

BIGGER THAN YOU

Lesson 17 Proclaiming the Unknown God

Acts 17:16-34

At the end of our previous lesson, Paul was taken to Athens to escape trouble in Berea that had been instigated by the Thessalonians. At that time, even though the heyday of Athens had long passed, Athens was still considered the Greek cultural and intellectual capital. Athens was located in the Roman province of Achaia, known today as southern Greece. In this lesson, Paul engages the local intellectuals in the marketplace of ideas. He is taken from the marketplace to the Areopagus (also called Mars Hill), to meet with the council of city elders. His Mars Hill sermon is remarkably relevant to us today, as we preach Christ in our culture that is not so different from Athens of long ago.

Read Acts 17:16-21

1. Paul waited for Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens. Athens in Paul's day was filled with Greek statues. Today we appreciate the artistic value of the statues; back then the statues were deemed holy.
 - a. Find Athens on the map on page 3. Trace the journey from Berea to Athens.
 - b. Read verse 16 and pretend you are in Paul's shoes. What is so distressing about a city full of idols?
 - c. Is there a contemporary definition of idolatry that is broader, and more inconspicuous, than pagan idol worship? If you think so, describe it.
 - d. In Athens, a city full of idols, there is a synagogue (verse 17). To whom does Paul preach in the synagogue?
 - e. The response to Paul by those in the synagogue is not recorded. Why do you think Luke is silent on this issue?
2. Philosophers gathered in the marketplace to exchange ideas. Epicureans, generally speaking, advocated the pursuit of pleasure as the highest goal in life. Stoics equated virtue with wisdom and held that the absence of emotions was most desirable.
 - a. How would you characterize the tenor of the discussion between the philosophers and Paul (verse 18)?
 - b. What might Paul have been saying about "the good news about Jesus and the resurrection" (verse 18)?
 - c. What is today's equivalent to the marketplace of ideas in Athens? Where do people have serious exchange of ideas?
 - d. What are various responses to Christ in our "marketplace of ideas"?
3. The philosophers take Paul to the Areopagus, the main legislative and judicial council of Athens. It met on the Areopagus, or Mars Hill, to conduct business. The council and the meeting place have the same name.
 - a. Describe the intellectual mood of that day from (verse 21).
 - b. Do you think we are vulnerable to keeping up with the latest thinking in Christianity today? If so, explain.
 - c. Paraphrase the question posed to Paul (verses 19-20).
 - d. How would you describe the inclination toward Christianity of today's leaders in comparison to the Athenians?

- c. Now that the time of overlooking is over, what does God command all people to do? Why? (verses 30-31)
- d. Do you think the whole world has heard that the time of overlooking is over? Does everyone know they must repent because God's judgment is coming? If not, what should be done?

11. In verses 32-34, we read the various responses to Paul's sermon.

- a. List the different types of responses.
- b. What particular point in Paul's sermon seemed to provoke the Athenians (verse 32)?
- c. Why is this fact a sticking point for unbelievers even today?
- d. Paul's message in Athens was not met with hostility as it had been before in Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi. Why do you think hostility was absent in Athens?

12. Read Romans 10:12-15 and discuss our responsibility in proclaiming the good news about Jesus.



You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8