

Be Calm & Carry On

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

So Acts 17, we're just going to pick up where we left off before Drew came last week. I think this is just a wonderful word for us.

So we're in that second missionary journey of the Apostle Paul, and he's kind of marching through, doing his thing, and we could easily cover all these verses, but we're going to look down and begin reading in verse 16, if you'll look there with me.

This is the Word of God. Luke writes now, while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, this is Greece, this wasn't an earlier visit here, his spirit, I mean that was an okay joke, you can throw me a bomb.

You know, I mean, we're supposed to stick together on a lone day like this, right? While he was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.

[1 : 08] So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with them, and some said, what does this babblers wish to say?

Others says, he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities as to foreign gods, because he is preaching about Jesus and his resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus.

I knew that word, I'll be kind of proud of them. Areopagus saying, may we know what this new teaching is that you're presenting. For you bring some strange things to our ears, we wish to know therefore what these things mean.

Verse 21, now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except teach telling or hearing something new.

Acts 17, verse 22, so Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said to the Athenians, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.

[2 : 22] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with the inscription to an unknown God. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

Verse 24, 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 light and breath and everything.

Verse 26, and he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods in the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

Yet he's not actually 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 think that a divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

[3 : 47] The times of ignorance God has overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. Because he is 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 the assurance of all by raising him from the dead. Verse 32, Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.

But others said, We will hear you again soon. I will hear you again about this. So Paul went out in their midst, But some men joined him and believed, Among whom also were Dionysius.

There you have. Pog, I don't remember. I'm not sure that word so many times. And a woman named Demarius and others with him. That's the word of God.

You know, so many ways we look at children and we find out what we're really like. You know, we're so careful. In public interactions, we're so careful, so calculated, and so covered up.

[4 : 58] So camouflaged, if you will. But anybody who has kids knows that kids are not that way. They're out there in the open. They have no inhibitions. No pause.

They're so completely needy. And yet the first words they learn are, No! I do it! Right? Any parent heard that phrase?

Or they're so lovable and sweet, But the very next words they learn are, Mind. Mind. And when mind doesn't work, They lay down on the floor and kicking and screaming and carrying on.

Or one of the upsides of having older kids is the older kids get to look at the younger kids and see what they looked like when they used to do that. And all that kicking and screaming and carrying on.

And the older kids get to laugh at that. And then sometimes we would just all fall out and laughing at how absurd the temper tantrum is.

[6 : 00] And if that weren't enough, they can lie so well. Without trembling. And with a completely straight face. A polygraph could not detect.

But we can. We context with, did you eat the chocolate? And there's like chocolate around their lips. Or just wrappers hiding underneath their pillows.

But they laugh. And they try to hold. You know, it's interesting. Kids don't have to learn to be angry or selfish or strong-willed or to lie. And interestingly enough, they don't have to learn that the world isn't safe.

Safe is all their little world is. With hovering helicopter parents, video monitors, nightlights, and 24-hour care. They still know, though, somehow, intuitively, that the world itself is not safe.

And so they go to bed and worry about monsters, goblins, strangers, robbers in the dark. And as we get older, you would think we would leave our childhood fears behind us.

[7 : 07] We'd grow out. But as a society, if anything we have not grown out of, it's fear. One in six, conservatively, one in six Americans take anti-anxiety medications.

I bet it's a lot more. It could be fear of anything. Fear of death. Fear of love. Fear of losing something. Importantly. But one thing's certain. We've not outgrown fear.

Fear of fear. Our fear has been on display this week. Now, maybe we come in high and mighty, not afraid. No doubt, this situation is quite serious.

Our president declared a state of emergency. Just in case you're wondering, that doesn't happen often. The measures of distancing do not happen.

These are these guys that want perfect attendance with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. I don't know if they understand that. But then they're the ones that cancel school for two weeks. It's serious, right?

[8 : 14] No doubt, we should heed the counsel of medical professionals and government leaders. We should wash our hands faithfully. It just does seem absurd. I've been taking up singing the doxology because I think that's 22nd.

And it orients my heart to the Lord. We should avoid large crowds. We should try to flatten the curve. You don't know what I mean by that? Just open up the Western Post.

We must not, though, panic. We mustn't panic. We must not give in to fear, at least not the fear the world has.

So, the title of my message today, not that anybody really cares, is be calm and carry on. Be calm and carry on. Don't fear. This is where we're going. Don't fear what the world fears.

Fear and worship the living God. Don't fear what the world fears. You should fear something. Fear and worship God. Point one, everyone worships.

[9 : 11] Everyone worships. You know, the first thing Paul notices when he arrives in Athens is that everyone worships. Now, Athens was the cultural and political center of the Greek world.

So, before Rome and the Roman Empire, this was the one. You know, it was known for its literature, art, architecture. Most importantly, it's philosophy, which you saw in and as we were reading with the Stoics and Epicurean.

But from Athens also came Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. But when Paul enters Athens, he doesn't notice or take note of any of those things.

He notices what they worship. He goes to the synagogue first, as we have documented before. That's his custom. He goes to the synagogue. He preaches to the Jews.

But then he goes to the marketplace and sees a world full of idols. Look at verse 16. Now, while Paul is waiting for them, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city that was full of idols.

[10 : 12] Literally, the word means there's a city under idols. Not merely full of them, but under their spell.

Swamped with idols. Smothered with idols. You think about your hash browns when you get done with them over there at Waffle House. I mean, that's what Athens was. It was smothered, covered, and whatever with idols.

It was one person, two writers said, Athens is one great altar. So, you know, these idols would have been visible and obvious.

They would have been statues to greet gods of justice, prosperity, protection, magic, wisdom, and obviously Athena, so many other things. And when Paul arrives in Athens, he's not impressed with Athens.

He's provoked. Standing before the Areopagus, he proclaimed. Look at verse 22. Standing in the midst of them, he said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you're very religious.

[11 : 21] He could say the same thing to our student. For as I passed along and observed the altars of your worship, I found also an altar with the inscription, To an unknown God.

What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. Now, if you notice, Paul, if you've been remembering as we've been walking through Acts, he doesn't begin his sermon in a way that's typical of the rest of the sermon.

He doesn't begin talking about Abraham or Moses or the story of God in the Old Testament or even his promises of Jesus Christ. He begins with something more foundational, something true of everyone, something true of us, regardless of our background, upbringing, spiritual beliefs, or practices.

He begins by saying, Everyone worships. Everyone worships. When Kim and I brought our first child, our son Rev, home, we were totally enthralled.

We've got Cole and Peyton in the back, and they are in this phase. I'm a big fan of new babies because I just think it's so fun. But let's be honest. At the beginning, they are not contributing members to society.

[12 : 33] I mean, they are blobs. They are certified blobs who just eat, sleep, and do the regular activities. But as they grow, you know, I think we just, we, this little boy just began to be captivated by everything around him.

I just remember the lights that would turn on, you know, a light in a corner of a room which is mesmerizing. Or when we'd walk out of a room, he'd turn back as if to catch one last look at the light.

And then we'd start to move through these books, and his eyes began to form these contrast posts, just black and white, black and white. And he's beginning to see things. And then when his eyes began to form again, some look at people.

And he's a people watcher just like his dad. That's the one thing he gets from me. And he loves to interact. But I think he interacted and began to interact with people as if he already knew that they were the most amazing thing God created.

When he was six months old, I remember I used to get up in his face and smile and talk to him, you know. And he would slur or coo or whatever you want to say and kick his legs down like this and push his belly out as if he was convulsing in joy and delay.

[13 : 45] Our little boy. Not a plastic thing to manipulate. He was a boy created with a heart to worship. It just stunned me.

He wasn't created to be all about himself. He was created to be all about someone else. With this amazing capacity.

Dogs, as wonderful they are, they don't do this. They can't love, rejoice, praise, delight, fear, and endure. They worship this little boy.

He was created. Everyone worships. That's what they were created for. That's what you were created for. David Foster Wallace, not a Christian at all.

One speech said, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worship. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what?

[14 : 46] To worship. And I just love it. You know. As Paul gets into Athens, there's just so much idolatry going on.

But what he's struck by, what he runs to, is these folks who created to worship God. I wonder if we see our city the same way Paul saw Athens.

Do we see what our city worships? You know, there's an old saying that said, in Boston they ask, what does he know? In New York they ask, what does he make? In Philadelphia they ask, what family is he from?

And what they're pointing to is what those cities worship. They might worship education. They might worship wealth. They might worship family. Well, what do they ask here? What drives us here?

What do we worship? Is it family? Is it carving out an ideal life for ourselves and our kids? Is it tradition? Doing the same things over and over.

[15 : 52] Not because they're the right things necessarily, but because we've always done. Is it image? Having a sparkly, impressive life and character. Something that everybody wants.

Is it fear? Is that why we stockpile our ammo? And our toilet paper? What do we worship? Bob Dylan, in his Christian days, said, well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you've got to serve someone.

Do not fear what the Lord fears. Fear and worship the living God. Everyone worships. Fear and worship isn't. Point two, only the living God is worthy of worship.

Smart people can sometimes be so stupid. Athens is known for its learning and philosophy, but all of its striving and worship is built on chasing what they don't know.

I think this is very interesting. When the philosophers first meet Paul, they call him a battler. Now, that's a first century cut down. He's saying, you're a copycat.

[17 : 01] You're basic. You're fake. You're just saying what you've heard. You're just regurgitating things. But then they hear something new, and they say, we want to know more.

Maybe this guy isn't a battler after all. And I think in this, we see their folly. Look down in verse 21. Luke's telling the story, and then he adds this little comment.

Now, all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. So what he's saying is what they worship in this city, a bunch of intellectuals in the city, they don't worship knowledge.

They worship the quest for knowledge. Does that make sense? They don't worship what they know, but that they know the newest thing, the newest story, the newest book, the newest event, the newest philosophy, and knowing more than the next guy.

So that's what they're known for. Not so much for knowing things, but for wanting to know everything. But their knowledge is not true. It's never certain. It's never settled. It's never, they never arrived.

[18 : 09] That's what Luke's saying. What they worship on their idol is unknown. That's the definition of, well, close to the definition of agnosticism.

Something out there, somewhere, I just don't know. They worship the quest for knowledge, but true smart people worship God. After this buildup, Paul begins to preach, and we can do five sermons on what he preaches here.

He uncovers the living God who alone is worthy of worship. He confronts their idols at every turn. I think it's spectacular. I love it. The first thing he says, the living God is sovereign. Look at verse 24.

He says, 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. The smaller gods of the Greek were always, they were only in charge of the sky, the sea, or the harvest, or the fruit, or something like that.

But the Lord is in charge of everything under heaven. And earth, he was before everything, is what Paul is saying. In the beginning, God was. And he created the world and everything in it.

[19 : 20] The living God is sovereign and free. Completely separate from what he's made. And he's far above. That's what he means at the end of that verse.

He says, he doesn't live in temples made by human, or made by man, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed everything. He is the Lord of heaven and earth.

Unlike idols, it must be propped up. The Lord needs no temple made by men. All that's made was made by him.

Therefore, nothing made could contain him. I love the story of Dagon when the Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant.

They take the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolized the Lord, and when these people, they take it into the temple of Dagon. And when the idol worshippers would go to sleep, the idol of Dagon would fall at the feet, not the feet, but fall at the base of the Ark of the Covenant.

[20 : 23] And they'd just come back, set him back up, you know. And the next day, it fell at the base of the Ark of the Covenant. The same thing happened. Again, it's saying, the Lord doesn't need to be propped up.

You may prop up your little God. You may carve him out and make him look nice, but the Lord wants no prop. That's what he's saying. He's not served by human hands.

I love the way Drew put it last week or when I guess Psalm 50 put it, if I was hungry, I wouldn't call you. You're not on speed dial. If I was thirsty, I wouldn't call you.

The Lord is sovereign and free and so far above. We can worship God and we can hold our little hands and we can fear the one who holds everything.

The Lord, he's sovereign. The Lord is far above. The Lord gives everything. And this is where this passage just blows up. The God who made all these things, he's not served by human hands.

[21 : 25] In verse 25, 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 the face of the earth having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.

Idols need constant attention and make constant demands. In the old days, they demanded sacrifices and incense. You just follow, you set your calendar to the sacrifices that it made and they demand the same thing of us.

They demand time, attention, innumerable sacrifices as we don't burn incense and we don't burn sacrifices but we go to those things. But the Lord needs nothing.

He doesn't need you. You will not understand this God. I will not understand this God until you realize He needs nothing from you. He gives to all humankind life and breath and everything.

Literally what Paul's doing there, he's taking us back to Genesis 2-7. When the Lord created Adam, he literally took up his body and blew in the breath.

[22 : 31] Are things really held together by chance or fate or our decision? Every breath is what Paul said. Every breath that we breathe is a work of His doing.

Every breath is a gift. God's not a clockmaker that sets the clock to work. God personally and continually upholds and sustains all creation moment by moment by the word of His power.

or just taking a breath. We live with this in your eyes that we're in control.

The coronavirus comes down and you're at home. What's the Lord wants you to know? Every breath.

Every breath. Nothing's spinning in place. The Lord is holy. I'll never forget when my friends had a terrible form of leukemia that went into remission, came back.

[23 : 43] 40 plus, 45 year old man, six kids. We were worshiping together on Sunday morning, one Sunday. we read a catechism.

Just like we did today. Talking about everything in life is held together by the hand of the Lord. He was deep in the midst of chemotherapy.

Nearly all of his hairs had fallen out. and he recited with me, with us, not one hair falls from my head apart from your hand.

He told me that afternoon that his daughter reached up to his head. He said, Dad, that means you're here too. That's who the Lord is.

Everything is held. Just like Luther said, the goods and kindred go. There's more to life also. The body they can kill and take anything they want from me, come and have it. But God's truth abides still.

[24 : 48] We mustn't fear what the world fears. Paul Tripp says it so well in this quote.

The only truly practical and lasting solution to the fear of situations, location, or people, or coronavirus is fear of God. Only fear of someone more powerful than what you are facing and the assurance that this one of scary power has chosen to unleash his power for your benefit has the power to give you courage in the face of something or someone more powerful than you.

That's what it is. There's a God who has scary power and yet he's taking regard of you. And I just love this, this speech that roots us in these things.

But there's more, you know, he said, he made from one man. That's why I believe in one literal Adam. And he determined a lot of periods and the boundaries of every person who's dwelt on the face of the earth.

The idea is that different nations have risen up and declared themselves the best. The Greeks, the Romans, the Germans, but it is God behind it all. God topples one after another.

[26 : 02] He determines the dealings, the day, and the doings of every person under the sun. And that means you. All that you call life is from him. Your birth, your parents, your hometown right in the heart of big orange country.

Your education, your talents, your work, your relationships, your experiences, your difficulties, your opportunities, your possession. They're all his gifts. Every one of them.

Your salvation, the living God who's far above, who's sovereign and completely free. He gives. He just gives. He just gives.

Don't fear the one who gave you all these things and his son. He's not going to stiff you now. He's not going to nickel and dime you now.

As if it could get better. The living God is near. Why all this? Why all this? Why the creation?

[27 : 10] Why the creation? Why food is wonderful? Why blessings? Why all these things? Why being held together by his hand? God doesn't need the world.

He didn't create the world because he's low there and he's somebody to hang out with. He did it. Look at verse 27. So that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

Yet he's not exit far. In him we live, move, and have all our being. The God who's sovereign far above and giving so many of these things is near.

He made all this. All that you see so that we would seek him and know him so that we would feel our way to him. That we realize he's not far. We realize we live and move and have our being in him.

Here's the idea. All of creation, every star in the heavens, every sunset, every waterfall, every 16 inch trout, every detail of your birth and your life, every breath, every gift, every opportunity, every day you exhale and sigh at the end and say, Oh God, thank you that day's over.

[28 : 21] And every day you say, Lord, let this day not be over. Let me trace every goodness again and feel it all again. All of it, all of it is the Lord saying, I want you. I want you to know me.

I want you to see how kind and gracious and loving and steadfast I am. I want to cover you. I want to keep you. I want to rescue you. I want to save you. I want to keep you secure.

The Lord doesn't need anything. He gives everything to you. That's who he is. Run to him.

He wants to know you. That's incredible. This is the one. Don't build me a temple, but do come to me. Let me be everything.

That's incredible, isn't it? Point three, anyone who worships anything or anyone else must repent.

[29 : 34] Anyone who worships anything or anyone else must repent. The Lord commands all people everywhere to repent. The sermon's cut off, which is a total bummer.

I just would love to know what happens. Basically, Paul gets there and he just cuts to the chase.

He was going to declare more clearly about Jesus Christ. No doubt about that. But they get angry. But look at verse 30. Look at where he ends.

He says, It's time to ignore God's overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. Because he speaks today on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And of this, he has given the assurance to all by raising them from the dead. And that's what took the scales from him. The resurrection was an especially difficult word.

[30 : 37] But nevertheless, the point at the conclusion is very clear. Either we are worshiping God or an idol. There's no middle ground. There's no option of a non-choice in this moment.

Either we're worshiping God or we're giving our lives in some way to an idol, to something that is not God. Everyone who is not worshiping God should repent before it's too late.

That's what he's saying. It's time for ignorance and have God has overlooked. So God overlooked the times. You know, 2 Peter 3 says, a day is like a thousand years to the Lord.

A thousand years is like a day. And he's upholding these things. He's delaying that day of his return so that people might find mercy in Jesus Christ. And so he's overlooking all your past sin, all my past sin and inviting us to worship.

The living God has given us his Son and gives us so many things on top of it and has fixed a day in which all people everywhere will be judged by how they receive what he's given. After death is judgment.

[31 : 49] Jesus, the greatest gift of all, will stand to personally judge the living and the dead. He'll sift the wheat from the chaff. Remember those parables? He'll sift and separate the sheep from the goats.

on this earth it's not so clear. But on that day he says it'll be clear. To some he'll say welcome home, throw down your burden here forever. But to others the Bible says he'll say depart from me you who are cursed into the eternal power prepared for you by the devil and his angels.

Some will say the Lord says some will say in that day I cast out anything you were named. I went to church twice a month. I gave my money away. I served in the soup kitchen but everyone who did not turn everything over to Jesus Christ will hear him say in that day depart from me I never knew you.

Repentance is a powerful word. That is the truth of the gospel. If you repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ you will be saved. If you believe you say I'm putting all my chips in. That's a poker metaphor for church so sorry about that.

But I'm putting all my chips in on Jesus Christ. I'm not leaning on anything else. I believe that Jesus Christ by faith I believe that he is the Lord. I believe that he saved sins and I believe that he saved my sin.

[33 : 06] I'm leaning everything on him. I don't think he's just out there who could be a savior who may be a savior who is a savior. He's my savior. And if you put your trust in Jesus Christ he'll rescue you from your sins and grant you fellowship with God for eternity.

See repentance this is an especially important word for all of us but especially in times like this. We don't know the day or the hour. Death is the in Luke 13 several folks came to Jesus and asked in response to a national disaster they said were those people over there did they perish did they die because of their sin because they were worse sinners?

Is that why they suffered? Is that why the tower fell on them and killed them? Jesus said no I tell you but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

What he's saying today is no one who contracts the coronavirus and dies in all the nations in the world or in this nation are dying because they're we're sinners. Rather their death is a wake up to all of us who are alive.

we are indeed sinners and we must not sleep until we're sure that we have repented and trusted in Jesus Christ. I mean that is the truth of the gospel I mean that's the truth of this word there is a day that Jesus has appointed are these the days the last days I don't know that a day he's appointed which will judge all people if you've not trusted in Jesus Christ you'll perish.

[34 : 43] but if you've repented don't fear don't fear look after you I have one favorite cause is Martin Luther Jones his faith is a refusal to panic we need a healthy measure of that don't fear don't fear what the world fears fear and worship the living God be calm carry on keep loving others one of the greatest prayers for our community right now is that we keep loving one another I mean we've been quarantining or whatever we're doing for a couple days and we're already chipping I was at Target the other night buying about 50 dozen eggs you know to stock up just kidding just two 24 no and this lady's having trouble bringing them out and was just just like hell it's been a terrible day it's been a tough day retail clerks getting blessed out outside their control let's don't do that let's don't give into panic

I don't know where you are I don't know what you're like I don't know how this fear hits you but it may be a moment by moment you know we are not cordless drills! I mean we're not cordless drills we're cordless drills that need to be charged up constantly and for you that may be you might have a minute charge 5 minute charge 30 minute charge for you confessing Lord I just don't want to get into fear I want to be precaution but I want to get into fear find someone to love check in on your neighbor one of the things I love about this passage is that it shows that the apostle Paul he's not a one trick pony he doesn't have one message he goes to the synagogue and he preaches the paint off the walls on how Jesus was the Messiah that was promised he goes to Athens the center of idolatry preaches the paint off the walls in a very different way it calls us to adapt so to speak as we interact with people right now is a wonderful time every person you interact with is battling some degree of anxiety what's going on talk to them at 16 you know but you know we think how can I relate to these people you know this is a great way you think about coronavirus man you know

I don't know what you think about it that's what you can find out but the uncertainty of fear that's what I don't care about coronavirus ultimately I mean obviously I don't want to claim the last name my friend I don't want to be safe and cautious but the fear and uncertainty if not carefully confronting with the word of the gospel will ruin their soul that's the fact is dangerous fear outside of the Lord is deadly let's don't fear what the world fears let's fear and worship the living God let us pray Father in heaven we do confess we are cordless drills that need to be constantly charged in dependence upon you we pray for help we pray for strength we pray that you sustain us again we do pray that you would confront this virus and keep your people safe we call on you

Lord I do call this will be a day of salvation Lord we join with our nation again for this national day of prayer Lord we pray that whatever is going on in our country would bring forth the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ God help us we need you we highly need and confess our need for you in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com who