

**Acts 17: 16-28; “Proclaiming the God You Know”, Sermon #64 in the series –  
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on  
August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.**

This morning I would like to bring to your attention how the apostle Paul preached the gospel to the Athenian philosophers; the Epicureans and the Stoics. For I believe that it will help us to better understand, how to begin to preach the gospel to people around us. I think that you must know that there are many people around us who have never been raised in the context of going to church. They do not know the first thing about our God and His Son, Jesus Christ. They do not know anything about what God expects of them, or how they can come to know Him. What should we say to them? What truths should we proclaim to them?

Well, Paul knew how he should address these people, and I believe that there were some things which he told them which are things which we should remember when we attempt to speak to unsaved people around us. 1<sup>st</sup> of all – We should proclaim the God whom we personally know. 2<sup>nd</sup> – We should proclaim the sovereign God who has made the world and everything in it. 3<sup>rd</sup> – We should proclaim that this God is not far from each one of us.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – If we would be good witnesses we should proclaim the God whom we personally know.** (verses 16-23)

The apostle Paul, it says in verse 16, was in a waiting mode when he arrived at Athens. He really wanted Silas and Timothy to be there with him when he preached. He needed their support and their prayers in relation to his immediate situation, and any ministry that he would engage in there. He knew that when the gospel is publicly preached that it takes more than one witness to confirm the truth. The truth of the gospel and the word of God is proclaimed here Sunday by Sunday, and I know, that you, the members of this church, who are gathered here together with me, you help me to bear witness to the truth by your very presence and your eagerness to hear the word of God.

The same is true whenever and wherever the gospel is preached outside the four walls of the church in a public way. Even Jesus sent out his disciples two by two rather than sending them alone. Paul knew that it would be best if he had the other missionary men standing by him, standing with him as confirming witnesses while he preached. But while he was waiting for them, it says in verse 16, his spirit was provoked within him. He was provoked when he saw that the whole city was given over to idols. Calvin translates it – He was sore grieved. He says that his spirit waxed hot and it sharpened his zeal to preach. And so, he would wait no longer for his fellow missionaries. He thought that he simply must go into the synagogue there and preach and reason with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers.

At other times, it says, he would go into the marketplace and he would reason with those who happened to be there. Let me ask you whether you reason with people around you concerning the God that you know? Do you give people around you reasons that they should believe in the God that you love and serve? You really should, you know. For our faith is a reasonable faith. If you have been born again by the Spirit of God, you know that the wisdom which is from above is reasonable. Some of you have known from childhood the truth of the Scriptures which are able to make a person wise unto salvation. You know that there are tangible reasons why you should proclaim our God as the only true and living God. The greatest is because you have come to know Him personally when you first believed the gospel.

Years ago, when I was in High School and was walking up to catch the bus that would take me to school, one of my fellow-students came up behind me and said – Paul, did you know that you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? I was simply speechless, and I couldn't answer him. He was trying to make me think about knowing God. He would have told me more

about Christ, if I had asked him to explain. But I was offended that he had asked. I thought that I thought that I was a Christian because I went to church. But I did not have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In our generation now, 50 years later, the situation is actually much worse in our country than it was then, spiritually speaking. Many people do not believe in God at all, or they like to think that there could be many gods, any one of which could be worshiped, or all of them if a person chose to do so. This was the situation in Athens. As Christians we are called to share the truth of God's word and the gospel with others around us. Thankfully, the God whom we preach, we personally know.

Now, we see here that Paul's spirit was provoked when he saw the whole city was given to idols. He knew that God is not simply one of many gods. He knew that God was being dishonored by false worship. Let me ask, is your spirit provoked as you behold the false gods being worshiped in our own day? Are you grieved? Our God is the only true and living God. And in the 10 commandments, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment, He tells us that He is a jealous God. This is something that we must be willing to explain to people around us; that He as God wants all of Your worship, and He wants you to be devoted to Him and give your attention to Him, and to love Him with all of your mind and heart, soul and spirit.

Paul knew this, and that is why he was provoked. But you will notice that Paul was not an Iconoclast. He was not a man who instantly ran to destroy the false images and break down the altars of their gods. He did not lift up his voice and harangue these people for their false worship. He would reason with those who were so deluded. Are you willing to do this? Do you see people as spiritually blind in their nature? How will they know if they do not hear the truth from you? It was here in the marketplace that certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. Evidently he was doing some street preaching, and as they listened to him, they could see that he was not a polished orator or philosopher. Rather, he seemed to them to be a proclaimer of foreign gods, it says, because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection."

So, because it seemed to them that his words were accompanied with some mysterious power that they could not fathom, they took him and brought him to the Areopagus. And they said to him – May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? Because you are bringing some strange things to our ears, and we want to know what these things mean. People who have never read the Bible and have not been raised in a Christian tradition tend to see the preaching of the gospel this way; as something foreign to them. But it is a very good thing when the Holy Spirit is striving with them, that they want to know what these things that we are saying to them, mean. When people show interest in the Bible and the things of Christ, if they want an explanation of the gospel, are you ready to bear your testimony?

People must have the knowledge of God and Christ to be saved. Are you willing to give it to them in simple, straightforward terms? Will you tell them that God can be known. There are people out there who like these philosophers, spend their time in nothing else but either telling or hearing some new thing. Tell them that the God they wonder about, you know. There are people out there who are very religious people, who are worshipers of a false god, or follow after the philosophies of the world. "The Epicureans were a sect of people who were pleasure seekers." "They believed that pleasure and the avoidance of pain were to chief end of man." "They were materialists, who, while not denying the existence of the gods, they believed that they did not intervene in the affairs of men." "They taught that, at death, the body and soul (both composed of atoms) disintegrate; there is no after-life." (John MacArthur, Commentary on Acts, Vol 2, P. 131)

"The Stoics, on the other hand, saw self-mastery as the greatest virtue." "They believed self-mastery comes from being indifferent to both pleasure and pain, reaching the place where one feels nothing." In contrast to the practical atheism of the Epicureans, the Stoics were

pantheists.” (MacArthur, again) Pantheists are those who believe that God is in and through His creation essentially. He is not distinct from the universe or matter. Those who hold to these philosophies need to hear and comprehend Biblical truth. This is a matter of the Spirit’s working in relation to our preaching and sharing the truth of the Bible. We must be willing to proclaim it and to reason with them over it.

Paul was eager to do this. He made observation on an inscription on one of their altars which said – To the Unknown God. He said – “Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing Him I proclaim to you.” He was declaring that there was only one true God. This is what you and I must be willing to do. We must not balk at saying that being religious by itself is not enough to know God. To know God and to worship Him aright means that in your mind, you understand that He can be personally. And that requires that someone share the knowledge of God to you; that knowledge which is only found in the Bible.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – If we would be good witnesses, we should proclaim the sovereign God who has made the world and everything in it.** (verses 24-26)

Verse 24 says – “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 preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.” Truly, my brethren, it is very important that we tell people plainly that God created the world and all things in it. The word did not come into being through a big bang, but by the Creator God, the Triune God, saying – Let there be light.

He did not say this because He needed the light to see by, in order to fashion the world in 6 literal days. In Himself He is Light. But He who is the Light of Light, spoke and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. Everything He created, He did it for our sakes, so that we can behold His glory, and His infinitely great Creative wisdom and power. God made the heavens and the earth. The heavens declare the glory of God and the earth shows forth His handiwork. Day after day utters speech and night after night reveals knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and the words to the end of the world, it says in Psalm 19: 1-4.

Do you reason with people in this declarative way; that it is God who has given to all life and breath and all things? People today will challenge you with the theory of Evolution. But we can declare to them with all confidence that order of a human body with a soul and spirit does not come out of chaos of the primordial slim. And the kind of order that you find in every aspect of the Lord’s creation, shows forth His handiwork. All the details of every creature that he has made does not indicate that they evolved but that they were created as the species that they have always been. God is the originator of every genus and species. Let no one say that it came about by random accidental forces at work. There are no such things. If there were, this world would quickly spin out of control.

All the laws of nature were not just something that happened on their own. They were put in place by the All-wise and understanding God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The evolutionist has no leg to stand on, with theories spun out of their own desire that God not be the God of the Bible. Those people who do not believe in God are called “fools” in the Bible. It is the fear of the Lord that leads to the beginning of wisdom and understanding, in regard to both natural physical and spiritual things. It is only fools who despise wisdom and instruction it says in Proverbs 1: 7. The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. But he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Those who do not believe that there is a God are people who are harming themselves, and others by their false philosophy of life. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 3 says – “By faith we

understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” It is as simple as that. Doubt and skepticism, and a person relying on their own intellect to know whether there is a God, or whether He created the world, all these supposed reasonings are vain. God is the first cause of all things. Something does not come from nothing without infinite intelligence, wisdom and power defining it and speaking it into being. That infinitely wise Being, our God, has determined that without faith, it is impossible to please Him.

Psalm 94: 8-11 says – “Understand, you senseless among the people; and you fools, when will you be wise?” “He who planted the ear, shall He not hear?” “He who formed the eye, shall He not see?” “He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge?” “The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile.” Our God is Lord of heaven and earth, our text says in verse 24. He is the sovereign Ruler over all. He does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He give to all life, breath, and all things.” It is so plain and simple that a young child can take it in. Why then do not all men receive the truth, so as to believe it? Because they do not want to believe God’s word. And they do not want the Sovereign God ruling over them.

Therefore, they make up lies about God and creation and man’s origin so that they will not have to submit to doing His will to please Him. But notice what Paul says here. In verse 26 he says that God has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the fact of the earth, and He has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings. It is God’s sovereign wisdom and power that has determined that all the nations of people in the world would descend from the one man Adam whom He created. He is the One who determined their preappointed times, how long they should live and where they should live; that is the boundaries of where they should live, He determined those things Himself. It is this kind of Sovereign wisdom and power that belongs exclusively to the Lord our God.

If you would be a faithful witness in proclaiming and sharing the truth of God’s word, let people know that you believe that the Bible is God’s word. The Bible declares these things, plainly and simply to be true. Tell them that to know God, they must not lean to their own fallen understanding and act as though they can judge God. God is well able to prove Himself faithful and true to reveal these truths to any sincere mind. The Jews in Jesus’ day marveled over Him, and they said at one point – “How does this man know letters, having never studied? And He said in John 7: 16 – “My doctrine, My teaching, is not Mine, but His who sent Me.” “If anyone will to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on my own authority.” “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.”

You see, that is the real issue isn’t it; whether a man is seeking his own glory or the glory of God. And if a man is seeking the glory of God, he will be willing to do God’s will and to believe the things that God has laid down in His word. His word is truth. But atheists and false philosophers think that they are wiser than God, and that they know better than His word. Their real quarrel with Him is that He is the sovereign God, and He does tell us what is true and right, what is wise and holy in His word. And so Paul says in Colossians 2, verse 8 – “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily...”

**3<sup>rd</sup> – If we would be good witnesses we should proclaim that this God is not far from each one of us.** (verses 26-29)

In verse 26 it says that God has determined mankind’s pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope 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, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His 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.” When you and I proclaim the sovereignty of God, that He rules over all creation, over all people, and over nations as well, we need to also tell them that they themselves should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might find Him.

Paul terms it – “groping for God that they might find Him”. And what is the reason that we should tell people to grope? It is because He is not far from each one of us. Ah, that is very good news for all men. God is not distant and far away somewhere, up in the heaven of heavens, dwelling in unapproachable light, so much so that He cannot hear your groanings. No, He is not far from each one of us. How can this be? It is because God is immense. His presence fills heaven and earth. He knows all of us perfectly, because He made us, and He is the One who upholds us and keeps us in life. Grope for God that you might find Him. This means that if you don’t know Him, you should call upon Him in prayer in your own pitiful way. You don’t know how to approach Divine Majesty, but He will hear the cry of the lowly.

Psalm 113, verses 4-8 – “The Lord is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens.” “who is like the Lord our God, who dwells on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?” “He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes – with the princes of His people.” Psalm 138, verse 6 – “Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar.” The reason that God is so near to us is because it is in Him that we live and move and have our being. It is He who gave us our soul and spirit. It is He who upholds the life that He has given, day by day. He gives us all of our days.

Let us, when we witness to people, speak of the nearness of our God; to hear pray and to save us from our sins, and to help us in every difficult situation. Psalm 139: 1-6 – “O Lord, You have searched me and known me.” “You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.” “You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.” “For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.” “You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.” “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.”

Let us speak of these things to people around us, of the nearness of our God. Psalm 73: 28 in the New King James says – But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works. The New American Standard says – “But as for me, the nearness of God is good for me; I have made the Lord God my refuge, so that I may tell of all Your works.” Let us ask people whether they have made the Lord God their refuge, whether they have put their trust in Him so that they might declare all His works. Let us exhort them to believe God’s promise in Psalm 50, verse 15 – “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” We will continue this study of how we can better witness to people around us next Sunday, when we will look at the rest of Paul’s message to the Athenians.