

# An Urgent Message from Your Maker

By Dr. Jerry Bilkes

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Acts 17:30-31

**Preached on:** Sunday, July 10, 2011

## **Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids**

950 Ball Ave NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49503

**Website:** [www.frcgr.org](http://www.frcgr.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/frcgr](http://www.sermonaudio.com/frcgr)

Dear congregation, there are times when we read the Scriptures or we listen to sermons, when we may wonder whether what we are reading applies to me. This may be a right question. It may be a wrong question. Whatever it may be it is a real thing in our lives. Does this promise apply to me? Does this direction in God's Word does it have application to me?

What we hope to hear from God's Word tonight has application without a doubt to every single one of us today. And this is not just my opinion, but this the Lord's own statement. If you are a human being, man, woman, young person or child, God's Word is for you tonight, because the Lord says through the apostle Paul in verses 30 and 31 of our text:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 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.<sup>1</sup>

Our theme with God's help tonight is an urgent message from your maker. And we see three thoughts. First of all, a message demolishing religion; secondly, demanding repentance; and, thirdly, disclosing the judgment. An urgent message from your maker; demolishing religion, demanding, repentance and disclosing the judgment.

First of all, demolishing religion. Paul in our chapter is in Athens. What had brought him there? Well, he is on his second missionary journey. The Lord had opened the door into Europe powerfully and effectually at Philippi. And Paul had traveled there to Philippi and brought the Word there with fruit. And from Philippi Paul had gone to Thessalonica and, again, the Word had had effect. People had turned from idols to serve the only true and living God. And from there Paul had gone to Berea where people searched the Scriptures to know whether these things were true. And there people had stirred up the people to the point that Paul was constrained to leave Berea. And he went on ahead to Athens to wait for Timothy and Silas before going on to Corinth. And as he is here in

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:30-31.

this ancient and historic city, more than 600 years old, he walks around and as he does he sees how very religious these people are. There are temples and statues everywhere. Historians tell us that there were about 30,000 statues of gods in this city of Athens at this time including—and Paul makes a reference to it—a statue to the unknown God. And this was the people's way of making sure that all their bases were covered, that there wasn't some God, somewhere that they didn't know about and that they wouldn't have a statue for that god. That is how religious and superstitious these people were.

Mind you, it was also a city of great learning. Students would come from all over the ancient world. It was a university town, you could say. And people would sit at the feet of Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and many others who were renowned of their wisdom and philosophy. Our text mentions the Stoics, a school of philosophy that was pantheistic, that believed that God was everywhere and that everything was part of God and that fate controlled your life and that you simply had to grin and bear it, as we would say today. You also had the Epicureans, another school of philosophy that advocated Hedonism. Live for pleasure, because that is all there is to live for and soon life will be over. Perhaps some of these things sound familiar. They are still alive and well even though they are not called the same thing necessarily today.

And if you had been in Athens at this time you would have seen very notably this acropolis, still there today. It is a rock outcropping that towers over the whole city. It is about 500 feet high. And the top of it is about four acres in diameter. And built on top of this acropolis is the most beautiful temple the ancient world could produce called the Parthenon, a temple for the goddess Athena, the patron goddess of Athens. But everywhere there were these temples and statues.

On the side of the acropolis there was this Areopagus of which we read in our text and it was a level area, a plane in the honor of the Greek god Eros. It is also known, that same area, as Mars' Hill. It was later renamed for Mars, the god of the Romans. And this Areopagus area overlooks the Athenian market where people would gather and do business. And on the Areopagus, this area where Paul would stand and give this sermon, most likely, there the supreme court or the council of the city would meet. And most likely the justices would sit and they would issue verdicts and judgments on criminal cases and civil cases that were appealed to them. It was sort of like the supreme court of our day. Even today when you go to Athens you can see the ruins of this Parthenon, of this temple and the Areopagus as well. And it is impressive today. But how much more impressive must it have been back then? It was an imposing edifice. Anyone who stood there wondered at it. This is what man was able to produce.

But in our passage, there in the Areopagus stands this little man, Paul, Saul. His name means little, small. And by his own admission he did not have an impressive appearance. He didn't have impressive speech. But there he stands. And if you are able to look into his eyes you would see fire blazing, love burning in his heart and in his soul for the people whom he saw there in Athens. And if you could look into his heart you would see his heart all stirred up. The Word of God says in verse 16 God, as it were, by his Spirit,

stirred up the heart of Paul. Watch out when the Lord stirs the hearts of his people to pray, to bring the Word, to preach. The Lord was using Paul.

Just like his master, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose heart had been stirred as he looked out over the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd, lost and perishing, heading, as it were, to a precipice over which they would hurl themselves into an endless and a Christless eternity. How his heart moved with compassion for the lost. So, too, Paul.

And the city was so religious, so devout. Everywhere where he went he saw people engaged in conversation, often about religious things. Later one he would write:

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 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.<sup>2</sup>

Here is man professing to be wise, making himself utterly foolish. These people were rejecting the true knowledge of God. And because of that, they had this insatiable thirst in their souls for meaning, for theories, for new ideas, anything to give them some sense of significance, something that would get them in tune with what is real and lasting and relevant.

Oh, what a noise there must have been on the market place of Athens. Every day people wanted to hear something new. That is what you see in verse 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.”<sup>3</sup>

These people were hungry for knowledge, anything to tantalize them. But, of course, all of it was vain. Don't we see something of that today? People want to hear new things, fresh things, things they haven't heard before, at least not for a while. They like to hear a mixture of this theory and that theory repackaged and presented and glitzy on screens and on radios everywhere, new things, new things, every day new things serve up to us new things.

Don't you hear the emptiness in these people's souls? They weren't content. They weren't satisfied. They were, as it were, drinking in everything that might satisfy their empty soul. And yet nothing would. No wonder Paul's spirit was stirred. And Paul, we know, was not ashamed of the gospel of God. And so he begins to speak with people wherever he could find them on the marketplace, within the synagogue, devout people. He spoke with them. Undoubtedly he would have asked them questions, but also preached unto them Jesus Christ and him crucified. And somehow people hear about this and, yes, it is one more new thing. In fact, that is what they call him. They call him a babler, verse 18. And literally this word means a seed picker. And what they are referring to is these scavenger birds that would come and sort of like seagulls, wherever

---

<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:22-23.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 17:21.

people are they come and they just pick up whatever is left behind you and that is their scavenger birds. And that is what they are saying about Paul. “Paul, you are like this scavenger bird. You are just picking up ideas here and there and you are just putting them together and there you are. There is your own philosophy. That is how they looked at Paul.

And so half mockingly they said, “Paul, why don’t you share us your new religion, your new philosophy, what you have come up with?”

It is sort of like, “Paul, how about you have your 20 minutes of fame within Athens?”

What will Paul do? Paul will you flatter the people, tell them that they have discovered many interesting things and that they are certainly on the way to the truth? Paul, are you going to compromise what you believe? Are you going to tell them that they can have their religion as long as they make some additional corrections here and there? Or, Paul are you going to simply leave that all to the side and give them maybe some tips for successful living in this world? How to have nice families, how to make it in this world, how to be successful, how to win friends and influence people now in this world? Are you going to affirm these people in their quest for authenticity, not be too sharp, not lay things out clear on the table, hide the message of sin, gloss it over, just so much, avoid the word repentance? Paul, don’t you want these people to feel good about themselves? Don’t you want to keep their hearing at least? Paul, if you say it just right, maybe they will build a school for you and think of all the influence you will have in Athens and throughout the Greek world.

Congregation, Paul is a wrestler.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”<sup>4</sup>

Paul knew he was all alone in terms of men, but he knew that there was a Son of God in heaven who had met him on the road to Damascus and had sent him with the gospel to the Gentiles and so there he stood on the Areopagus with the temple of Athena above him and all of the idols around him like a forest of idols in the midst of which he found himself as a lone voice crying in the wilderness, the waste land, the spiritual wasteland of his time.

Paul was a wrestler. If Samson centuries before had asked for his one arm to be put on the one pillar and his other arm on the other pillar and lifted up a prayer to his God in heaven and sought with all his physical power to break this temple to Dagon into pieces, you could say that spiritually speaking Paul wrapped his spiritual arms in the gospel around the fortress and temple of Paganism as it stood there all around him at that time and undoubtedly with a prayer to his master in heaven, he cried and said, “Lord, bring it down. Bring it down and save souls by truth and truth alone.”

---

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 6:12.

With insight given him by the Holy Spirit Paul found the one chink in the armor of Paganism as it was there before him that day. Do you know what it was?

“For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.”<sup>5</sup>

That is the chink in their armor. They don't know what they are talking about? They don't know whom they are worshiping. They don't know the first thing about truth, about God. All their worship was pure ignorance through and through. Unknown Athenians., you speech is betraying you. You don't know. And isn't this something that you ought to know? Isn't this something that it is too important not to know? You don't know God. You don't know your maker. You don't know the one who has formed you from the dust and given you breath in your nostrils who has made you to live and to fill this earth. You don't know the one who has made all these things. You are walking on is soil. You are breathing in this air. You are speaking to other image bearer and you don't know the source of all things.

Do you see here how Paul draws a scriptural arrow in the bow of truth? He aims it right for the heart of these Athenians. You don't know. And it isn't just a matter of there are some things you don't know that I want to tell you. No, this ignorance is the source of their misery. Because, Congregation—and this applies to all of us—we have been created for what? To know God and to glorify him and enjoy him forever. And so if you don't know God in truth that isn't just some problem over here and the rest is fine, but the basic, the predominant, the main thing is wrong. You don't know your maker. And so everything else is void of purpose and significance. You don't know the most important thing. Just imagine how that must have sounded to those people?

It would be like going to Harvard today or to Oxford University and gathering all those intellectuals around and to say, “You don't know the slightest thing of what truly matters. You have libraries filled worth books and you have studied for years and written books on end, but you don't know what you are supposed to know. You don't know the God who formed you and in the knowledge of which there is life. You never looked upward into the face of him who has made you, who is light and life and strength and happiness and everything, whose attributes are the perfect things to know and in the knowledge of which there is happiness and peace and great joy. You lack everything because you lack this. And your misery that you are trying to cover up with all that marble of all these statues and that misery that you are trying to send away by all this learning at the feet of the philosophers, that misery is going nowhere, because it is a misery because of ignorance. You don't know your maker.

But Paul doesn't stop there. He doesn't simply point out their misery. But when he calls them ignorant, he is really putting his finger on their sin. Because they should have known and you and I should know the Lord, because we were created perfect and upright

---

<sup>5</sup> Acts 17:23.

in the knowledge of God. And we have around us a book of nature which speaks to us loud and clear the knowledge of God.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”<sup>6</sup>  
The birds every day and the plants and the flowers, the trees, the air that we breath is preaching to us a constant message about God, his glory, his majesty, his goodness and so on. But you don’t know.

Like he says in Romans one, he says:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.<sup>7</sup>

Congregation, we should know the Lord. We should know him in truth, in uprightness, in perfection. Because we were created in the knowledge of him. In Adam we knew our creator. We walked with him in the cool of the day and fellowship with him. He knew us and we knew him in Adam. And we should know from the testimony of nature all around us, but by nature we don’t know. Our hearts don’t know.

And there is this emptiness which we try to fill with so many things. Oh, our world is so ingenious, isn’t it, in doing exactly that. Every second of every hour you and I can be hearing the latest and the greatest. It is coming closer and closer with modern technology. It hounds us. It is after us. And you know what it is. It is Athenian novelty being served up in your and my homes every day all day long. Listen to this. Consider this. What do you think about this? Isn’t this great? And if you do this, how happy you will be and how wonderful life will be. Here is 10 steps to try for this and another 15 to try for that and seven habits over here that you can try and it is served up to us all day long.

Our world finds ways to put a veil even more so on our hearts and on our minds. It gives us so many things that our hearts go after very easily, sports heroes, entertainment, movie actors, amenities that pamper us and make us feel good about ourselves, at least for a few moments. It holds up before us this independent glamorous life, young people, that can be yours if you just buy a few things. And you go into debt for just a little while and you amass these things and it can all be yours and you will be the hero and you will be fulfilled and you will be satisfied. You will be the envy of your peers and of the town.

Let all those things leave you more hungry and more vain every step that you go into them. And you need more and you need more and you need more.

And, congregation, don't tell me that in the church things are really that different. Oh, I know we are thankful for the knowledge of God that we have been taught. And, yes, the

---

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 19:1.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:20-21.

catechisms and godly parents and all these things are blessings that should not be despised. And yet in your unconverted state do you know the Lord?

You know, these Athenian people were devout. They were pious. If you would have met them, oh, yes, turn a blind eye to the statues and things like that, but engage them in conversation, these people were spiritual people in the sense that spiritual things interested them, intrigued them. They could talk about them all day long. They were devout. They worshipped in so many ways from early morning to late at night. And so, too, we, we can do it in our own way in our orthodox way. And yet without Christ it is all a home made self made piety that cannot stand the judgment of God.

We need to come to the point that Asaph came to when he says:

“So foolish was I, and ignorant.”<sup>8</sup>

Have you come to that point in your life, that God has shown you through the power of his Holy Spirit and through the Word being applied to your soul. Yes, you were taught many things and it was good and the Lord can use that. But there comes a point in your life when you say, “Now I see the power of them, the reality of them. Now it grips me and I feel how could I have lived so long without this, without the Lord.”

“So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.”<sup>9</sup>

Says Asaph.

You see, then the Lord takes the veil from off your eyes and from off your heart and you get a look inward and you realize what Calvin said when he said, “Your and my heart is a factory of idols.” The assembly line of our heart is producing without fail idol upon idol upon idol. And even after grace, people of God, we have to confess that principle still indwells us, doesn't it? Oh, there is come another principle. Thanks be to God. There is, I principle that knowledge of God by the revelation of Jesus Christ within our hearts, the basis of his Word and Holy Spirit. But there is still that assembly line of idols served up. the is never any strikes on that assembly line of the idolatry of the human heart.

Before Paul will speak about a remedy, he first has to point out the problem. He first declares to the people their misery and beneath that misery their sin. We need the Holy Spirit to demolish vain religion in our lives, to strip it away, to show it for what it is so that the temples come crashing down that the Holy Spirit shows that we have our Parthenons as well and we have our 30,000 idols set out before us as well. And they need to come down and there needs to be that cry for true knowledge from the most high. Lord, teach me. And unto me impart. Take away my foolishness, Lord, and show me the truth as it is in Christ.

---

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 73:22.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

William Cowper says it so beautifully. He says, in prayer, he says, “The dearest idol I have known, what e’er that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee.”

When that is the language of your heart, then something has begun which Paul speaks of next. We hope to turn to in our second point namely how this urgent message demands repentance. Notice what he says in the words of our text, verse 30.

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”<sup>10</sup>

Paul here uses a word that in many places today, in many churches even that adopt the name Mars’ Hill will not say. Repent. Turn from your sin and seek after God who made you. Repent, sinner, repent. You must know that life of turning from your folly and turning unto God. What is repentance? Let me try to state it as clearly as I can. Repentance is that change of mind worked by the Holy Spirit whereby we sorrow for sin which we have committed in which we are by ourselves, we repudiate, we take away, we turn away from any means and every means of trying to save ourselves. And we come under God and we say, “Lord, if thou shouldest enter into judgment with thy servant, in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” There comes this repulsion in your soul against sin in principle. You learn to hate sin as the catechism says with holy hatred. And through power given unto you by the Holy Spirit you being, in principle to flee from sin. You run from sin. You stop your ears to the siren calls of this world that says, “Oh, come back. Don’t take it so seriously. There is lots of time before you need to repent. You close your eyes to it and you say, “Eternal life, I must have the knowledge of God which is eternal life.” And you lose that instinct which every one of us have by nature and that is to preserve ourselves and to hold on to ourselves and maybe make a truce with God. Somehow give God quite a bit of our lives. And yet to hold on to certain areas of our lives and of our sins, to still be to some extent a master over our own lives. But in repentance the Lord makes you profoundly sick of sin. You hate sin with holy hatred. You see it as being offensive unto God, like that publican of whom we heard about this morning. You abhor yourself in dust and ashes and you say, “Lord, is there yet mercy for me? Lord, for me the sinner. Lord, have mercy upon me.” That is what repentance entails.

Repentance isn’t simply an abhorrence of sin and a fleeing from sin and the power of God and of the Holy Spirit. Many people are not clear on this. But repentance also in principle has this apprehension of mercy, of divine mercy. It has some inkling, however small, that God is a God who is to be enquired after and who will pardon to the uttermost those who come unto God by him. And however faint that apprehension is, true repentance has that.

The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster standards says it so well. It says, “Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn

---

<sup>10</sup> Acts 17:30.

from it unto God and with full purpose and endeavor after new obedience take hold of God in Jesus Christ.”

You know, there is a repentance that has no apprehension of mercy. But do you know what that Bible calls that? A worldly sorrow that leads unto death.

When the prodigal in that far country came to himself, do you remember that? What did he say? He said:

How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.<sup>11</sup>

That prodigal, underneath it all has some apprehension, some sense, something that his sin sick soul hankers after and holds on to. In my father’s house, there is bread. The servants of my father don’t perish with hunger and I am. I will go.

And in the preaching of the Word this, too, needs to be held out to sinners who know nothing and who need to know and who need to repent. Well, how is Paul doing that in this passage? Notice how he does it. He says:

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at.”<sup>12</sup>

What does he mean by that? Does he mean that God turned a blind eye to their sin and that God may turn a blind eye to your sin as well? No. God never turns a blind eye to any sin. He will judge all the actions of every man, every woman, every boy and every girl in the day of judgment. The secret things, everything will be judged. It is transparent. It is open before the eye of him with whom we have to do. His eye is open to your and my sin.

What does Paul mean, then, when he says that God winked at your sin in these times of ignorance? What he means is this. Is that God has been longsuffering and patient until now. He could have executed every one of you even before you were born because of your sin in Adam. He could have struck down every one of you in his righteous judgment at age five or age 10 or age 25 or at any point in time. But up till now he has winked at your sin in the sense that he has not yet executed his just judgment over your sin. And hereby he is giving these Athenians a sense of the patience that God has exercised with respect to them. And he does the same with us tonight, dear congregation. You are still alive every one of you. You are still in the day of grace. You may have sinned, great sins, small sins, religious sins, whatever it may be. But until now God has not had the gavel of his justice fall down and demand an account from you and from me until now. Many others have perished in their sins. Even this past week in our city and our heart

---

<sup>11</sup> Luke 15:17-19.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 17:30.

grieves for these families, but there were people who in a moment and it happens all the time, from one moment to the next are translated from this life into the life that is to come and they stand before the great judgment seat of God all of the sudden. And the day of grace is over and God no longer winks at their sin in the sense that he forbears with them anymore. No, then the day of grace is over. The day of judgment has come.

And Paul is bringing this forth before the Athenians and he is saying, “God up till now has winked over your sin. Don’t you see what a patient, what a long suffering God he is? He could have decimated you long ago? But he has brought you to this point and you can still hear about this man whom he has appointed, whom he has raised from the dead whereby he will judge the world in righteousness. You can still hear Christ proclaimed in all his glory and suitability and necessity for poor and needy sinners still today.”

Don’t you see how long suffering God has been with you, unconverted sinner among us tonight? He has not snuffed out your life five years ago. He didn’t take you away this past week in your sin and in your ignorance. You are still here. He does not delight in the death of the wicked, Ezekiel says, but rather in this, that the wicked turn from his wicked ways and live.

Paul writes to the Romans and he says:

“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”<sup>13</sup>

My dear friends, has your heart never been affected with the truth that the Lord has still left you in the land of the living? Even though Satan came to the Lord and said, “Lord, look at that sinner. He deserves to die. Cast him into hell.” The Lord said, “Not yet, devil. Not yet. He still has to hear one more message of my goodness, my forbearance, my longsuffering, one more message about my crucified Son and risen one.”

But the Lord is saying, “Until now I have winked at your sin. Until I have been the longsuffering, patient and good doing God in your life. But now I command everyone, everywhere to repent. You are not assured of one more night. You are not assured that you will reach old age. Even you, young children, teenagers, young people, older ones as well. Don’t count on it. The Lord is saying in his Word, “Tonight I have winked at your sin thus far. I have not executed my judgment yet till today. But I command you, every man everywhere, now to repent whoever you are.”

Could it be any clearer? Every man, every human being. If you are a son of Adam, a daughter of Adam, if you belong to the human race, young or old, God’s Word is to you tonight. He is not speaking here to devils. He is not speaking here to angels. He is speaking to every man, everywhere now.

You know, Jonah came into the city of Nineveh long ago and he gave them a message which was curt. This is what he said.

---

<sup>13</sup> Romans 2:4.

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”<sup>14</sup>

You have heard much more than that. Granted, even in that message there is something of God’s mercy and long suffering. Yet 40 days, Ninevites and your city will be overthrown.

And what did the Ninevites do? We read that they repented in dust and ashes at the preaching of Jonah.

And here is Paul in Athens and he comes with so much more. And still till today God sends forth messengers and they come with the whole gospel and they call men everywhere to repent.

Dear friends, I don’t know what you came for tonight. I don’t know what message you wanted to hear tonight. But I can tell you what message the Lord has for you tonight. Everyone, everywhere, repent now.

And if that is not enough, Paul has one more thing for us tonight. We hope to see this briefly in our third and final point in which he discloses the judgment. Paul says to those Athenians there on this Areopagus, this supreme court of the ancient world where the justices would convene and hear cases he says there is a judgment coming and the judge of the heaven and of earth, the supreme judge. You can never appeal that judgment and the day has been appointed, he said, God has appointed a day. It is written already on the divine calendar appointment, judgment day.

I don’t know when that is. You don’t know when it is. God has kept it secret from everyone of us, but it is there and it is on the calendar of your life as it is on the calendar of my life. And it is an appointment that every one of us will keep. You won’t be late for that appointment. You won’t be accepted from that appointment. It will be judgment day, the great white throne when all the nations of the world, every person who has ever existed will be there together on that day, rich and poor, great and small, Ninevites and Athenians, Europeans and Americans. Presidents will be there, kings and queens, also lowly servants, those who died in infancy, those who died at a ripe old age. Religious people will be there and non religious people will be there. Church members, church goers and non church goers, Free Reformed Church members will be there. Every one of us will be there and what a day that will be.

We read in the Scriptures that heaven and earth will flee away from the sight of him that sitteth upon the throne and no place will be found for heaven and of earth. Imagine that. The graves will be opened. All the cemeteries of Grand Rapids, all the graves will be opened and the dust of all those who have died will be raised and joined with their souls. Those who have been thrown out at sea, their dust, too, shall arise. Oh, what a day that will be. At the sound of the trumpet at the voice of the archangel all of the angels all of a sudden they will take all of the souls of those who have trusted in Jesus Christ and they

---

<sup>14</sup> Jonah 3:4.

will be there together with their bodies. What will that be like? We can't imagine it. Everything we have seen in this world will be like this small compared to what that day will bring.

And there on the throne of God will sit the judge. Who will that judge be? Paul tells us, "Him who was crucified, him who stood before Caiaphas and Annas and Pilate, who stood before their judgment seat. Now they will stand before his."

Heaven has a court file on every person who has ever lived. Atheists will stand before the judge. University professors, Stoics, Epicureans, philosophers, Free Reformed people who sat on these pews that you are sitting on today. They will stand there. You and I will stand there and like a shepherd he shall divide the sheep from the goats, the goats on his left hand and the sheep on his right hand. Oh, what a day of surprises that will be. Many who thought they would end up on the right hand may very well be on the left and many of whom we may have thought they will surely be on the left hand, all glory to grace they will be on the right hand by free grace alone.

And, congregation this is Paul's point today. Repent, every man, everywhere now, because God has appointed a day. It may be soon. It may be later. It could be at any moment. This judgment has already ascended up into the throne. He is sitting already at the judgment bench. God has raised him from the dead and he has, as it were, the gavel already in his hand. And there he is and he has sent forth messengers to preach all over this world that every man might hear also today. But the gavel is in his hand and the day will come when that gavel will come down and time will be no more. And the judgment day will begin.

Do you understand why God is saying to you and to me every man, everywhere, now repent? There is no time to delay. There is no time to say, "I will take yet some time. I want to hear some more. Come back again and tell us some more."

No. Now is the day of salvation.

It is remarkable that after this message that Paul preached, with his Spirit stirred within him, the most people that heard it, that is exactly what they said. We will hear thee again. We will hear thee again.

Do you see what their problem was? It was the now. They were saying to Paul, not now, but later. We will hear thee again. But what do we read? In verse 33 it says:

"So Paul departed from among them."<sup>15</sup>

Paul never preached in Athens again. This was the final sermon most of these people ever heard. We will hear thee again. They will meet Paul in the great judgment day. And the Lord will ask Paul and say, "Paul, did you preach to these people? Did you warn them

---

<sup>15</sup> Acts 17:33.

of the judgment to come? Did you say to them every man, everywhere now repent? Or, Paul, did you say you can delay? You can take your time. You still have time Athenians.”

Paul will say, “I was with them in much fear and much trembling, but these were my words.”

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”<sup>16</sup>

Congregation, are we delaying repentance? What will you do when that great day comes? Oh, someone says, “But I can’t repent. I tried to repent. It is not within man to repent.”

The Lord says, “Repent.” And he can be inquired of by the house of Jacob to do it for them. If you don’t know where to start, open your Bible and beseech the Lord and say, “Lord, I do not know how to repent, but teach me and unto me impart that saving grace.” And do not rest, beloved. You can’t afford to rest until the Lord by his Word and by his Holy Spirit shows you and gives you that true repentance.

You know, so often the problem is this. That somehow even piously we haven’t become guilty enough to fall upon mercy and mercy alone. And to say, “Lord, thy forbearance, thy goodness, thy Son Jesus Christ. Indeed, he is the judge and the gavel is in his hand. But when I see his hand, I see them as nail pierced hands. Lord, why were his hands nail pierced when mine should have been?”

And then the Lord shows you the offer of free and sovereign grace that lies in those nail pierced hands of the judge. Oh, while he proffers peace and pardon, hear his voice today for those nail pierced hands, if they are slighted and if the gavel comes down in your life and finds you Christless and repentanceless, oh what will it be?

You know, there were other judges on that day who heard Paul preach and who will stand in that day and be judged by this judge. But, marvel of all marvels, we read of one man. I don’t know if you noticed it, Dionysius the Areopagite, do you know what that man was? He was one of the supreme court justices of the Areopagus and he was there listening to Paul and the Lord worked in his soul and when Paul says, “You ignorantly worship the unknown God,” something in Dionysius accused himself and he said, “You know, that is me. I have ignorantly worshipped God all my life. My life has been one pile of religion, but no truth. It has been all vanity.”

And the Holy Spirit convicted him of that and do you know what? That supreme court justice, he become a convict that day. He was convicted in his heart of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. And his soul cried out after this Jesus Christ crucified and risen and this Jesus Christ became precious unto his soul. And we read he clave unto Paul. He stuck to Paul. He said, “Paul, tell me more.” He said, “Paul, I need this truth. Paul, I need to repent. I need this grace of repentance. I need to repent now, Paul. I

---

<sup>16</sup> Acts 17:30.

cannot afford to wait anymore.” And this supreme court justice became a convict, convicted of free and sovereign grace and of the need of it in his soul and he repented and he believed. Tradition tells us he became a church leader later on in Athens.

Paul’s wrestling was not in vain. The fact that his heart had been stirred was not in vain. God’s Word is never in vain. It never returns unto him void, but it accomplishes that which he purposes. And this Dionysius, together with this Damaris, a woman of whom we know very little, but they will stand there at the judgment seat of Christ on the right hand together with Paul and together with all you who repent. But all the rest of them and all the rest of you on the left hand.

Will it be on the left hand?

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”<sup>17</sup>

Amen.

*Great God of heaven and of earth, seal thy Word to our souls as thou alone canst do. Wrestle us down to the ground where we come from off our thrones and become the convicts who have sinned against thee and thy goodness and thy longsuffering all of our days and grant us by thy Spirit’s work true repentance and abhorrence of sin, but also that apprehension of mercy and grant us to say with Dionysius and Damaris and the prodigal, “I will arise and go to this God, this forbearing, this long suffering God and see whether or not he will have mercy and to our God for he shall abundantly pardon.” For thy thoughts are not our thoughts, neither is thy way our way. Oh, bring it home, Lord, to our hearts and grant that in that great day of days, none of us could it be would be on the left hand, to perish while today thy nail pierced hands are outstretched still in the gospel. Lord, bring us down. Bring us where we cannot bring ourselves. Be with the young and the old. Oh, Lord, give us not over to hardness of heart. Give us not over to sin, to bold sinning yet once more. But give us no rest until we rest in thee and thy finished work and to thee shall be all the praise. We ask this and the pardon of every sin in Christ’s name alone. Amen.*

---

<sup>17</sup> Acts 17:30.