

Knowing our God

(Acts 17:16-34)

Introduction

Good morning Lighthouse, are you ready for the Word of God? I'm pleased to hear that, because that exactly what will be preached today. Who would agree that knowledge and education have its importance? I would assume most if not everyone in here would agree knowledge is very important. (except algebra, geometry and calculus, right teens? Kidding.) There are many quotations out there regarding knowledge. Such as "knowledge is power." "Knowledge is the treasure of a wise man". "Knowledge has a beginning but no end." These are good and all. Knowledge is indeed one of those never-ending pursuits. Nowadays, there is plenty that you are better off not knowing. My personal favorite quotation related to knowledge is this one. Proverbs 1:7 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." I'm grateful for knowledge and education. I love history, I love writing, the list goes on. You can cram yourself with all the knowledge you can get, but if you do not know and fear the Lord, it will all fade away. Paul encountered many knowledgeable people during his journeys. Ones who were very religious people too. Today we're going to be going over the most important knowledge in the world: Who God is and how you can know Him. I am so grateful that God has given us all the means to know Him – through this book right here, the Bible.

Background

Author: Luke – it is a continuation of the Gospel Luke narrative – post resurrection and ascension of Jesus. It is known as the history of Christianity.

Recipient: Theophilus 1:1 “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Purpose: The book of Acts was written to provide a history of the early church between Christ’s ascension to the completion of the New Testament. The emphasis of the book is the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Acts records the Apostles being Christ’s witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding world. That commission is still being fulfilled today because it was given to the first church in Jerusalem, and He promised to be with them always even to the end of the world.

Situation: Paul had been driven out of Thessalonica then Berea and is now Athens waiting on the rest of his missionary company (Timothy and Silas)

Paul, now on his second missionary journey has been violently driven out of the city for the fifth time. Unbelieving Jews would stir up anger in this city and beat Paul and drive him out. This time, following him into the next city when they learned of his preaching into other cities. It wasn’t enough for them that Paul was out their city, they wanted to make sure Paul stopped teaching the Gospel to other cities too. While Paul was primarily to be a minister to the Gentiles. He would preach first in the synagogues, and then go preach directly to Gentiles. He follows his pattern he mentions in Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Gentile).” The Gospel was first brought to the Jews, it was God’s will for this people to be a light unto the Gentiles as mentioned in Isaiah 49:6. Paul would receive mixed responses but usual rejection from Jews and then move on to Gentile people. Paul usual is not alone as he reaches and teaches in cities, but this time Paul is without his company in a city full of idolatry and much religious practice in a place called Athens.

Scripture

Acts 17:16-34

(16) Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. (17) Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. (18) Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. (19) And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? (20) For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (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.) (22) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. (23) For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. (24) God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; (25) Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; (26) And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; (27) That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: (28) For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (29) Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. (30) And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: (31) 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. (32) And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. (33) So Paul departed from among them. (34) Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Outline

I. The Motivation to preach, v. 16.

(16) . . . his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

A. The unique city he preached in.

1. Athens is a well-known city in Greece. A very famous and historic city. The capitol and the largest city in Greece.
2. They had the best craftsmen to offer. It was a cultured, educated city that was proud of its history.

B. Paul's spirit was stirred because of the idolatry in the city.

1. Most would be amazed at the sight of Athens and its beauty, but Paul was not. His spirit was stirred. He was grieved.
2. This was no basic idolatry or simple following of tradition.
3. The phrase "wholly given to idolatry" is one word in its original: κατείδωλος (kat-i'-do-los). They were all in, the city was driven by it.
4. This means this was a city that was lost – they did not know God – Paul's heart was for them to be saved and know Jesus.
5. Paul's spirit was stirred when he saw the people's spiritual condition – They were lost. Do we have that same stirring when we see a world that does not know Jesus? Paul's love and passion for Jesus and desire to see people saved motivated him to do what he did.
6. Idolatry, that's just a foreign culture thing, right? No way would we bow down to temples and statues. Therefore, no idolatry problem here, right? Not at all. Idolatry starts with the heart. Anything you put over God is an idol. We battle

idolatry continuously.

II. The Recipients of the preaching, vv. 17-21.

A. Paul first went into the synagogues, v. 17.

1. As he did with every new city he went into. If there is a synagogue, you know where to find Paul. “To the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”
2. Here at the synagogues, there would of course, be Jews. He “disputed with Jews.”
3. This word “disputed” comes from the word διαλέγομαι (Dee-ah-legoh-my).
 - a. “to say thoroughly, that is, discuss (in argument or exhortation): - dispute, preach (unto), reason (with), speak.”
 - b. It was where we derive “dialogue” from – this implies it wasn’t just a 1-way conversation. Not a monologue – there was back and forth discussion. Paul of course would be using Old Testament Scripture and prove that Jesus is indeed the Messiah promised to come.
4. There were Jews, there were also what we see “devout persons.” This would refer to Gentiles who feared God. (God-fearers). They weren’t allowed inside the synagogues but would be outside to hear the reading and teaching. This people-group throughout Acts were getting saved left and right.

B. Paul went into the marketplaces, v. 17.

1. Paul didn’t limit his preaching to just the synagogues, he went to the marketplace too daily. He had conversation with anyone who would meet.
2. You would think its a perfect time for Paul to rest and wait for the rest of his missionary company, but there was no stopping him.

C. Paul was then brought to Areopagus (Mars Hill) by the Stoicks and Epicurean Philosophers, vv. 18-21.

1. These are two differing schools of thought in Greek paganism – Epicureanism and stoicism.
 - a. To give small basics about their beliefs, Epicureans believe that life's purpose is pleasure. Everyone's goal and responsibility are to free themselves of anything that would differ that. They did not deny existence of deity, but they believed Gods had no relation or work with mankind. Not too far from many American mindsets.
 - b. Stoics were pantheists – the belief that God is everything and everything is God. Nothing should be resisted in life because they believe it comes from God. It drove them to high sense of moral excellence. No destiny, no plan, no sovereign. Everything is driven by nature.
 - c. What the Paul preached, and the Bible teaches is much contrary to these two thoughts.
3. They called him a babbler and preacher of strange (or foreign) gods. In their beliefs, resurrection from the dead was not possible.
4. They were curious about what Paul was preaching so they brought him to Areopagus, a rocky height in the city – Also known as Mars Hill or Ares rock.
5. These people at this location loved a good debate and had nothing better to do but hear out all the new ideas and bicker with one another. (Kind of like today's Facebook comment section.)

III. The Content of the preaching, vv. 22- 31.

A. The Unknown God they ignorantly worship, vv. 22-23.

(22) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. (23) For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

1. Paul tells them they are “too superstitious.”

a. This comes from the word δεισιδαιμονέστερος (dice-ee-dahee-mon-es'-ter-os) A word even I won't attempt to pronounce.

b. The idea is that these Athenians were religious and took it to beyond. They over did it. Here is an example here and from their history. Paul was not complimenting them at all.

2. There is an altar dedicated to “the unknown God”

(Photo) This altar recovered is in a Palestine museum today. It was not uncommon for Greek paganism to dedicate an altar to an unknown God. Its kind of interesting if you think about it. Altar for Zeus, here you go Poseidon, Hermes, Athena – But... just incase we missed one, unknown God.

3. Six hundred years before Paul, a terrible plague came on the city and a man name Epimenides had an idea. He let loose a flock of sheep through the town, and wherever they lay down, they sacrificed that sheep to the god that had the nearest shrine or temple. If a sheep lay down near no shrine or temple, they sacrificed the sheep TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

4. Paul was not saying that their worship to the unknown God was good or okay, but he is using it as a transition to preach the Gospel. Ignorant worship like this is not real worship to God.

B. The true God of the universe, vv. 24-26.

(24) God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; (25) Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; (26) And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

1. God is creator of the world and all things in it – He is not part of creation.
2. He is not confounded to a temple. There are passages that show God's presence in temples, but not that is in need of them, exists because of them or it's His residing place.
3. He is Lord over heaven and earth – He is in charge.
4. He is not represented by what human hands can build. Neither is He dependent on anything mankind can give. In Greek paganism – their God's power is dependent on people's prayer. Our God transcends everything in the universe and is not dependent on anything.
5. He is the giver of life beginning from one blood to every nation. From Adam through Noah; There is one God who created us all and to whom we all are obligated to.
6. He has determined the times of the nations and the bounds of their habitation.
7. What Paul preached here transcends everything in their beliefs and teaching on their gods.

C. Mankind's relation to God, vv. 27-29.

(27) That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: (28) For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (29) Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

1. God is not far from them and they should seek after Him.
2. Because of God mankind exists.
3. Paul quotes two Greek poets in relation to this truth. Now, this is not approving, saying these are prophets or declaring what these men said to Scripture. “For we are also his offspring.” Meaning we come from God. We are made in His image. This is the passage that uses the idea of all being God’s children at the creation level – but we are not all God’s children spiritually speaking.
4. Paul told them of our responsibility to God because we are His offspring. Since we are His offspring, we are responsible to have right ideas about God, and therefore, must reject the wrong idea that gold or silver or stone could represent God.
5. Their ignorant worship of the unknown God had a lot of ignorance in who God is.

D. Mankind’s accountability to God, vv. 30-31.

(30) And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: (31) 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.

1. Of course, Paul was not here to preach who just God is and correcting their view of the unknown God – He is going to give them the Gospel – He is going to preach repentance – stop trusting what they are trusting in and put their trust in Jesus.
2. God would’ve been just to end their idolatry, but He was merciful to them.

3. They must repent because there is a day where God will judge the world in righteousness by His Son, whom He ordained and given assurance of who He is by rising from the dead – Jesus.
4. Paul preached to them the same message this world needs today – the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

IV. The Results of the preaching, vv. 32-34.

A. Some mocked.

1. This is to be expected when you preach Jesus.
2. They wanted to hear philosophy, not truth.

B. Some wanted to hear more.

1. Those who respond to the light God gives them, God sends them more.
2. It is unknown if this group were really intrigued about the resurrection or just wanted to have more debate for the sake of debate.

C. Some believed and followed.

1. Even though it was few, the success was in the power of the Gospel.
2. Even if it were no one – Paul would have done his part in faithfully preaching the Gospel.

Conclusion

In closing, God has given us all the means to know Him. The most important knowledge available to you. But knowing who God is and about Him is only a start. Knowing Him in a personal relationship is what is most important. These were very religious people, but they did not know God. There plenty out there in the name of Christian that can talk the talk and all the details about God and debate ideas, but don't know God at all. Religion will never save you.

Only Jesus does. God has given us all the means to know Him – and that is through Jesus. Just like He declared “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes unto the Father but by Me.” – His death, His burial and His resurrection. If you want to know God, its only by trust in Jesus to save you.
