

Journey Through Acts
“The Unknown God”
Acts 17:16-34

Introduction:

1. Tonight - We Are Going To Get Back To:
 - Our ***Journey Through Acts*** - So Please Go With Me:
 - In Your Bibles To:
 - Acts 17 - Where - After A Difficult And Dangerous Time In The Cities Of:
 - Philippi & Thessalonica & Berea:
 - **Paul Had To Be “Sent Away” By** The Brethren!
 - And - In Order To Be Out Of Reach:
 - Of The Jews - Paul Was “Conducted” By Land & Sea:
 - Over 200 Miles To The Once Great Capital City Of The Philosophers:
 - Athens!
 - This Is A Map:
 - That Shows The Distance Paul Traveled:
 - To Get To Athens!
 - And Once He Got There:
 - **This Was What He Saw!**
 - All The Ancient Glory Of Athens:
 - With The Pagan Parthenon Sitting High Atop The Acropolis!
 - Today - Athens Remains:
 - The Capital & Largest City In Greece:
 - And Its Recorded History Spans:
 - Around 3,500 Years!
 - It Was The Ancient Home:
 - For The Greatest Of The Greek Philosophers:
 - Socrates, Plato & Aristotle!
 - In The Fourth Century Before Christ:
 - It Became The Headquarters For:
 - Greek Philosophy & Theology!
 - And - It Was Into This World:
 - The Gospel Would Now Come!
2. Because - It Was In This City - We Now Read:
 - 17:16-17 - “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. / Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him!”
 - For A Time - Paul Was Alone:
 - There In Athens - And Since It Was A New Place:
 - To Him - He Would Have Wandered About That Old & Great City:
 - To See What It Was All About!
 - And - What It Was All About:
 - Was Idolatry!
 - Again - 17:16 - It Was A - “City Wholly Given To Idolatry!”
 - There Were Statues Of Their Gods & Goddesses All Around! There Were Altars & Temples To Them As Well! And The Shadow Of The Parthenon Reached Every Quarter Of The City!
 - But - What Would Paul Do In Such A Place?
 - What ***Could*** He Do?
 - He Continued To Tell Others About Jesus:
 - Wherever He Met Them!
 - Not Only Did He:
 - Head To The Synagogue Of The Jews:
 - He Also Went To:
 - “The Market Daily!”
 - **The Agora - Or Market-Place:**
 - Was The Place Where All The People Of The City:
 - Would Go:

- To Work & To Shop & To Associate With Each Other!
 - The Agora Today Is Mostly In Ruins:
 - Though - A Modern Building Was Constructed To Show What:
 - It Might Have Looked Like When Paul Arrived In Athens!
 - **Here Is The View:**
 - From The Agora - Looking Up Toward The Parthenon:
 - The View That Paul Would Have Had As He Sought To Tell Those Lost Athenians The Truth About Their Gods & The Gospel!
3. But - As He Was Talking With People:
- There In The Marketplace - Whoever Would Meet With Him & Listen To Him:
 - 17:18 - “Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection!”
 - So - As Paul Was Preaching The Word:
 - The Word Got Out - And He Became A Source Of Both Curiosity & Consternation!
 - Now - In Athens - There Was No Sharp Division:
 - Between Philosophy & Theology!
 - Because - Philosophy Was Their Religion:
 - Whatever Sort It Was!
 - The Epicurean Philosophers:
 - Believed That:
 - The Highest Good In Life:
 - Was Pleasure - Because - At The Heart Of Their Religion:
 - There Was No Supreme Being / No God To Be Accountable To!
 - The Stoick Philosophers:
 - Believed That:
 - The Highest Good In Life:
 - Was Virtue - Because - At The Heart Of Their Religion:
 - Everything Was Divine, Including Them!
 - They May Have Had A “Form Of Godliness” But:
 - They Denied “The Power Thereof!” (2 Timothy 3:5)
 - But - Both Of These Philosophies:
 - Had Degenerated Into:
 - Vileness & Wickedness!
 - And When Paul’s Message About Jesus & The Resurrection Came To Them:
 - Some Of Them Teased Paul:
 - And Mocked His Message:
 - Saying - “What Will This Babblers Say!”
 - The Word Translated “Babbler” Literally Means A “Seed-Picker” - As If He Just Picked Up Some Things He Heard & Tried To Get A Following For Himself!
 - Others Of Them Were Threatened By Paul:
 - And Wondered About These New:
 - “Strange Gods” That He Was Describing!
 - Some Jew Called Jesus & Something Else Called “The Resurrection” - Or “Anastasis” - Which They Had Never Heard Of Before!
4. And So - These Philosophers:
- Wanted Paul To Clarify His Teaching!
 - And So - In 17:19-21 - We Read - “And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? / For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. / (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)”
 - **The Areopagus Was Another Out-Cropping Of Rock:**
 - Not Too Far From The Acropolis - Where The Panthen Stood!
 - It Was Where The People Of Athens:
 - Had Built A Famous Temple & Altar To Their God Of War!
 - To The Greeks - This God’s Name Was Ares!
 - But To The Romans - This God’s Name Was Mars!
 - And So - It Also Became Known As:
 - “Mars Hill!”

- Eventually, It Became The Place Where The Ancient City Council Would Meet:
 - To Make Decisions & Judgments!
 - But - By The Time Paul Arrived:
 - It Was More-Or-Less A Debate Society:
 - So That They Could Get Together:
 - 17:21 - “Either To Tell, Or To Hear Some New Thing!”
 - And What Paul Had To Tell Them:
 - Was Something Entirely New!
 - So - When Paul Was “Brought Unto Areopagus” (17:19):
 - Either He Was Brought To The:
 - Place Of Mars Hill - Or:
 - To The Council Which Took On Its Name!
 - But - Tradition Has Him:
 - **Standing Near Here - At The Foot Of The Rock:**
 - Into Which Has Been Carved Steps - That Lead To The Top Of The Hill!
 - And - Just To The Side Of Those Steps - A Metal Plate Was Erected With A Complete Inscription In Greek Of Paul’s Address At Mars Hill!
 - **This Is A Closer Look At That Inscription:**
 - Which We Will Be Reading For Ourselves:
 - In The Next Few Verses!
5. Because - As Paul Assumed His Position:
 - At The Head Of The Assembly:
 - Which Is Possibly The Same Rocky Platform:
 - **Pictured Here:**
 - God Opened The Door For Paul To Open His Mouth And Introduce That Idolatrous City - To True & Living God:
 - Who - To Them - Was Yet Unknown!
 - 17:22-34 - “Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. / 23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you!”
 - Now - It Is Clear That The People Of Athens:
 - Did Not Use This Altar - To Worship:
 - The True God!
 - But - Paul Uses The Existence Of This Unusual Altar To Introduce Them:
 - To The Lord!
 - In 17:24 - Paul Introduces God:
 - As The Creator God & The Invisible God!
 - “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands!”
 - The People Of Athens Had Never Known Such A God!
 - A Single God Who Is Sovereign Over All His Creation & A Spiritual God Who Cannot Be Seen With Their Eyes!
 - In 17:25 - Paul Introduces God:
 - As The Complete God & The Sustaining God!
 - “Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things!”
 - This God - Who Was Unknown To Them:
 - Was Both A Transcendent God & An Imminent God!
 - One Who Was Above All Things And Yet Near - At The Same Time!
 - To The Greeks - Their Gods Had To Be One Or The Other - Not Both!
 - In 17:26-27 - Paul Continues To Introduce God:
 - As The Personal God!
 - “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; / That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us!”
 - God Made Man - So That Man:
 - Might “Seek The Lord!”
 - And - In Their Own Ways - They Were!
 - In Their Own Ways - They Understood:

- This Truth - Which Had Been Captured By Some Of Their Own Ancient Poets!
 - Which Paul Explains In 17:28:
 - “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring!”
 - Now - This Does Not Mean That They Sought After God In The Right Way!
 - It Just Means That God Put Into The Heart Of Every Man A Desire For & A Conscience About Something Higher Than Themselves!
- But - What Did Man Do With This?
 - Paul Tells Us In Romans 1:25 - That We:
 - “Changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever!”
 - And So:
- In 17:29-31 - Paul Introduces God Further:
 - As The Holy God & The Just God!
 - “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device! / 30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: / 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead!”
 - This Unknown God:
 - Is Different From All Other Gods!
 - As A Holy God - He Has “Appointed A Day” In Which He Will:
 - “Judge The World” According To The Standards Of His Own “Righteousness!” (17:31)
 - And He Will Do So:
 - By The Man Paul Was Telling Them About! By Jesus! And The Proof Of This Day Of Coming Judgment - Is The Resurrection Of Jesus From The Dead!
- 6. And With These Words:
 - Paul Ends His Address - Partially Because Of The Reaction:
 - Of Those Self-Described “Lovers Of Wisdom!”
 - 17:31 - “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked!”
 - But - The Lord Still Used Paul:
 - In That Place Of Idolatry:
 - To Bring Souls To Christ! Because:
 - 17:31b-33 - “And others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. / So Paul departed from among them. / Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them!”
- 7. What An Astounding Scene:
 - That Was Laid Out For Us By Luke:
 - In These Verses!
 - And We Wonder How Such Seemingly:
 - Cultured & Curious & Civilized Men:
 - Could Know About Every Other Kind Of God - But Not The One True God!
 - But - Is This Really:
 - That Far-Fetched?
 - Because - There Are More & More People:
 - In Our Own World & In Our Own Times:
 - Who Know Absolutely Nothing Of The God Of The Bible!
 - To This Society - That Considers Itself:
 - Cultured & Curious & Civilized:
 - He Still Remains “The Unknown God” To Them - Doesn’t He?
 - 8. So - How Should We React & How Should We Respond:
 - To The Athenians Of Our Day?
 - I Would Like To Briefly Go Back To Where We Started:
 - Tonight - And See The Response Of Paul:
 - In 17:16-18!
 - 1. ***Our First Response:***
 - To A World That Does Not Know God:

- Is To Be Sensitive:
 - To Their Real Problem & Need!
 - Even As Paul - In 17:16 - "Saw The City Wholly Given To Idolatry!"
- This Was Their Real Problem:
 - And Their Real Need!
 - Their Politics:
 - Was Not Their Main Problem!
 - Their Economics:
 - Was Not Their Main Problem!
 - Their Environment:
 - Was Not Their Main Problem!
 - Their Main Problem:
 - Was Spiritual!
- Is This What We See:
 - In Our World & In Our Cities & In Our Own Communities Today?
 - They Are Still "Wholly Given To Idolatry!"
 - They Still Worship & Serve The Creature More Than Their Creator!
 - And When They Finally Meet The Unknown God:
 - They Will Immediately Know Him To Be:
 - Holy & Just!
 - And They Will Be Judged!
- We Need To Be Sensitive:
 - To The Real Problem & Need Of The World!

2. *Our Second Response:*

- To A World That Does Not Know God:
 - Is To Be Stirred:
 - In Our Spirits!
 - Even As Paul - Also In 17:16 - Because - "While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him!"
 - I Believe Paul's Spirit Was Stirred For A Couple Of Reasons!
 - First - He Was Stirred:
 - Because He Grieved:
 - Over Their Idolatry & Sin!
 - Paul Loved The Lord & His Glory:
 - And These People Were Living Like He Did Not Even Exist!
 - Isn't This How God Felt:
 - At The Time Of The Flood:
 - In Genesis 6:5-6 - "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. / And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart!"
 - Does The Rebellion Against God:
 - And The Rejection Of God:
 - By This World - Grieve Your Heart:
 - And Stir Up Your Spirit Today:
 - As It Did Paul's? As It Does God's?
 - If Not, Why Not?
 - Is Your Spirit Stirred:
 - Over What You Hear & Over What You See? But Then:
 - Second - He Was Stirred:
 - Because He Groaned:
 - For Souls!
 - Because Paul Also Loved People:
 - And Wanted Them To Know This God Who Was Unknown To Them!
 - Isn't This How Jesus Felt:
 - When He Uttered These Words From Luke 13:34:
 - "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!"

- Does The Lost Condition:
 - Of The Multitudes In This World:
 - Cause Your Heart To Grow:
 - For Their Souls?
 - If Not, Why Not?
 - Is Your Spirit Stirred:
 - Over Their Plight? Which Once Was Yours?
- We Need To Be Stirred:
 - In Our Spirits:
 - For The Glory Of God & For The Condition Of Man!

3. ***Our Third Response:***

- To A World That Does Not Know God:
 - Is To Share:
 - The Truth About God & The Gospel:
 - So That The Unknown God Can Become Known To Them:
 - As Their Own God & Savior & Lord!
 - This Is What Paul Did:
 - In 17:18 - Whether In The Synagogue Or In The Marketplace:
 - He Continued To - “Preach Unto Them Jesus, And The Resurrection!”
 - Now - There May Be Times:
 - When We Need To Re-Introduce This World:
 - To This Unknown God:
 - As Paul Did On Mars Hill In The Rest Of Acts 17!
 - But It Must Always Lead Us To Tell Them About Jesus & His Resurrection!
 - Because - Its Not Enough:
 - To Believe In God!
 - A God Or Even ***The*** God!
 - One Must “Believe On The Lord Jesus Christ” In Order To Be “Saved!” (16:31)
 - We Need To Share:
 - The Truth About God & The Gospel:
 - So That The World Might Come To Know:
 - The Unknown God:
 - As You Have & As I Have!

Conclusion:

1. There Is Much More That Can Be Gleaned From This Passage!
 - But - For Tonight:
 - Remember This Truth:
 - Even Though God May Seem To Be Unknown In This World:
 - 17:27 - “He Be Not Far From Every One Of Us!”
 - In Fact - God Himself Became One Of Us:
 - When Jesus - Philippians 2:7-8 - “Made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: / And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!”
2. It Is Jesus:
 - Who Makes The Invisible God – Visible!
 - And - It Is Jesus:
 - Who Makes The Unknown God:
 - Known & Near:
 - To Us!

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