

“Sermon to the Unknown God”
(Part 4)
Acts 17:15-34
(Preached at Trinity, June 6, 2007)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We’ve been looking at Paul’s famous sermon on Mar’s Hill
2. After preaching in the Synagogue Paul met up with some of the philosophers of Athens. Luke says they were Epicureans and Stoics
Acts 17:18 – “Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. . .”
3. Both of these groups denied the presence of a God who was active in the affairs of men. They were humanistic philosophies that focused upon the actions of the individual. As Paul began to preach to them the Gospel of Christ they were curious but it all seemed foolish to them.
Acts 17:18 – “. . . He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”
4. They brought Paul before the Areopagus, a respected aristocratic body with jurisdiction in matters of religion and morality. They were curious and always seeking to hear some novel idea or philosophy.
Acts 17:21 – “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.”
5. Paul stood and began to preach his famous discourse known as Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill.
Paul gives a brief introduction followed by five clear points. As we’ve often seen with Luke’s record of sermons, we are given just the highlights of the sermon. The actual message would have been much longer.
6. We’ve looked at the first four points
 - A. God is the Creator of all things – **Verses 24-25**
The Gospel presupposes God as Creator – with the absence of this knowledge the Gospel must begin here.
As Creator we find God’s infinite power and wisdom
As Creator God exercises His universal dominion
He has the right to give us His law and to demand obedience
 - B. God is infinitely greater than His creation – **Verses 24-25**
He has infinite worth, He has infinite excellence.
All of the nations are nothing compared to Him, they are less than nothing.
 - C. God is the Sustainer of all things – **Verse 25, 28**
“seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;”
Not only is God Creator – He also sustains all life

- D. Not only is God Creator and Sustainer
 God is the Ordainer of all things
Acts 17:26 – “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;”
1. He orders the affairs of men.
 2. God determines our life, when we live, where we live
7. Beginning with **Verse 29** Paul brings the conclusion to his sermon and the conclusion to the Gospel.
- A. There is ample witness from creation for all men to worship the Creator. They do not worship the Creator because they do not want to worship the Creator. They will not have Him.
- B. Instead human beings are given over to idolatry.
Acts 17:29 – “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.”
Romans 1:22-23 – “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,
²³ And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”
8. Tonight I want us to look at Paul’s conclusion to his message.
- I. God commands all men everywhere to repent from their rebellion against the living God.
- A. The people of Athens were guilty of idolatry
Acts 17:16 – “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”
Acts 17:29 – “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.”
1. They had disregarded God and His law
 2. They were under God’s condemnation – guilty as charged
 3. God commands them to repent
- B. What does Paul mean by the first part of **Verse 30**
Acts 17:30 – “And the times of this ignorance God winked at”
1. Does this mean that God closed His eyes to their sin? That God will not hold them accountable for their sin? It cannot mean this because it is contrary to the nature of God.
 2. It in no way diminishes the guilt of humanity
 - a. All stand guilty under His just condemnation
 - b. All have had enough revelation to leave them without excuse
 - c. We can clearly see this condemnation as Israel entered Canaan and began executing God’s judgment upon its inhabitants
Joshua 11:20 – “For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, *and* that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.”
 3. It is testimony to God’s progressive revelation. Paul is saying that men are held to a higher accountability as they have greater knowledge

- a. It in no way implies that the Gentiles were innocent of their idolatry. It does remind us that for thousands of years the revelation of God was cloaked in mystery from the Gentiles – the Gospel of Christ was not known
Ephesians 3:3-5 – “How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, ⁴ Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) ⁵ Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;”
Ephesians 3:8-9 – “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; ⁹ And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:”
Romans 16:25 – “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,”
Colossians 1:26 – “*Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:”
- b. Notice Paul tells the that God’s blessings in Christ was a mystery previously hid
- c. Now the mystery has been made known
3. God didn’t overlook the sins of the multitudes who lived before Christ
- a. Paul isn’t saying that God “winked” at or overlooked their sin – All have enough knowledge of God to leave them without excuse But they will be judged according to the knowledge they had
- b. Paul describes this in Romans 2
Romans 2:12 – “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;”
- c. Our Lord taught the same thing
Luke 12:47 – “And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. ⁴⁸ But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”
4. Now, however, as He has made His redemption plain in Christ, He commands all men everywhere to repent.
- a. The time of ignorance is over
- b. To refuse to bow now is to make a mockery of Christ.
If God holds those who have received greater knowledge at a greater accountability how terrible will it be on the day of judgment for those who have heard the Gospel today?

- B. God sends forth His command – REPENT!
1. God has sent forth His Son who died and rose from the dead – God is fully revealed in Christ
 2. God has given His Word and sent forth His people to boldly proclaim it
 3. God has commanded all men to turn from their wicked disregard of His glory – turn from their rebellious treason—turn from their evil sin and bow before Him. He commands all to worship and serve Him alone.
 4. Judgment is coming!
Acts 17:31 – “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness”
- C. Paul didn't simply share his experiences
1. He didn't talk about how wonderful the teachings of Jesus are – words of love and truth. He didn't share how his life was greatly improved now that he was following the teachings of Christ.
 The Gospel is not our personal testimony. Today the Gospel is based too much upon the existential – too much upon our experience.
 2. There is only one message people need to hear today – Paul preached the Gospel of Christ to them. The same message Paul brought to the Athenians is the message we need to bring today.
 3. He pressed the demands of the Gospel upon them.
 You have sinned!! Your idolatry is wicked! God who created you and all things commands you to forsake your sin.

- II. All men everywhere are also commanded to believe
Acts 17:27 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.”
- A. Paul preached Christ
Acts 17:18 – “because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”
Acts 17:31 – “by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”
1. We have all fallen short of God's demands for total faithfulness to Him which is called sin – “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”
 2. God sent forth His Son who suffered in our place – He bore our guilt. The resurrection is God's seal upon the work of Christ
 3. This has to be believed – trusted, a full dependence upon
- B. God is gracious to receive those who come to Him
Acts 17:27 – “he be not far from every one of us:”
1. Although He is completely apart from His creation He has condescended to receive us as sons.
 2. The Gospel commands all men to lay down their sins and come to Him through Christ.
- C. As always Paul had different responses to his preaching
1. Most would not receive his preaching. Most considered this the most foolish thing they had ever heard
Acts 17:32 – “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked:.”

1 Corinthians 1:18 – “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

2. Some were curious about it

Acts 17:32 – “We will hear thee again of this *matter*.”

- a. There are many today who become interested in religion
- b. Multitudes attend church. Some are enamored by the fellowship. Others are drawn to the theology, they love to discuss the various points of doctrine.
- c. They never actually follow Christ – few know what it means to follow Christ

Matthew 8:19-22

Matthew 16:24 – “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

Matthew 19:21 – “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.”

- d. I know few people who are following Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:26-27 – “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*:²⁷ But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;”

3. A few, however, are changed – they give themselves to following Christ

Acts 17:34 – “Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed:”

Conclusion:

1. What is the message for us today?
2. First, Paul says the time of ignorance is over. We are living in the age of the Gospel. It must be heralded to the ends of the earth. God calls all men everywhere to repent. This is the message we must bring.
3. Second, if you have not trusted Christ what excuse do you have? Will you claim ignorance? You cannot. You know too much. Yours is an open denial of Christ. God commands you to repent and believe.
Because He has been patient with you.
Because He commands you to repent.
Because God has appointed a day of judgment.
The day of ignorance is over. Today is the day to believe. Today is the day of salvation.
4. Have you followed Christ?
Verse 34 – What did it mean that they joined Paul? It means they joined in the life he had found – the life of a Christian.