

Acts 17:16-34

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[0 : 00] Found in your pew Bible on page 926, we are reading this morning Acts 17 verses 16 through 34.

Acts 17 beginning at verse 16. 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 persons 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 babbler wish to say? Others said, he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities. Jesus and the resurrection.

And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, may we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strength to your ears.

[1 : 10] We wish to know therefore what these things mean. Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who live 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 object 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. 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.

[2 : 25] 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 the 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 Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Well this morning we see the Apostle Paul in the midst of one of the intellectual centers of the ancient world. Athens. Renowned for its 400 year history of great philosophers and thinkers going all the way back to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

[3 : 37] Athens was widely known for its elaborate art. Historic architecture for its theaters, temples and marketplaces. In the section of the book of Acts we see Paul visiting a succession of cities.

We saw in chapter 16 coming to proud pagan privileged Philippi. Chapter 17 we saw Thessalonica, the crossroads capital.

Berea, slightly off the beaten track. Chapter 18 we'll come to Corinth, a thriving commercial port. But today we are in Athens, the university town.

Athens as we see in verse 17 had a small minority of Jews and devout persons who gathered in a synagogue to learn from the Bible. Athens had a marketplace where all kinds of people gathered for

business and social purposes.

But the story we have here focuses on Paul's interactions with the philosophers and scholars. With people who are quite intelligent but who are completely unfamiliar with the Bible.

[4 : 42] And this morning I want us to consider particularly how Paul interacts with these philosophers in Athens. And more broadly what the Christian faith has to say to intelligent, scholarly, non-Christian people today.

Now maybe you say, well that's sort of where I am. Maybe you're skeptical. You're a thinker and you think, yeah I can sort of see how Christianity is emotionally attractive to people.

But I just don't know whether it really stands up to thoughtful inquiry. Is it rationally well grounded? Well I hope you'll find Paul's words thought provoking if that's you.

Or maybe you're a Christian and you're a student or a faculty member. Or you're regularly interacting with people who are very intelligent. Maybe more intelligent than you in some respects. And yet operate out of a completely non-biblical worldview. This passage I think provides a model for how to communicate the Christian message in that kind of context.

[5 : 43] So I hope you'll be encouraged and equipped as we look at Paul's example here. But maybe, maybe you're not an intellectual. Maybe you feel like scholars have their heads up in the clouds.

And their feet are far from the ground. They're always thinking they're so important. Coming up with all these weird theories. Speaking in a language no one else can understand. Especially philosophers.

Well let me say two things to that. First of all, Luke who wrote the book of Acts. Seems to sympathize with your concern. Verse 21. Luke makes a rare side comment.

And says, now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. This isn't a totally positive comment.

In other words, the Athenians were addicted to novelty. Constantly attracted to the latest theories. And that tendency is still very present in academia, right?

[6 : 42] You have to find something new to say. That no one else has ever said before quite in the same way in order to get your dissertation approved. PhD students, can you say amen?

Amen. But of course, if novelty always rules the day, then no one's ideas are going to last very long. And whatever you write now has little chance of being read in 20 years.

Let alone 200. Well, so that's one thing. But second, as verse 17 says, Paul reasoned both in the synagogue, in the marketplace, and with the philosophers.

That would be like preaching in churches, right? In places where people expect to hear teaching from the Bible. Talking with people on the green or at Starbucks or at the mall or in the marketplace of today.

As well as going to lectures at Yale. Engaging with students and faculty at local universities. Paul engaged with a whole range of people. And as a church, that's our mission.

[7 : 45] Our calling here in New Haven. Is to engage with a whole range of people that God has brought to New Haven. Now, not every one of us will be quite as flexible as Paul. And be able to do all three of those really well.

But that's what we're all called to as a church as a whole. And we all have a part to play. And we're all called to embrace this broader mission of the church. So, regardless of whether you're a student, I think this passage is relevant to you this morning.

And I think it applies beyond scholarly context as well. But, as I said, Luke focuses on Paul's interactions with these scholars in Athens. Now, why did Paul focus his time with the scholars?

Well, I don't think Paul did not spend time among these philosophers and scholars because he was enthralled by their prestige. Or because he thought they were the most important people in the world.

Or because he worried that without their endorsement, his message would never gain any real traction. Paul spent time with the scholars primarily because God in his sovereignty had placed him there.

[8 : 56] In fact, it's not even clear that Paul actually intended to go to Athens at this time in his ministry. Verse 16 says Paul was waiting for them in Athens.

A little bit of background. Paul had traveled to Philippi. Right? He'd had that vision of the man in Macedonia. So, he said, okay, clear direction. We're going across to Philippi.

The road from Philippi goes west to Thessalonica. Another main major city. And we know that for many years, Paul had wanted to go all the way to Rome.

And if you went from Philippi to Thessalonica, if you stay on the main road, it leads you across Macedonia to the Adriatic Sea. You cross the Adriatic Sea. You're in Italy. You get a main road right up to Rome.

We can't be totally sure, but it seems like that might have been Paul's plan. But he gets to Thessalonica. There's a riot. The believers send him slightly off the beaten track to Berea.

[9 : 54] Opposition follows him to Berea. They put him on a boat, send him south to Athens. And Silas and Timothy are going to follow as soon as possible. He's waiting for them in Athens. It wasn't his plan to be there in the first place.

He was waiting for his friends to come so he could move on somewhere else. Maybe you're here in New Haven or in Connecticut and it wasn't your plan to be here or to stay here for so long.

Maybe you feel like you're waiting for something to happen so you can move on. Maybe you're studying at Yale and you actually don't feel that excited about it.

Maybe it feels like a foreign land and it feels draining and it's not all that it seems cracked up to be. But you know, even though it wasn't necessarily Paul's plan to come to Athens, it was God's plan for Paul to be in Athens.

And Paul made the most of his time there. How did Paul make the most of his time there? Well, he didn't just approach Athens as a starry-eyed tourist, admiring the historic architecture and munching on hero sandwiches as he walked through the streets.

[11 : 02] Neither did he approach Athens as a disgruntled critic, complaining about how uppity those Athenians were in their heads all the time. Nor was he intimidated into fearful silence by the greatness of Athens' scholarly reputation.

Aren't all those reactions that we could be tempted to have, right? If you walk through downtown New Haven or if you go to a place like Yale. Now, Paul's initial reaction to being in Athens, we see in verse 16.

It says, His spirit was provoked because he saw that the city was full of idols. One ancient writer said in Athens, There are more gods than there are people. There were statues of great military and political leaders.

There were temples where sacrifices were offered to a whole variety of Greek gods. There were pillars and sculptures celebrating erotic pleasures. Paul saw these, and he was upset.

He was indignant. He was deeply disturbed. And this wasn't just his momentary impulse. It was an ongoing reaction. The same word is used to describe God's reaction to idolatry in the Old Testament.

[12 : 20] That God was provoked to anger. He was jealous for his honor and reputation. And that people would see him rightly for who he was.

And Paul was also jealous for the honor of the one true God. And dismayed to see that this God who had made the world and everything in it was not rightly understood.

Or worshipped. Or obeyed. Now of course you might say, well in modern New Haven, we don't worship idols. And offer sacrifices in temples like the Athenians did.

Or do we? Have you ever been to Sterling Memorial Library? The main library at Yale. Not only is it built like a cathedral. But as you walk in the front entrance.

You see straight ahead of you in the place where an altar would normally be. A brilliantly restored painting of the goddess of knowledge. Surrounded by the disciples of knowledge.

[13 : 21] Standing before a tree of knowledge. And do we not sacrifice quite a lot on the altar of knowledge. And education. And you know this isn't just a Yale thing.

One of the recently rebuilt New Haven public schools. On Dixwell Avenue. Has a banner prominently displayed. In its front windows. In capital letters. Education equals freedom.

Freedom. Isn't education seen as the promise. The guarantee of freedom. And future hope for all. Or what about the gradually expanding footprint.

Of the hospital. And the northeast medical group. Promising health and healing. From Westchester to Old Saybrook. As the new advertisement says.

And charging quite a high price. Even though you don't get the bill. Until after you go there. Now don't get me wrong. Education and healthcare. Are worthwhile pursuits.

[14:22] They're an important contribution. They make an important contribution. To the well-being of our society. But when they promise more than they can deliver. When they become the primary source.

Of our present identity. And our future hope. They become idols. Vicious God substitutes. That eventually suck the life.

Out of people. And obscure the glory. Of the Lord who made us. Brothers and sisters. Are we distressed. By the idols. In our city.

Like Paul was. Is it a burden on our heart. That we bring to the Lord in prayer. When we see the idolatry. In our city. When we see. Our own tendencies. To make good things.

Into. The things that. Make our lives. Into ultimate things. Are we motivated. To live differently. Are we motivated. To.

[15:21] Cry out. As we sang earlier. Give us clean hands. Give us pure hearts. Let us not lift our souls. To another. Are we motivated. To be wholeheartedly.

Devoted to our God. And Savior. And to proclaim. This good news. About the one true. And living God. Who gives life. To anyone who will listen. So that's Paul's. Initial response.

To Athens. He saw their idols. He was provoked to anger. He reasoned. With all kinds of people. And engaged. With them. About. The one true God. Now in verse 18 to 20.

We'll see the scholars. Initial response to Paul. Now you might wonder. Who exactly were these scholars. That Paul interacted with. What did they believe? Well verse 18. Luke mentions. Two groups of them.

The Epicureans. And the Stoics. The Epicureans. Were sort of easygoing. Agnostics. Their motto. Went like this. Nothing to fear in God.

[16:17] Nothing to feel in death. Pleasure can be attained. Pain can be endured. In other words. The Epicureans believe. That the gods might be out there. But they're far away. They're in their own world.

They're not bothered. With human affairs. They believe the world. It was composed of atoms. Material atoms. And life was a product of chance. And time. And the death would be the end.

Of human existence. And one day the entire universe. Would go up in flames. In the meantime. The goal. Is to avoid pain. And enjoy pleasure. As much as possible.

Now for the most part. The Epicureans didn't go crazy. They. Their ideal was to be like the gods. To be undisturbed. To have a life of tranquility.

Enjoying simple pleasures. Of food and drink. And friendship. The Epicureans were the easy going. Agnostic. Artsy yuppies. Of ancient Athens.

[17:15] One might say. The Stoics on the other hand. Were rigorous moralists. Committed to duty. And virtue. In one sense.

The Stoics believed in God. But the Stoics idea of God. Was an impersonal force. Of reason. An energy. That pervaded. And determined. The entire universe.

A divine spark. That animated. All human beings. And for the Stoics. The goal of human life. Was to live in accordance. With that reason. And to calmly accept. Everything that happened.

As the inevitable result. Of fate. Because everything that happened. Was the result of fate. Many Stoics believed. That history was an endless cycle. People would live. And die.

Eventually the universe. Would die. And go up in flames. And then it would be renewed. And then because everything. Was completely determined. By this impersonal. Mechanistic fate.

[18:11] History would follow. The exact same course. All over again. And again. And again. The Stoics motto. Might have been something like. Grin and bear it.

Don't get over emotional. Either about tragedy. Or happiness. Be steady. And self-sufficient. The Stoics were the disciplined. Dutiful. Orderly. Military type folks.

In ancient Athens. But despite their differences. With one another. Both the Epicureans. And the Stoics. Reacted negatively. When they first heard.

Paul preaching. Some of them were dismissive. What does this babbler. Wish to say. That word babbler. Was used to describe. A bird. Who would pick up some seeds. And sort of drop them.

As he was flying along. Or a person. Who would sort of. Snatch sound bites. From other people's ideas. And didn't really have anything original to say. He was just sort of regurgitating.

[19:06] Other people's ideas. In a very unthoughtful way. So some people were dismissive. But others weren't just dismissive. They were suspicious. He seems to be a preacher. Of foreign

divinities.

They heard Paul talking about Jesus. And about the resurrection. And they thought he was talking about. A male female pair of gods. Jesus and Anastasia. The Greek word for resurrection.

I mean. There's all kinds of misunderstandings. Paul had to face. You know. And so they took him. And brought him to the Areopagus. Now that word took him. Is translated in chapter 16.

And chapter 18. Seized him. Or arrested him. It's not necessarily. A friendly taking. And the Areopagus was the supreme court. Of ancient Athens.

And a long time ago. A very similar accusation. Had been made against Socrates. Who was later executed. Socrates was initially accused. Of believing in gods. Of his own invention.

[20 : 06] Instead of the gods. Recognized by the city. So the question. That the people come to Paul with. Is not just a curious question. Hmm. That's interesting. We want to hear more. It's also a suspicious question.

You bring some strange things. To our ears. What exactly do you mean? Is this new teaching. A threat to our city? Now I wonder.

If you're not a Christian. Do you identify. With any of these reactions. To Christianity? Perhaps you're curious. You're genuinely curious. You just want to learn more. Perhaps there was a time. When you were dismissive. Dismissive. Where you thought. This just sounds ridiculous. Or perhaps you're. Quietly suspicious. And worried.

That biblical Christianity. Will undermine. A culture of tolerance. And diversity. These are some of the reactions. Of the scholars in Athens. To Paul's preaching about Jesus. And in verse 22 to 31.

[21 : 06] We see Paul's response. To the curious. Dismissive. And suspicious. Intellectuals. Of ancient Athens. And I want to point out. Two things. About Paul's speech. To them this morning.

First. What we see. Especially in verse 22 through 28. Is that Paul. Intentionally. Connected. The Christian. Message. To what they already.

Believed. Paul connected. With these Athenian. Scholars. In at least five ways. First. He began. By addressing them. Respectfully. He said.

Men of Athens. I see that you are very religious. He didn't start. By telling them off. Or attacking their idolatry. But patiently. And respectfully. Seeking. To gain a hearing. Now the word religious. Could have a positive meaning. As in. Being devout. Or it could have had a negative meaning. Like superstitious. Could mean both things. You know. Paul's careful. He doesn't flatter.

[22 : 03] The Athenians. He doesn't say something. That he doesn't really believe. Is true. On the other hand. He's careful to avoid. Unnecessary offense.

So. Respect. Second. He finds a point of contact. From within their own culture. Verse 23. He says. As I was looking. Through your city. I saw this altar.

To an. To an unknown God. Now we don't know exactly. What this altar was. Or why it was constructed. There are a few references. And other. Ancient writings.

To altars. To unknown gods. In Athens. And elsewhere. We don't know exactly. Which one this was. But Paul takes it. As a jumping off point. He says. You know. Isn't it interesting. In a city where. You have. More gods than people. Right. They're never enough. And there's a recognition. Of something. That more.

[22 : 59] That you haven't yet. Grasped. That you don't yet know. That you want to worship. You know. Paul doesn't just come on the scene. And say. Look.

I know what you need to hear. Turn from idols. To the one true God. Listen to the Bible. And listen to me. No. He takes the time to. He starts with something.

Within their own culture. That points to. The truth about. The very same God of the Bible. You see. Paul knows that all people. Are created in God's image.

Church. And so. Within every culture. Even cultures that have had. No prior Christian influence.

There are points of contact. Within every culture. That reflect. God's truth.

And part of our job. As Christians. Is to carefully observe. As Paul did. And find those points of contact. And begin there. In our conversations. With not.

[23 : 55] With people who don't. Believe in Christianity. In our modern culture. Perhaps there are even more. Points of contact. Because there are. Remnants of. For example. Of Christian ethical teaching.

That have survived. Into a. Post-Christian. Pluralistic age. Right. Things like a belief. In human rights. Most people today. Believe in human rights.

That makes a lot of sense. If you. Agree with the Bible. That people were made. In the image of God. That idea is on. Very thin footing. If human life.

Is simply the product. Of time. And chance. And nothing else. So it's a point of contact. There are. Many others.

So. Respect. Point of contact. Third. He presented the Christian teaching. About God. In ways that resonated. With their own beliefs. The Stoics would have agreed. That there's one God. Who made the world. And everything in it.

[24 : 51] And that this God. Was sovereign. Over the periods of history. And the boundaries of nations. The Epicureans. Would have agreed. That the divine being. Whoever it might be. Is self-sufficient.

And doesn't need anything. From people. Fourth. Paul addressed their misconceptions. And concerns. About Christianity. They had some. Weird misconceptions.

Paul made it clear. That he's not talking about. Two gods. A male God. Jesus. And a female God. Anastasia. He said. No. I'm talking about one God. Who made the world.

And everything in it. Let's start there. He also says. The God I'm talking about. Is not a foreign God. He made all the nations of the world. From one man.

To live on all the face of the earth. He's not a local God. Who belongs primarily to one ethnic group. He's the God of all the earth. And he doesn't need a new temple to be built.

[25 : 44] Paul says. You know. I'm not trying to bargain. For another piece of real estate. In downtown Athens. That's not what it's about. So he clears all these misconceptions. To the side.

Excuse me. Fifth. He quoted some of their own poets. Verse 28. The first quotation. Is most likely from Epimenides of Crete. An ancient Greek philosopher poet.

The second is from a Stoic poet. Eratos of Sicilia. Now Paul wouldn't. Probably wouldn't have agreed. With a larger point. That these writers were trying to make.

If you take these. If you look at. The whole book. Or poem. That these quotes come from. But he was able to take excerpts. From what Greek poets had already said.

And weave them into. A presentation of. Truth about God. And the message of Jesus Christ. So for those of us who are Christians.

[26 : 40] Do we intentionally seek to connect. As Paul did. With our non-Christian neighbors. Do you approach people. With genuine respect. Do you seek to understand.

Their world view. What they already believe. Have you looked for points of contact. With the Christian faith. Do you see how the Christian faith. Maybe resonates with some things. That they already believe. Have you sought to address.

Some of their misconceptions. And concerns. Have you read their favorite books. Or seen their favorite movies. Now some of you might be thinking. But isn't that making it more complicated. Than it needs to be. Too much beating around the bush. Too much accommodating. To people's misguided notions. Paul doesn't even mention Jesus. Until the last sentence of his speech. Didn't Paul think better of it.

And change his approach. When he went to Corinth. Shouldn't we just aim to preach Christ. And him crucified. And that's it. Take it or leave it. None of this quoting pagan poets. And finding points of contact.

[27 : 39] Just tell people. Look. Here's how it is. Take it or leave it. Well in some context. Paul does take. A straightforward. In your face approach. Back in Acts 13.

Paul didn't mince any words. When he confronted. Aemus the magician. With a strong rebuke. But you know. Luke gives us no reason. To think. That Paul's speech in Athens.

Was misguided. In any way. Or that Paul thought better. Of it later on. In fact. Luke highlights the speech. In the flow. Of the story. There are three major speeches.

In sort of the fourth. And fifth sections of Acts. Chapter 13. Paul gives an extensive speech. In the synagogue. In Pisidian Antioch. Showing how Jesus was the fulfillment.

Of the law and the prophets. Here he gives an extensive speech. To the philosophers in Athens.

And in chapter 20. He gives an extensive speech. To the elders of the church in Ephesus. And each of these speeches.

[28 : 38] Are presented as models. Of how to communicate the Christian faith. In different contexts. So. What I think we can take from this.

Is that there are times. And there are times and places. Where it is right. To take. A straightforward. In your face approach. Perhaps with people who.

Think they know what Christianity is about. But are seriously mistaken. Or who profess faith in God. But live in blatant hypocrisy. Paul would probably be very straightforward. In those situations.

In fact he was. But there are times and places. Where it's right to take. The approach he took in Athens. Patiently seeking to establish. And explain. A Christian worldview.

Before calling people. To repent and believe in Jesus. And. And perhaps. That's particularly appropriate. In scholarly contexts. At universities.

[29 : 35] When. Or when speaking to. Thoughtful people. Who have little or no. Christian background. That seems to be Paul's approach. What we can take from it. See Paul doesn't always take the same approach.

Paul wasn't just an. In your face kind of guy. Who was always getting in everybody's face. And Paul wasn't. A wishy-washy. Never. Never confront anyone. Person.

Person. Or he wasn't just a slow. You know. Take a long time. To actually get to his point. Person. His approach to people. Wasn't determined by his personality.

It was determined by what would be most helpful. And appropriate. For the people he was engaging with. All right. So that's the first thing we see. Paul connected. The Christian faith. To what they already believe.

But we also see. That Paul confronted. Their ignorance. And their idolatry. Paul didn't just agree with. What they already knew.

[30 : 30] And affirm them just as they were. Paul also confronted them. And called them. To repent. In verse 30. So let's look at that theme.

Paul confronts. The Athenians. Both at the beginning. And the end of his speech. Paul referred to their ignorance. Now. You know.

If you go up to a PhD student. And say. I just want you to know. You're pretty ignorant. You might not get a good reaction. Right.

But Paul says. In verse 30. He talks about the times of ignorance. He doesn't quite. Again. He doesn't quite say it that blatantly. But he talks about the time of ignorance. And in verse 23. What therefore you worship as unknown.

Or. In ignorance. This I proclaim to you. He's saying. Though you may be very well educated. You are living in ignorance of the one true God.

[31 : 28] You do not know. The one true God. And so some might have been offended. But perhaps some were sympathetic. You know. The more you study. Isn't it true that the more you study. The more you realize.

How much there is out there. That you don't know. And so Paul went on to tell them. About the one true God. And he challenged them. Here's at least four ways he challenged them.

First he challenged popular attempts to bargain with God. Verse 24 and 25. He says. There's one God. Who made the world. And everything in it. He doesn't live in temples. You can't manipulate him.

You can't contain him. God is not served by human hands. As though he needed anything. In other words. God doesn't owe you anything. You see the whole system.

Of making sacrifices to idols. Was based on the hope. That if you sacrifice to the gods. Then they'll take care of you. And be nice to you. And give you what you want.

[32 : 23] Hopefully. Paul says that's completely misguided. You cannot earn anything from God. You cannot buy things from God. He doesn't owe you anything. Rather.

He's given you. He's given you everything that you have. Second. He challenged their feeling. Of ethnic superiority.

Athenians believed that they were unique. And exceptional. Unlike any other people. On the face of the earth. Most other nations have believed the same. Verse 26. Paul says.

God made from one man. Every nation. Of mankind. To live on all the face of the earth. God is the ruler of all nations. Not the exclusive property of one. Third.

Paul challenged the Stoics. He challenged their assumption. That God was an impersonal force. Or a pervasive energy. Paul says. Wait a minute. If we are God's offspring.

[33 : 22] In other words. If we're creatures. Made in his image. And if we are personal. Beings. Then God is no less personal.

Than we are. God is not just a force. Or energy out there. That would. Mean making God less. Than we are. God is a personal being.

Calling for personal. Loyalty. Paul also challenged the Epicureans. Epicureans thought. God is far away. Not worried about us. Paul says in verse 27.

But he is actually not. Far. From each one of us. You know. If you've been. Exploring. Christianity. You know.

I wonder if you've seen. Both. The connection. And the challenge. Of the Christian worldview.

Maybe you've seen. That Christianity. Really resonates. With some things.

[34 : 17] That you deeply believe. Or feel that you really need. Or really want. But have you also faced. The ways that. The Christian message. Calls you. To change your thinking.

Or to change your way of life. The Christian faith. Does make some distinct. And countercultural claims. That we must wrestle with.

And so we see. Paul both. Connected. To the Athenians. And what they already believe. But he also confronted. And challenged them. And that's what. The gospel of Jesus Christ. Does to every person.

It doesn't matter. If you're a scholar. Or if you didn't. Even go to high school. It connects with us. At a very deep level. Because we're creatures. Made in the image of God. And it confronts us.

As people who are fallen. And sinful. And who have. Turned away from God. Verse 27. Says that God's purpose.

[35 : 17] For us. Was that we should seek him. And find him. But you know. The sad irony is. In that verse. Is that.

Though God made. The world. And everything in it. Though he gives us. Life and breath. And everything. He actually isn't far. From each one of us. But. And he made us. To seek him. And find him. But we're. We never complete that process.

We're still groping. In the dark. You know. The word. The word that's translated. Feel their way.

Toward him. Is a word. In verse 27. Is a word used.

Of people in a dark room. Stumbling around. Trying to find their bearings. Trying to feel. On the walls. You know. Paul's not saying. That. Some people.

Seek after God. On their own. And successfully find him. He uses a word. Translated. Perhaps. To express a wish. It expresses a wish.

[36 : 15] That something would happen. But no guarantee. That it actually will. Paul doesn't say. God made us. To seek him. And find him. Because he's not far.

From each one of us. He actually says. God made us. To seek him. And find him. And yet. He's actually not far away. Even though he's not far away. We still. Can't find him. On our own.

And that's why. Paul comes to Athens. To say. What you worship. As unknown. What you recognize. Is out there. This. I'm going to tell you about. It's possible.

That in verse 27. Paul was alluding. To an old story. Told by the most famous. Athenian philosopher. Of all. Socrates.

Recorded by Plato. In his book. The Republic. Socrates. Compared the human condition. To living in a dark. Cave. A dark. Underground. Cave. He said.

[37 : 11] Outside. There is light. And truth. And beauty. And justice. But inside. We live in darkness. We are bound in chains. And we can only see.

Shadows. Images. Dancing on the wall. Of the cave. And we're fascinated. By these images. These idols. We think that's all there is.

Because. That's all we've ever seen. And we're not far. From the light. But we're living in ignorance. And in idolatry. And Socrates said.

We're not only. Unable to free ourselves. Because we're in chains. He says. We're also unwilling. To be freed. Socrates said. If one of the prisoners. Was freed from his chains. And dragged out of the dark cave.

And into the light. He would resist. At every step of the way. And he would cover his eyes. Blind. In the blinding light of day.

[38 : 08] And he says. If a man. Who had been brought. To see the light. Came back into the cave. Seeking to free his fellow prisoners. They would turn on him. And kill him. If they would.

If they could. It's a fascinating analogy. But the Christian message. Is that there was one free man. Who came from the light.

Into our darkness. In order to set the captives free. And we turned on him. And crucified him. And yet this Jesus. Who was crucified.

God raised him from the dead. To demonstrate. That he was. And is. And always will be. The rightful king. Of glory. And justice. Over all the world. Verse 31.

Paul concludes his speech. He says. God has fixed a day. On which he will judge the world. In righteousness. By a man. Whom he has appointed. And he has given assurance to all.

[39 : 04] By raising him from. The dead. It's a message of future judgment. And future hope. And in the context of Athens. It was a radically new message.

No one in Athens. Believed in the bodily resurrection. Of the dead. The Epicureans believed. That you live. You die. That's it. They had no fear.

Of future judgment. But they also had no hope. That evil would ever be conquered. And so the Epicureans. Were friendly. And kind. Among themselves.

But they remained. Largely isolated. From the troubles. Of this world. Epicurean philosophy. Attracted people. Who had the leisure. To enjoy good food.

And good friends. But it gave no comfort. To those who were suffering. Terribly. Or facing untimely deaths. Stoics believe. We're all part of this larger whole.

[40 : 04] This universe. Pervaded by reason. And energy. And one day. We'll all. Die. And sort of merge into that. One day. The universe will go up in flames.

And then repeat itself. All over. And over. And over again. Stoics were dutiful. And disciplined. Some of them were calm. And composed. In the midst of great pain. Pain.

But. Stoic fatalism. Allowed. No room. To truly grieve. Over injustice. And cruelty. And it offered no. Hope or promise. Of everlasting joy.

Because history was a cycle. That would repeat itself. Over and over. But Paul proclaimed. Paul proclaimed. A message. That history.

Was moving towards a conclusion. It wasn't just going to end. And it wasn't just going to go around and round. But it was moving toward a day. When God would come and judge the world.

[40 : 58] And rule the world in righteousness. Through the man he had appointed. On that day. Evil would be defeated. And judged. And removed. And idols would crumble and fall. And the created order would joyfully welcome its rightful Lord.

As Psalm 96 says. Let the heavens be glad. Let the earth rejoice. Let the sea roar. Let the field exult. The trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord.

For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness. And the peoples in his faithfulness. You see when it's talking about judgment.

It's not only talking about removing the evil. But it's also talking about setting up his eternal kingdom. Where he will rule the world in righteousness. And faithfulness.

It's a message of future hope. But it's also a call to repent. Every knee will bow before this king. Who has been raised from the dead. Paul says God commands all people everywhere.

[41 : 55] Without exception to repent. To forsake our idols. And come under the lordship of this king Jesus. Have you come under the lordship of this king Jesus?

Who will one day rule the world in righteousness. Verse 32 to 34. We see the responses of people in Athens. Some mocked. Didn't bother to listen anymore.

Others said we'll hear you again. Perhaps they were sincere. Perhaps they were just procrastinating. Some joined Paul. Started following him.

And either that day or later on. They came to believe. Including one of the members. Of the Areopagus itself. And a woman named Damaris. And others as well.

What is your response to this Jesus? Let us pray. Father we thank you for.

[43 : 07] That you are the God who made. The world and everything in it. And that you have made. Human beings in your image. Lord we thank you for.

Paul's. For giving. Filling Paul with your Holy Spirit. And with wisdom. To connect. This message of the gospel. To what the Athenians believed.

Already. And yet. To boldly confront them. With the unique message. Of Jesus Christ. The crucified and risen Lord. Lord we pray that you would.

Draw us near to you this morning. We pray in Jesus name. Amen. Well this morning we come to celebrate.

The Lord's Supper.