

Acts 17:19–34

Pummeling Pluralism: Paul's Preaching of Creation, the Judgment, and the Need to Repent and Believe in Jesus before We Have to Stand before Him

### Saturday, December 24, 2022 ◦ Read Acts 17:19–34

*Questions from the Scripture text: Where do they take Paul (v19)? What do they request (v19–20)? Why were they so interested (v21)? What did Paul begin by observing around them (v22)? What does he note as evidence (v23)? What does he claim about the relationship of this unknown God to his own preaching? How does Paul identify this God in v24? Where can't He be contained (v24b)? How can't He be worshiped/served (v25a)? Why not (v25b)? From what has He made whom (v26)? What has He appointed to them?*

**What is the message of the gospel in a place like Athens?** Acts 17:19–34 looks forward to the morning sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In these nineteen verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **the message of the gospel is that the One True God Who created the world and all things is alone worthy of praise, the One True God Who doesn't need our service is trustworthy of our faith, and the One True God Who will surely judge the world in righteousness has assured this not by the rising and falling of nations but by the resurrection of Jesus Christ the Judge and only Savior.**

The same apostolic message. The message to Athenians is the same as to Jews: Jesus and the resurrection (v18, cf. v2–3).

The best that they could do was knowing that there is One that they cannot know (v23). They knew that He is from the things that were made (v24a, cf. Rom 1:19–20). But because they had exchanged His glory for the lie, they were unable to arrive at a right knowledge of Him or worship of Him (v24b–25). Just as life and breath come from God, so also right worship can come only from God. He needs nothing; so, only what He commands is acceptable, since it depends upon Him.

They had multiplied idols from every nation. But each of these nations already owed their existence to the one true God (v26). He had given them His image. He had assigned to them their time. He had assigned to them their location. And He had assigned to them their purpose: knowledge of Him (v27a). He had even put that knowledge into them (v27b–28).

Man's uniqueness in God's image should have been a clue to them that man himself could not come up with an image of God (v29). Nations had not been routinely destroyed for idolatry up until that point (v30a). But with the message of the gospel going out, it is not only necessary that individuals repent and believe in Jesus, but that nations respond rightly to the gospel that is preached among them (v30b).

And there is coming a day when He Who has been judging nations through history will judge each individual in the cosmos by Jesus (v31a). He has identified Jesus as the Righteous One by raising Him from the dead (v31b).

The same grace-dependent response. At first, most of the responses seem to range only between mockery and willingness to give a second hearing (v32). But apparently as he departs (v33) it is then that the Spirit moves some to convert (v34). The Lord is saving whom He will. None for whom Christ died can be lost!

**Why were you made? How can you fulfill this purpose? How do you know Christ is the only way?**

*Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for creating us to know You and to worship You. Thank You for displaying the truth about yourself in the creation and giving us an inherent sense of it in our own hearts. But thank You most of all for giving Christ to atone for our idolatry, and to rise again as our righteousness, so that we may have hope in Him for the day of judgment. Grant unto us to believe in Him, we ask in His Name, AMEN!*

**Suggested songs: ARP46 "God Is Our Refuge and Our Strength" or TPH417 "Jesus Shall Reign, Where'er the Sun"**

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At 17 beginning in verse 19 and going through verse 34, These are God's words. And they took him and brought him to the ariopagus saying may we know what this new doctrine is. Of what you speak for your bringing, some strange things to our ears. Therefore, we want to know what these things mean.

For all the Athenians in the foreigners who were there spent their time and nothing else. But either to tell or to hear some new thing, Then paul stood in the midst of the areaopagus and said men of Athens, And perceived that in all things, you are very religious. Because i was passing through and considering the objects of your worship.

I even found an altar with this inscription to the unknown. God, Therefore, the one whom you worship without knowing. Him, i proclaim to you. God, who made the world and everything in it. Since he is lord of heaven and earth. Does not dwell in temples made with hands nor is he worshiped with men's hands?

As though he needed anything since he gives to all life breath, and all things. And he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. And has determined their pre-appointed times in the boundaries of their dwellings. So that they should seek the lord.

In the hope that they might grow up for him and find him. That he is not fear, as though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move, and have our being It's also some of your own poets have said for, we are also as offspring. Therefore, since we are the offspring of god, we ought not to think.

That the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone. Something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly these times of ignorance, god overlooked But now, commands all men everywhere to repent, Because he has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness. By the man whom he has ordained.

He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. While others said we'll, we will hear you again on this matter. So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed.

Among them Dionysius the Areopagite. A woman named Damaris. And others. With them. So far the reading of God's inspired and to narrate work. So, Paul was And whenever synagogue was in in the synagogue and then whenever it's synagogue. Was out in the marketplace, reasoning. With persuading people, preaching to them.

Jesus. And The resurrection. And, This was a pluralistic society in which Loved to. Here and speak. Uh, new things. And there was a particular place that they did that. So, They took him away from the evangelism that he was doing. That was. Basically based on God's providence, that if someone had providentially been Made a member of synagogues so that they had the word of God.

Paul out of respect for God's word, had good. Hope that God might be converting that person. Maybe to evangelize them at synagogue. And then if God and his providence, just happened to have them in the marketplace at the same time that the apostle to the Gentiles was in the marketplace.

Paul had good. Hope that God might be converting them. So whoever happened to be there, he preached to them Jesus in the resurrection. But the world does not like. Evangelism. The trusts in God's providence, the world. Once. To. Uh, sequester and herd. Um, The. Uh, you know, the Talking about religion and philosophy.

Into the places that it wants. The way that Sydney the first used to Heard. Um, And kiss wherever I wanted being the good border collie that she was. So they take them to the Areopagus, which is the place. Where they hear all these new things. They like the strange things that he's bringing to their ears, you are bringing some strange things to our ears.

Therefore, we want to know at these things mean, You know, it's interesting. The apostles assumption is that, whoever the Lord is bringing to hear his word. He might be saying, remember the Lord is bringing into the life of a believer, he might be saving. Um, Whereas most of us.

Or at least in my experience, I've been around many who thought somebody who's asking questions means that, you know, there are really getting converted, but curiosity and interest and all sorts of new things, does not come necessarily. From the gracious work and spirit. It also comes from the flesh.

It comes from the idea that all philosophies are equally acceptable and all theologies are equally interesting. What I actually comes from the spirit is the desire to reject all philosophies and all theologies, except the ones that are taught by God, the Holy Spirit through the scriptures, So this this curiosity or open-mindedness, is not actually an indicator of something gracious happening.

The Lord may use it, he is very merciful, he does save a couple here but comparatively to what we've been To what we've been seeing and do in other places. Uh, is actually not a great marvelous response. At the end of the passage, there are Some. And they're so few that you just names one man, one woman.

And says again, there were a couple of others in the city of Athens. One of the most populated cities in the world. So, Let us learn to take our encouragements the way the scripture gives encouragements, but let us learn. But let us learn also to Uh, to serve the Lord in whatever opportunity he gives us.

Notice Paul doesn't say well, you know, this Areopagus thing was your idea, not my idea. And I already had an evangelistic plan. So no. Thank you. No. He gets an opportunity to preach the gospel. He's going to preach the gospel and so he does. This is. Men of Athens, I perceived at all things.

You are very religious. From Paul. This is not a compliment. They thought it was a compliment. Uh, Paul is saying the one thing that you got, right? Is that you despite all of your religion, you still don't know. The only one, who's true. Then the one who made the world and everything in it.

In other words, he's not just the unknown God, he's the only God. Everything else? You're calling a God, didn't make the world. Nothing else that you're calling? A God. Made a single thing that is in it. The only God who made the world, the only God who made anything.

Is a God that you don't even know. Despite of all of your pluralism, Despite of all all of your religions, all of your philosophies, all of your theologies. Okay, so the curiosity of man and the multiplicity. Of listening's to one, another does not increase truth. Man is blind. Infinity times zero.

Well. That's weird to calculus. A Googleplex time, zero is still zero. Okay, so he's saying he basically says it's a good thing for you. That finally, after these centuries of all of this blind idolatry, you finally, have someone who actually knows the one true God standing in front of you.

You better listen up. Okay, so he's not being like super complementary and engaging with and intersecting the culture. He is denouncing their culture and everything in it.

He says you've done it. You you've worshiped all the wrong Gods. Versus. 22 through 24. You worshiped, all the wrong ways verse 25, notice, he worshiped with men's hands as though he needed anything. You should have known because you were inventing the worship. That the one you are worshiping was not God.

You should have known because you thought you were giving him something. That the one that you were serving is not God. If your God needs you, He is not actually God. He is an idol that you invented, because he's needy. Okay, so he draws this clear distinction and If if man in his darkness and sin had not been given over to a depraved mind, he would say, that's exactly right.

So nor is he worshiped with men's hands as though he needed anything since he gives to all life breath and all things. And he has made from, okay, I should say one more thing. One of the things in our life, whatever it is. That we give our our lives to Uh, a lot of people.

Do it to. Give their lives for money, or The all the appraised that comes from others, or Feeling strong in ourselves or Um, Your all of these things that we have to put a lot in. To get something out of. That we have to. Uh, serve or work really hard at.

To improve a little bit, the fact that it needs our help, whatever it is. Should be an indication to us. That it cannot ultimately help us. It is not worthy of our worship. It is not worthy of the devotion of our hearts. The one true God is a God of all grace.

He gives us everything. When we serve him, we serve him independence upon him. When that service goes, well, that came from him. And the fact that he is not needed, but gives everything. Not only means that he is worthy of our worship. But it means he is trustworthy of our faith.

That when we trust in him, we know. He can save us, he will save us. He does love us. We love him because he first loved us. He's the one who initiated the loving So anything anything man-made in religion? Whether it's pagan man-made religion or whether it claims to be christian, it's not actually christian, if it doesn't come from christ, But there are a lot of people who say this is christian, that is christian They use the word christian holiday, for instance, to talk about, you know, different.

Holy days, that the lord didn't make up. Interestingly, the ones who love those? Uh, often get upset if you talk to them about the one actual christian holiday, But, If your god is needy, that's a clue that he's not god. He's not worthy of your worship and he's not trustworthy of your Faith.

If he needs your help, he can't give you what you need. Now what has the true god done? He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth and has determined their pre-appointed times in the boundaries of their dwellings. So, one of the things in Athens is that it was a melting pot, there are people there from all sorts of nations and all sorts of gods, they thought that they had heard from all the nations.

Thus, thus, far, discovered with older different gods and now they have a strange, dude, talking about a strange god. As far as they're concerned like, ah, another nation with another god. They buy into this idea of multiple races. Which, Is an idea that we have in our culture today.

It's not new. But it's as false now as it was 2000 years ago. He says no actually. All people in all nations at all times were made of one blood. And there's only one god.

Verse 27, so that they should seek the lord. In the hope that they might grow for him and find him. So, it's not that the nation's all have different gods. That's the nations have come up with different gods because they're all committing the same idolatry. So what you're hearing or not?

You know, bunch of different perspectives on the truth. When you hear pluralism, when you hear people from different nations, talk about the religion in their nation, What you're hearing is not a bunch of different perspectives on the truth. You're taught. You're hearing the great variety of Rebellious lies against the truth.

And yet, god has made the truth evident. Not only did he make the world and everything in it? Like Romans one tells us That. Um, The divine nature is actually. On display and the things that are made. But he also made himself known to us. Which he says in romans one before he even talks about What you can see in the rest of the creation.

And we should. Read that real quickly. Have this horrible habit of? Assuming everybody remembers the scriptures. I don't remember the scriptures such i should. Because what may be known of god is manifest. In them. For god has shown it to them. Since the creation of the world is invisible, attributes are clearly seen being understood.

By the things that are made etc. So, there's a knowledge of god that is in every man. And that's exactly what he says here. He says. So that they should seek the lord in the hood that they might grow for him. And find him, though. He is not far from each one of us.

For in him we live and move, and have our being Is also some of your own poets have said for. We also, are as offspring And so, he's He's quoting.

Epimodios. From about 600 years prior and aratus. From about 300 years prior. And words that they said. That they were speaking. Uh, with reference to zeus, which was a lie. They made these things up about Zeus, why? Because, They understood. That there was a god and whom they lived and moved and had there being They just came up with their own idolatry.

Someone whom they created in the image of men. Zeus. Was created in the image of a man and not a particularly good man. Because sinful men are the only kinds of men who make up idols. So when they make up an idle god, they make up a sinful god.

And that's what you have and the Greek pantheon, a whole bunch of sinful supermen basically. Who with their divine powers just act as wickedly as gods as men act among men? And so these these poets for hundreds of years, Had been saying things about zeus and then we live and move and have our being or we are the offspring of god.

We also we are as offspring. That we're actually true of the living god. So, paul is saying, Is. Your own poets testify against you. That god the one true god is not left himself without witness. In men's hearts. That we are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. Whenever we, Whenever we make up something about god, And so, he points out We have souls.

We grope after him. Gold doesn't have a soul. Silver does not have a soul. Stone, does not have a soul. Even the fact that we are devising things, Shows that the things that we devise can't be god, why? Because we can't devise things that devise things. Right. Even with With all that we've done with AI.

We you know, nothing is that we make is truly sentient. Because it doesn't have. A soul.

Okay, therefore, since we are the offspring of god, we ought not to think That the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone something shaped by art. And man's devising. Truly these times of ignorance. God overlooked What does he mean? While humans and god hasn't judged the nations yet.

He means that. God has been patient thus far with the nations. You know, one nation rises, another nation falls. You know, different nations at the same time are in this. Balance of power and tension against one another and God hasn't destroyed them all. Does that mean that god isn't going to judge the world?

There's this. Delusion that people fall into, because They have lived a while. And they have not ended up in hell yet. Remember in romans chapter 2 and the idea that Um, Yeah, there were those who Uh, were presuming because of the patients of god. That what they were doing wasn't so bad after all, And what are the apostles i used at the patience of god is meant to lead you to repentance.

It's meant to show you. How gracious and good? Is this god against him? We are sinning. Not so that we would become hard in callous and say, well, yeah, ever since the creation of the world, things have continued as You know, as they always were and they always will.

He's saying. History had a beginning of the creation and it hasn't end at the judgment. And the fact that, Uh, god isn't destroying all of the nations. Uh, that or that god hasn't yet destroyed. All of the nations that refuse to trust in the lord. Jesus christ, doesn't mean that he won't.

It doesn't mean that he's grading on a curve. It doesn't mean that there's this kind of natural law, and that Your your heart will be balanced against. What it knew to do. And, you know, if you've done more good than bad, You know, if your karma balance at the end, Is positive that you'll be okay.

No. He's gonna judge the world in righteousness. He's gonna judge the world according to his. Perfectly righteous standard. Anyone who has failed to love him with all their hearts, all mind and strength, anyone who has failed to glorify him as god and worship him only will go to hell.

Which means that you better. Be a different someone than you begin. Because the person you began ask is going to hell. And either the person you began as Has been punished with hell on the cross in union with christ. So that you are not the one. As whom you begin.

You are the one who will live forever. Because you are in jesus. And he has, And your behalf and his own. But in your behalf has loved the lord did with all the heart. Soul, mind and strength, and he has Glorified god properly as god and no one else.

Even satan offering him all. You know, all the nations of the world. And which of course aren't really satan's to offer. Although we have some kind of domineering over them at the time and jesus came to take that away. But he did glorify God alone as God he answered so worship.

You shall serve you all the way your god and him only Only if you if the righteous one who is doing the judging, Is your righteousness. Are you going to survive that judgment? And so, he said, you know, Don't let the Um, The fact that history hasn't yet ended.

Fool you into thinking that it's not going to end. He's appointed a day. Yeah, he's not slow as some count slowness. He's not dragging his feet. Yeah, he's not unable to end it immediately and judge everyone. His patient. These patient. So truly these times of ignorance, god overlooked You know what the pox or amount on the fact that room has survived for a couple hundred years?

At this point fool you into thinking that roam is stronger that Greek or Roman gods are real? No, the only reason rum's still exist is because god is permitting it to exist. Truly these times of ignorance, god overlooked But now, commands all men everywhere to repent because he has Appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness.

By the man whom he is ordained. He has given assurance of this to all. By raising him from the dead. There's a man who is stronger than all of your gods because he was God himself. He is the judge. He is the righteous one. But he who is righteous god became first righteous, man.

In order that he could be our righteousness. Before we stand beforehand. And our judged.

And so, it's It's a very bold. Very plain. Very contrary to all that, they believe. And, It's interesting. They? Seems like they were willing to hear him up until that point. Because they thought they were just hearing a strange new thing. They were not getting at all. That he was telling them that even their approached truth.

Is something for which there is literally hell to pay. But when they hear about the resurrection from the dead, Said well, we've never seen that before. Just like they've never seen the judgment before. Well, the judgment is coming. The resurrection did happen. When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked others said, we'll hear you again on this matter.

Yeah, both of those groups are still unsaved, aren't they? One decided that their pluralism doesn't have room for this one. The other one decided that they liked their pluralism, but they yeah. As we? Yeah, cycle through listening to You know, various religions, we'll listen to you again. You, you can join the pluralism of our Ideas.

And so paul departed him from among them, however, Some men. That's interesting. The word there is not anthropologists on there. It's Male specific, some men joined him and believed. Among them dionysius the ureopagite. A woman named amorous and others with them. So, your implication is that it's a few but it's a few Whom god himself saved.

Whom God himself. Saved from man-made religion. From trusting and things that they had devised. From serving. Needy deities. To trust in god, through christ alone. Serving the god. Who not only has made everything, but is the only one who can save us. Praise god. He exercised, his almighty power to save on that day.

And may he continue to do so. In our days. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this portion of your word. We pray that you'd help us. As we come to hear it preached tomorrow, that your spirit would bless both. Are hearing of it now in family worship, and then especially Our hearing of it preached in the public worship tomorrow.

And pray that the lord jesus would. Speak from heaven and Sanctify us as he Continues to Prepare us to receive an unshakable kingdom. We thank you and praise you. That all the kingdoms of this world. Or about to be shaken. And Destroyed. And we look forward, lord, jesus to the day that we will sing.

That the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom. Of our lord. Jesus christ, which we ask in your name. Lord jesus. Amen.