and ruler. Man is a sinner. Christ is the risen Savior. But look at what happens here in verse 32. There's a mixed response to the message of the gospel.

[34 : 53] Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, but others said, we will hear you again about this. Now you see the difference? Some immediately reject it.

They mock it. They write it off as ridiculous. Others are intrigued by it. They want to hear more. And Paul goes out from their midst in verse 34.

He says, but some men joined him and believed. Now I love that he calls them by name. It says, Dionysius heard the gospel and he believed the gospel that day.

And Damaris, she heard the gospel that day and she put her faith in Christ. She believed the gospel that day. And still others with them. They responded to this truth by putting their faith in Christ.

Friend, there are many responses to this gospel message. And I have no doubt that this morning, some of you probably will leave here laughing at the idea of an actual physical resurrection.

[35 : 57] Some of y'all will think that is absurd. And still some of you might be intrigued. Maybe you come back next week. Maybe you want to hear more about this Jesus and who he is and what he's done.

You're curious. But I hope and I pray and I think that some of you this morning may be like Dionysius and like Damaris.

Some of you this morning may be ready by the grace of God to leave behind your sin and to put your faith in Jesus. And if that's you, if you are not a believer, friend, your response this morning to this message is very simple.

Repent of your sins and put your faith in Christ. Turn from your sin and put your faith in the risen Lord Jesus and you will leave here this morning risen with Christ as a new creation.

creation. The old is gone. Behold, the new has come. And for you, church believer, we respond to this familiar message with a heart of worship and gratitude for what God has done in Christ.

[37 : 13] Praise God. In Christ, your sins have been forgiven. Because Christ has conquered, death has been defeated.

And because Christ is coming again, he will bring you to be where he is for the rest of eternity in the presence of God. J.C.

Ryle says, we need not wonder that so much importance is attached to our Lord's resurrection. It is the seal and headstone of the great work of redemption which he came to do.

It is the crowning proof that he has paid the debt which he undertook to pay on our behalf. He's won the battle which he fought to deliver us from hell and is accepted as our surety and our substitute by our Father in Heaven.

Had he never come forth from the prison of the grave, how could we ever have been sure that our ransom had been fully paid? Had he never risen from his conflict with the last enemy, how could we have felt confident that he has overcome death and him that had the power of death, that is the devil?

[38 : 20] But thanks be to God. We are not left in doubt. The Lord Jesus really rose again for our justification. True Christians are begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

They may boldly say with Paul, who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that is risen again. Father, we praise you that Jesus has risen from the grave.

And we praise you for his sacrifice in our place, that he has paid the debt that we owe for our sin and has been raised for our justification for all who turn from their sin and put their faith in him.

We praise you for the gift of eternal life that you freely give to all who believe. And we love you, Father. We praise you for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.