

Sermon Title: It's Who You Know
Scripture Text: Acts 17:22-34 (Acts # 41)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 5-5-24

Every time I begin a sermon series through a book of the Bible, there are always those favorite passages that I know are coming, and I am excited to get there; and this week and next we are going to be dealing with one of those passages. It is the Apostle Paul's famous message on the "Areopagus"—also known as "Mars Hill"—in Athens. And we are going to take our time to get through it.

There is a well-known saying, predominantly in the business world, that goes: "It isn't *what* you know, it's *who* you know that matters the most." Well, like all tidbits of worldly wisdom, it contains kernels of truth. You could know everything about a great product or a service that you want to offer, but if you don't know the right people to *tell* about it, your business is going to fail.

Now, part of that saying *is not* true, because you *also* need to know what you are talking about. It isn't *just* who you know, but you need to make sure that you can deliver on what you promise.

I don't know what we did in raising our son, but in some respects we managed to stay out of the way of some of his giftedness, and he has built a thriving business by quietly learning an enormous amount of detailed information; and at the same time, he has built himself a nationwide network of people with whom he does business, to whom he refers business, and from whom he gets referrals. And he works very hard at cultivating personal relationships with them. But he has become *that guy* where anytime I ask about something, or he shares with me something that he is doing, I *always* hear something like, "My friend got me connected," or, "I know someone who does that." He really is that "guy who knows that guy"!

Well, do you know what? *You* know God through Jesus Christ; and that is , in essence, what Paul is talking about: how to know God. On an *infinitely* more important level, you need to know what there is to know about God—and there is plenty—and you need to know Him *personally*. So it is both "what you know"—but it is also, capital-W, "*Who* you know"—that determines whether your eternal destiny is Heaven or Hell (Matt. 25:46).

When we last spent time with the Apostle Paul—last Lord's Day—he was, as we saw, used to plant a church in the city of Thessalonica, and then plant another church in the nearby city of Berea; and those came right after he had planted a church in Philippi. And if you recall, in Philippi, he wound up beaten with rods and thrown in jail. In Thessalonica, he saw many more people come to faith in Christ than there had been in Philippi, but that made him the target of a zealous group of "jealous," unbelieving Jews (Acts 17:5; cf. Matt. 27:18; Acts 5:17; 13:45), to the point that Paul's friends secretly got him out of town by night, and they took him to Berea. After some weeks in Berea during which even more came to faith in Christ, those same ones that we labeled last week "The Thugs of Thessalonica" made that 40-mile trip down to Berea so they could become "The Bullies of Berea"; and they stirred up a riot in Berea, just as they had done in Thessalonica. *That* time, Paul's friends took him away again. Paul left Silas and Timothy, his two right-hand men, there in Berea to continue ministering to the new believers, but the other brethren escorted Paul down to the seashore—down to the nearby port—and then followed down the western edge of the Aegean Sea to the city of Athens, that great famous Greek city.

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And as his friends then departed to return to Berea, Paul sent word with them: "Go back and tell Silas and Timothy to catch up with me as soon as possible." And while he was waiting for them, he didn't just take a vacation—oh, and by the way: They never did catch up with him in Athens—but Paul went about his usual business: preaching the Gospel (Rom. 1:14-16; Rom. 15:19; Col. 1:25; 2 Tim. 4:17).

And this time, the unbelievers that he encountered were not violently hostile; it was much more a battle of ideas. We saw in Verses 16 and 17 of Chapter 17—"Now while Paul was waiting for them"—Timothy and Silas—"at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted) So he was just talking about Jesus all the time.

That led to Paul getting an invitation to go to this place called the "Areopagus," where the philosophers and the spiritual eggheads of Athens loved to discuss ideas. Look at Verses 19 through 21, where we left off last time: "And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.' " And then Dr. Luke gave us his little parenthetical analysis: "(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)"

Today and next Lord's Day—I won't *promise* we will finish then, but I am targeting that—we are going to sift through the record here in Chapter 17 of what Paul said at the Areopagus. It is *marvelous!* You *will be* stretched and deepened in the understanding of your faith when you see what Paul said here. Interestingly, there is almost a total lack of commands in this passage that we are about to dive into. It is going to be up to us to allow the Holy Spirit to teach us the truth about God so that we may know Him, so that we may grow in our knowledge and know Him better (2 Pet. 3:18; cf. Col. 1:10), so that we can make wise applications for how we should live.

The crucial question to the people in the Areopagus in Athens is the same as the question before us today: Do you know God? So, here is where we are going. I came up with a catchy little 11-point outline, just going phrase by phrase through what Paul says here; my target for today is the first four:

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| 1. God Is Knowable (vss. 22-23) | And if Jesus doesn't come before next Sunday: |
| 2. God Is Creator (vs. 24a) | 5. God Is Complete |
| 3. God Is Lord Of All (vs. 24b) | 6. God Gives Live |
| 4. God Is Spirit (vs. 24c) | 7. God Is Sovereign |
| | 8. God Is Near |
| | 9. God Is Patient |
| | 10. God Is Judge |
| | 11. God Redeems |

The overarching summary is: God Is Knowable

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It is quite obvious that God prepared Paul for this moment. When we get down to Verse 28, we are going to see that Paul quotes from [what are], to us, obscure Athenian poets. Now, what is a Jewish boy from Tarsus who has hung out a lot in Jerusalem doing knowing about Greek poets? Well, that tells you he was well read, he was well educated, and he listened.

One of those poets was a man named Epimenides. And about Epimenides, we have about us much mythology as there is history; he was sort of exalted as the history was written. But he was regarded as something of a prophet—a seer—and he was a poet and a philosopher, and he lived in the seventh or sixth century B.C.

He was from the island of Crete. Epimenides was the one who famously said, "All Cretans are liars"; and Paul quoted that in Titus Chapter 1, Verse 12, because he had left Titus to minister in Crete, and it was a tough crowd; and he said, "As it has been said: 'All Cretans are liars.' " Now, that is fascinating, Epimenides *being from* Crete, so his quotation is paradoxical. If "all Cretans are liars" is *true*, then, when Epimenides said that, he was belying it because he was telling the truth that all Cretans never tell the truth. But if he was lying, then it *was not* true that all Cretans were liars because he also spoke the truth. That is "The Epimenides Paradox"—you can scramble your brain with that someday, and it may be a good way to start a conversation.

But when you learn the history behind what we are about to see in Acts 17, it will make this come alive to you, and it involves good old Epimenides. So, jump in with me, starting at Verse 22—"So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription: "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you' " (vss. 22-23).

These people to whom Paul got to speak were the philosophers; they loved to muse about big questions of the purpose of life and how to live it. This place—the Areopagus—was famous. It was sort of the public court—not a court of law, but a court for debates and discussions. And it was an honor to be invited there. Not just everybody could take a number, and it was an open mike day at the Areopagus; you had to be invited.

And Paul seized the moment. He was very respectful. He began: "Men of Athens." He was being deferent, if you will—courteous to his audience. His purpose was to engage them, not to antagonize them (see 2 Tim. 2:24-25). And he came to proclaim the Gospel. He did not want to pick a fight, so he chose his words quite carefully: "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects." That was truthful. They had altars *all over* the city, dedicated to *any number* of supposed "gods." Remember the description? It was the "city *full of idols*" (vs. 16)—these manmade objects of worship.

So Paul seized upon one of the altars and made it the focus of what he was going to say. "I found an altar with this inscription: 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' " And *that* is where it gets *really interesting*. The origin of that altar is *fascinating*! And again, it shows how well Paul was prepared for the moment.

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There was a Greek historian named Diogenes Laertius. No, I never heard of him either, until I started studying this. He lived from A.D. 180–240—so, in the generation or two or three after the Apostles—but he wrote history of Greek philosophers. He wrote a ten-volume work called "The Lives And Opinions Of Eminent Philosophers," and it is one of the best sources on learning who the Greek philosophers were.

Laertius wrote about an incident in which a plague of some kind struck the city of Athens around 600 B.C.. Think of something like Covid-19, but more deadly. And being dominated by idolatry and superstition, the people assumed that the reason for the plague was the anger of one or more of the gods they worshiped. And Epimenides came to the rescue. To try and stop the plague, the people of Athens sacrificed to every god they could think of, but the plague continued. So, for some reason I have never heard the explanation of, messengers were sent to Crete to fetch Epimenides, because he was supposed to be this guru-philosopher-poet-seer-prophet kind of a guy. Well, he came, and he gave his spiritual advice. And in Laertius' ten-volume work, he puts it in these words:

"And [Epimenides]...purified their city, and stopped the pestilence in the following way: He took sheep, some black and others white"—I have no reason why "black and white"—"and brought them to the Areopagus; and there he let them go whither they pleased, instructing those who followed them to mark the spot where each sheep lay down, and offer a sacrifice to the local divinity. And thus, it is said, the plague was stayed. Hence even to this day, altars may be found in different parts of Athens with no name inscribed upon them, which are memorials of this atonement." (Book I, pgs. 115,117; Chapter 10) [<https://www.baptistmessenger.com/paul-in-athens-the-backstory-you-never-knew/>]

Now, why didn't we think of this four years ago? We could have taken care of that plague! Well, it worked like this: If one of more of the sheep were to lie down near an altar, then the people were told to make a sacrifice to the god associated with that altar. But some sheep apparently did not like lying next to altars; so if there were to lie down where there was *no* altar, the instruction is: "*Erect* an altar there, and sacrifice 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' "

It was all superstition and idolatry. It had *absolutely nothing to do* with the Old Testament sacrifices—the genuine sacrifices to the true God—but it sure made Epimenides look good, that the plague happened to subside after his stunt with the sheep, and it reinforced belief in worshipping idols.

That is how Satan works (1 Cor. 10:20). He will use coincidence and whatever to make people believe that. You know, it's like a lot of old wives' tales, home cures—that kind of thing. You get a virus; you're feeling really puny; and your neighbor, your mother, your aunt, whatever, says, "Okay, take this and you'll be better in a week"; and you take it, and sure enough—in a week, you're better. And if you hadn't taken it, you would have gotten better in seven days. But it *reinforces the belief* that that *fancy potion* actually works! And that is not a rejection of all home cures; I am just saying, that was what was going on there: Epimenides basically got lucky.

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Fast-forward to first-century Athens: Paul is standing in the Areopagus—in the *very place* where Epimenides stood about 600 years earlier, telling them to build altars and sacrifices "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" so they could be healed. Well, Paul is pointing to those same altars and saying, in effect, "You have ignorantly worshipped this 'unknown God.' Now, that is not an insult. You are saying, 'We don't know him.' " The Greek word for "know" is *ginōskō*. The Greek word for "don't know" is *aginōskō*: "agnostic," "ignorant." "What you are worshipping in ignorance, I'm going to tell you how you can know Him! I'm going to tell you *exactly* who He is."

It was a brilliant disarming way to handle the situation. He didn't come in, guns blazing, denouncing their rampant idolatry. He in essence said, "You are very religious"—well, that's true—"and you believe there is a god you don't know"—well, *that's* true—"Let me introduce you to Him."

So as we work through all that Paul says about the one true God, whose name is "Yahweh" (Ex. 3:15, LSB), you will see that he does not rail against the false gods, he lets the contrast be obvious. He tells you who God is; and he wants you to know that this God that he serves is *knowable*, and he wants to unveil His identity.

God "has made Himself known" (Ps. 9:16; 48:3), and He wants people to know Him. Start with Creation: "The heavens are telling of the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). Your own "conscience"—the "Law of God written in your hearts," either condemning or sustaining your views (Rom. 2:15; cf. Rom. 1:19). And then there is the Bible, the written "word of God" (Jn. 10:35; cf. 2 Tim. 3:15-16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). God "has made Himself known"—He is knowable.

In a long speech from Moses to Israel, before they crossed over into the Promised Land, we read this in Deuteronomy 4:35—"To you it was shown that you might *know* that the Lord"—and that is the Hebrew "Yahweh," His name—"that you might *know* that Yahweh, He is God; there is no other besides Him."

Now, Paul did not come in and say, "All your gods are not really gods!" Tell them who the true God is, and Lord willing, they will come to that conclusion.

From King David to his son, Solomon, about the fact that Solomon was going to build the Temple in Jerusalem that David had not been allowed to build, First Chronicles 28:9 says: "As for you, my son Solomon"—here is what to do—"know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord—"Yahweh"—"searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever."

After Jesus spent three years ministering, the night before He went to the Cross, He was praying to His heavenly Father about the message that He had brought to the world; and He says this in John 17:3—"This is eternal life, that they may *know* You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

My friends, let's start at the very beginning: *God Is Knowable!*

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Hebrews 11:6—"He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

God Is Knowable, so: Do you want purpose in life? Get to know God. Do you know God? Get to know Him *better* (Phil. 3:10, 12-14; Col. 1:10; 2 Pet. 3:18).

Can you state, maybe a couple of things that you would commit to doing in this next week to know God better: to read a portion of His Word, to study something you have not studied, to read another book about something? That is what we are all about—*knowing God!* "Eternal life" is to "know" God.

So, God Is Knowable.

Now let's get into the meat of his sermon: God Is Creator.

The first thing that Paul says to introduce the "unknown God" who is knowable is in the beginning of Verse 24—"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands."—just that first phrase.

As we work through these, I am going to show you Scripture to support each one of them, to reinforce each one of them. And it should increase your *knowledge* of God; it should increase your *love* for God. If you do not yet know God—well, I am going to be honest: I'm going to pray that you don't get *one wink of sleep or a moment's rest of peace* until you know God, because there is *nothing more important* that will ever happen!

Psalm 146, Verses 5 and 6—"How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord"—"Yahweh"—"his God, who *made heaven and earth*, the sea and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever." He is the Creator of *everything* (see Gen. 1:1; Is. 45:12; Jn. 1:3; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:10; Rev. 4:11).

In praying about God's promise that Jeremiah had been privileged to announce—His promise that Israel would be returned to the Land after their captivity at the hands of Babylon and Medo-Persia—Jeremiah wrote this in Jeremiah 32:17, and this one I will read from the Legacy Standard Bible: "Ah Lord Yahweh! Behold, *You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm!* Nothing is too difficult for You." Now, God did not hear that and say, "Oh, Jeremiah, thank you! I forgot: I *created* everything!" But the point is, he is *declaring*: "Nothing is too difficult for *Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth!*"

And by the way, in case you didn't know it, or in case you have any doubt about it: *Jesus is Yahweh* (Jn. 8:58); He is God in human "flesh" (1 Jn. 4:2). All the creation work of the Father is done through His Word; He *spoke* things into existence: " 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). Well, Jesus is the *Incarnate* "Word" of God (Jn. 1:1, 14). So we read in Colossians 1:16—"For by Him"—referring to Jesus—"all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him"—the entire physical universe, and the unseen world of angels and demons (Jn. 1:3).

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God *Is* The Creator, and so we need to worship Him as such, and we *cannot discount* that fact (Rom. 1:20-25). Do you hold to any of the remnants of the blasphemous ideas from the false religion of Evolution? (Jer. 8:9; Rom. 1:22; 1 Cor. 1:20; 3:20) Do you understand: God created the physical universe "in six days" (Ex. 20:11)—and it wasn't all that long ago, by the way geological people count days and astronomical people count years.

Look: Evolution starts with the *presupposition*: "We know the Bible *is not true!* We know that God did not create everything! Therefore, *now* we are going to answer the question: 'Where did everything come from?' And we know the answer *is not* what God says! The answer *is not* what God did." Do you waver at all in believing that the first 11 chapters of the Bible are *factual history*? (Ps. 33:6; 104:9; Prov. 8:27-31; Jer. 10:12; Matt. 23:35; Mk. 10:6; Lk. 3:36-38; Acts 17:26; Rom. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45; 1 Tim. 2:13-14; Heb. 11:3-7; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:5-6; 1 Jn. 3:12; Jude 7, 11, 14) By the way: Genesis 1-11 is going to be the portion of God's Word that we will target for our Wednesday night studies this fall. If you are not *rock solid* on that—pun intended—*rock solid* on that, come and be part of that study; you will be blessed. And even if you *are* rock-solid on it, come—somebody else needs to hear what you have to say by testimony about it.

Alright: God Is Knowable. God Is Creator. God Is Lord Of All.

In the middle of Verse 24—"since He is Lord of heaven and earth..." You know, if you create something, it is *yours*; you control it (Ps. 95:5; cf. Ps. 100:3 with Ezek. 18:4).

The world of idolatry believes that all these various competing or overlapping deities control various aspects of the world, or various things that go on in the world. That is why there was that frenzy to try to figure out "which god is angry enough to cause a plague in our beautiful city."

And by the way, if you think that is just ancient, trust me: It goes on today! Hinduism is the never-ending quest to placate gods, lest they torment you in some way. When I was in India, they said there are approximately 220 million gods; I don't know if they have invented any more. And so, in the typical Hindu home, you will have a shrine, and there will be offerings to maybe a national deity and a regional deity and maybe a city deity and maybe a family deity, and you just want to keep them happy so they don't hurt you. The same thinking goes on in Animism and Voodoo and the like.

Now, here in our country, we don't want to be that primitive. We kind of spit shine it: "Mother Nature smiled on us when we had sunshine for our picnic." No, no, no, no, no. And "Mother Earth"—no, she's nobody. I'm a golfer; they'll say, "Oh, the golf gods smiled on you with that bounce!" No, *they didn't!* It was *physics!* That's what it is.

Because He "created" it "all" (Col. 1:16), "He is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). So, do we worship Him appropriately as "Lord of all"?

Melchizedek, that wonderful mystery man during the time of Abraham—Melchizedek put it like this. He spoke to Abraham after God granted Abraham a victory in rescuing his nephew Lot from some of his many troubles. And in Genesis 14:19-20—"He blessed him

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and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' He gave him a tenth of all." Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek in honor of God who gave the victory.

Here's another one, that King David wrote. He wrote this to be recited or to be sung upon entering Jerusalem. Many believe this was sung when the Ark was brought back to Jerusalem. Psalm 24, Verse 1—"The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

I know God is probably a lot less sarcastic than I am, but I couldn't be surprised if He giggles when He hears things like "Human-caused Global Warming." "No, I lit a great big torch, and the Earth goes around it, and it gets hotter and it gets cooler!" *God* is in charge! (Ps. 103:19; Is. 46:10; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3a) We are not. How does that song say that Marsha taught me? "God is not impressed with the loftiness of men." (see Is. 2:11-17) No, "He is Lord of all."

In Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, he includes some words from Jesus that are not in the other Gospels: Luke 6:46—"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" If we say He is "Lord" (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3b), that means He is the Master (Matt. 17:5; 28:18-20; Lk. 11:28; Heb. 5:9). If He is the Master, we are the "slaves" (Eph. 6:6). He is in charge.

He Is Knowable because He made Himself known through creation, through conscience, through His Word. He created everything from nothing, and so it belongs to Him. And as Creator and Owner and Judge of the world, He Is Lord Of All. You either must acknowledge that *now*, voluntarily, surrendering your life to Him (Lk. 9:23; Jn. 14:15); or you will be *forced* to acknowledge that when you stand before Him at the time of Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15)—where your every deed, your every thought, and your every intention will be exposed (Acts 17:31; cf. Prov. 12:2; Ecc. 12:14; Matt. 12:36; Acts 8:22; 1 Cor. 4:5).

As we are following Paul on the missionary journeys, are you noticing the names of these cities and connecting them to books of the Bible? "Philippi"—he wrote to the Philippians. "Thessalonica"—he wrote to the Thessalonians. "Athens"—well, we have to wait; he is going to write to "Corinth," and they shared with Athens (2 Cor. 1:1).

Paul wrote this to the church at Philippi, where he started this missionary journey; and he wrote these profound words to them: Philippians Chapter 2, Verses 9 through 11—"For this reason also, God highly exalted Him"—Christ—"and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus *every knee will bow*, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that *every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father."

You either do it now when you embrace Him as Lord and Savior, or you *must* do it when He pronounces the *just* judgment upon you (Ps. 7:11; 9:8; Is. 3:11) and sentences you to eternity, to be "tormented" in "the lake of fire...forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10, 15; cf. Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

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When I came up with my catchy little 11-point outline, I knew we were not going to finish all of it, but I decided we have to at least get through three verses. So let's go to the last part of Verse 24.

God Is Knowable. God Is Creator. God Is Lord Of All. And then: God Is Spirit.

"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, *does not dwell in temples made with hands.*"

The point is: That rock that you carved that you worship—God is not there! That piece of wood that you made into something you pray to—God is not there! That lump of metal that you crafted—God is not there! (Ps. 115:4-7; Is. 44:10-20; 46:5-7; Jer. 10:3-5, 11, 14-15; Hos. 8:6; 1 Cor. 8:4; 10:19-20; 12:2; Gal. 4:8; Rev. 9:20)

But again, Paul doesn't attack the false beliefs of the idolaters (e.g., Ps. 115:4-7; Acts 14:15; 19:26), he proclaims the truth about God and His nature; he trusts the Spirit to do the work to apply it (Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 3:5-7; 12:3b).

Now, there *are* times to refute error. When you are asked a direct question, you need to give an answer. You need to "be ready...to give an answer" (1 Pet. 3:15, KJV). If you are not ready to give an answer, you need to promise to research the answer and come back with it.

But that is not where you *start* the proclamation of the Gospel. You don't *start* by refuting error, you present the truth of who God is (1 Tim. 6:15-16) and what He is like (Ps. 11:7) and what He did for us in Christ (Jn. 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Again, from the setting of the plans for the Temple in Jerusalem, we read this in First Kings 8:27—I love this: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven *cannot contain You*, how much less this house which I have built!" There, my friends, is the difference between the worship of the one true God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, Lord of all, *versus every other form of worship!* God is infinite! He is not confined to one place. And even the place where we honor Him does not *contain* Him.

Second Chronicles 2:6, from the same era: "But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him? So who am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn incense before Him?" We will come there and we will worship Him—but He is not going to be contained in our box (see Ps. 139:7-10; 148:13; Jer. 23:24).

The *silliness* of idolatry is on many fronts, but it is *patently* obvious in how idolatry *denies God's infinity!*

There is a famous statement that I have borrowed from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and I have adapted it and added three words at the end of it, and it is crucial. If you have been through "64 Days Of Truth" with me, or some of the other studies I've done, I have strongly encouraged you to memorize this:

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"God is a spirit"—not physical—"infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, love, and sovereignty."

Those three adjectives—"infinite, eternal, and unchangeable"—go with *all* of those other descriptions of various aspects of the perfection of God. He is *infinitely* all of those things all the time. He is *eternally* all of those things—before there was time, now, and after there is time (Ps. 90:2; Is. 43:10; 44:6; Heb. 13:8; Rev. 1:8). He never changes for a moment (Mal. 3:6); He never wavers for a moment from being all of those things perfectly, totally, all at once (Jas. 1:17)—and never changing (Num. 23:19).

God is spirit. To carve a piece of wood or stone, or to cast a piece of metal into some shape and then bow down and pray to it or in any other way worship it—well, that is *blasphemy*. "Blasphemy" is slander. That is *insulting your Creator!*

God *is* spirit, and He is omniscient—He knows everything (Ps. 147:5; cf. Ps. 139:1-4; Prov. 15:3, 11; 20:27; Jn. 16:30; 21:17; Heb. 4:13). So, do you realize that everything you see and hear and touch is the product of His creation? (Jn. 1:3) Do you understand that physical and artistic symbols of things to do with God are nothing more than *symbols*? Praying to them is *silly!* (Jer. 10:5)

Every time when I go to Russia, when I take somebody into an Orthodox church and they see people going up to a picture, a statue, whatever—lighting a candle, touching it, bowing down, praying to it, kissing it, moving on to the next one, bowing down, praying to it, kissing it, lighting a candle. They [the idolaters] say, "Oh, that's not idolatry. These are symbols that aid in worship!" No, it's idolatry! It is worshipping a representation that *is not God*. As a matter of fact, in the first two Commandments, [we are told]: "Do not worship those things, but *don't even make representations* of things that *are* in Heaven (see Ex. 20:4-5a; Deut. 4:15-16; 5:8; Is. 42:8). God is *so much bigger* than that!

As Jesus famously said to that woman who He talked to when He passed through Samaria, and she brought up the distinction between the Temple in Jerusalem—"Well, you [Jews] worship there in Jerusalem; we worship here in Samaria on Mount Gerizim." Remember what Jesus said to her? John 4:24—"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." It doesn't matter what ZIP Code the worship comes from! "God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable" in *all* of those things!

Well, I have identified at least seven more points about God that Pau included in his message there at the Areopagus; and if Jesus does not come back before next Sunday—Lord willing, we will keep working through them. But I have to ask you: How are you doing with *these* four?

I mean, is your life *all about* the fact that God Is Knowable? Do you know Him? Have you received the "free gift" of "eternal life in Christ Jesus" that He has offered so that you can come to Him (Rom. 6:23), you can become His adopted child (Gal. 4:5)? You can be "renewed" (Col. 3:10), you can be "regenerated" (Titus 3:5), you can be reborn (Jn. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3), you can have His Spirit dwelling within you (Rom. 8:9-11; Eph. 1:13-14)—because He is knowable.

Sermon Title: It's Who You Know
Scripture Text: Acts 17:22-34 (Acts # 41)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 5-5-24

He Is The Creator. Do you understand that everything in the universe was created by God in six days? And do you see the folly of trying to interpret that in light of so-called science that is based upon *assuming* what God says is not true, and then trying to answer the questions when you have *rule out* the answer? (Prov. 1:7; Jer. 8:9; 1 Tim. 6:20)

Do you understand that God Is Lord Of All? Is He *your* Master? Are you His servant above all else that you might be? (Matt. 10:37-38)

And do you understand that God Is Spirit? We worship Him, not because of the place. Oh, we are *glad* to have the place to gather and praise Him and encourage one another and build each other up and proclaim His Word. But we "worship" Him "in spirit and in truth." We dare not reduce worship to something less than total devotion of your heart to Him (1 Kings 8:61; 1 Chr. 28:9). Paul says: "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1)—that *is* your "reasonable" way to worship (NKJV)—"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (vs. 2). That's just more words to say the same thing: Worship Him "in spirit and in truth."

Make sure God is not unknown to you (Is. 55:6; Hos. 6:3; 2 Cor. 6:2).

And let's pray:

Our Father, thank You that when we say, "It's who you know," it is You that we need to know. Thank You for making Yourself known. Thank You, therefore, that You are knowable to everyone who will come to You in faith and understand that You are, and that You are who You say You are. Father, please do not let a person go from this place without knowing You through Your Son, Jesus Christ, who is the only way that anyone can come to You. Have Your way, according to the needs of each of our hearts. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.