

Scripture Reading:

Acts 17:22 “Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:24 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.

25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 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; 28 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.' 29 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. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” 32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.” 33 So Paul departed from among them. 34 However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

"Paul on Mars Hill: Good & Sufficient Reasons"

We have come to my final message on Paul’s sermon at Mars Hill, recorded for us by Luke in his orderly account he wrote for his friend Theophilus.

- I have spoken on several occasions about the significance of this message in my own life *[review]*
- This morning we will review what Dr. Schaeffer would call the good & sufficient reasons to believe the truths that the Apostle Paul has presented.

As we do it is good to review and focus on the lessons we found for us today: How Paul was provoked by the lost-ness that surrounded him in Athens:

- Just as we must be provoked by those mystics today who claim that god is in everything and that all paths to salvation can be followed.

And provoked by the evolutionary humanists who make matter eternal and think that everything we know and see came about WITHOUT God as a result of lots & lots of time and chance. We must remember that the Apostle Paul took opportunity to “become all things to all men, that [he] might by all means save some”

- We see this as he uses one of their own idols to draw attention to their ignorance and one of their own poets to tweak their conscience.

Our hearts must go out to the lost so that we will take the opportunities that God gives us today: Our heart must be the heart of Jesus which we see clearly in Matthew’s Gospel... After Jesus observes the multitudes. Matthew says “He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

As we labor in these fields that are ripe unto harvest we are to share the three great truths that Paul declared here in Athens:

- **God is the creator and sustainer of all there is**
- **God is the just judge of all who live**
- **God assured all men everywhere of His power to do all of this with the resurrection of Jesus!**

As we consider the good and sufficient reasons Paul has given to believe these great truths today, I want to consider a question that came at lunch.

- **A question that I have heard often in my Christian walk for these past thirty-five years:**

Wasn't Paul a failure here in Athens? Luke tells us of only a few converts. There is no mention of a church being planted and Athens is never again mentioned in Acts or the rest of the New Testament. Many will argue that this is the point that Paul himself drives home in his first letter to the Church at Corinth which we will consider.

- **We will find that what Paul says there about showing how the foolishness of God is far better than the wisdom of men is exactly what Paul has done here at Athens.**

Before we turn there we should consider what we do know about Paul's visit to Athens and this sermon on Mars Hill. It appears that there were not many converts, but this is also the case in several other cities along the way in these missionary journeys. We must remember the lesson from last week:

- **It is OUR job to be the beautiful feet that bring the Good News**
- **But, it is God's job to turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh!**

We are given the names of a man and a woman who come to faith and the man appears to be a member of the council that Paul was preaching too: Not unlike Nicodemus who came to Jesus from the Sanhedrin. We know from church history that a church was established in Athens and that their leaders participated in some of the early church councils. However, the most important thing that I would point to is the fact that this is the ONLY major sermon given to pagan Gentiles that is recorded for us by Luke writing here in Acts under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

- **IF there was a better way to preach to those who have no Jewish or Christian background, don't you think that sermon would have been recorded by Luke for our benefit?**
- **Since this is the type of audience we are now more likely to face in modern America, it is a vital sermon for us as well.**

So why do some people try to set Paul against Paul & Luke when comparing what he wrote in I Corinthians? There are some who believe that witnessing must be simple because it is all about faith and has nothing to do with thinking or reason...

- **We will see at the Table this morning that God does not look at things that way.**

The other problem is that quite honestly many people don't want to do some of the heavy lifting that is required to be all things to all people. The example I have often used is how silly it would be for someone to think that God was calling them to be a missionary to France and yet say they do not need to learn the French language because the Holy Spirit can make them understand what they will be saying in English!

- **If God calls you to be a missionary in France then you will have an obligation to learn the French language and even much of the French culture.**

What we have to remember is that God has placed us in a nation with a Christian foundation that was heavily influenced by both the Reformation and the Enlightenment as we are learning in the Schaeffer films... This influence has a BIG impact on how people think today...

- It is our obligation to understand this, so we can communicate the great truths that Paul has given here in Athens to the modern people of today in a way they can understand.

Doing so will not ensure our success with hundreds coming to Christ, any more than I could presume a huge response in France just because I learned to speak with them in French... *and to cook with lots of butter!*

So with all of that in mind, let's take a look at what Paul does say to the Saints at Corinth, the city that we will reach next in our missionary journey.

I Corinthians 1:17: "17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect."

I want to pause here because this is the verse that is often quoted to say that the sermon on Mars Hill was not effective: They argue that Paul allowed his academic training to get the best of him and tried to win over those of the world with his own wisdom and debating skills...

- I think you will see as we continue that Paul is telling the Saints here to do exactly what he did on Mars Hill!

17 "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

- Notice how Paul speaks about the Gospel dividing the people of the earth as we have often seen in Acts.

Notice also that Paul says that it is through the preaching of the Gospel that God will destroy the wisdom of this world...

- Isn't that exactly what Paul did with the Epicureans and Stoics there on Mars Hill?

20 "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

- The world has suppressed the truth in unrighteousness and they have become very foolish, though they think themselves very wise.

Think about the look you get from most in the scientific or academic worlds when you say that you actually believe God created the world in six ordinary days! Or the response of the liberal seminary professors if you say you believe in a great white throne judgment or that the resurrection of Jesus took place in history!

- Then we see Paul clearly stating that God wants the Gospel shared with those who are very lost...

21 "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

The Jews wanted a sign: Remember how they stood before the cross where Jesus was offered as the great sacrifice for sin and said that IF He came down they would believe!

The Gentiles seek after wisdom: Putting this in our modern terms, they demand that we compromise with their wisdom: First we must join them in believing that we are really just advanced rocks that have been changed over billions of years by the forces of only time and chance... Or see the wisdom of how killing a third of our children in the womb is the ultimate act of mercy.

- **That is the wisdom that God wants confronted with the foolishness of God:**
- **The truth of the Gospel, just as Paul presented it to those Greek fools on Mars Hill!**

Paul then reminds us again that we are responsible to share the Good News and that God is responsible to save those He chooses: His choices are the perfect choices that were made before the foundation of the world!

- **But they will likely look very foolish to those “wise men” who think they are in control!**

25 “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

- **The entrance to the Kingdom of God requires repentance and humility and a child-like faith!**
- **The wisdom of the world must be left behind, because it is truly foolish.**

30 “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-- 31 that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.””

- **We are to be unashamed to present the truth of the Gospel so that we can bring glory to God**
- **We bring glory to God when we preach the Gospel in the same manner as Paul did on Mars Hill...**

Does this mean that we must use the exact same words or quote the exact same Greek poet or use idols as our way of introduction? Of course not... BUT, we should always focus on the three great truths that Paul confronts them with as he calls them to repentance...

- **God is the creator and sustainer of all there is**
- **God is the just judge of all who live**
- **God assured all men of His power to do all of this with the resurrection of Jesus!**
- **It is by these great truths that we know that all of creation and all men and women have real meaning as the handiwork of God.**

-- We know that there is ultimate right and wrong determined by the character of God who will judge all things by that Character

-- We know that God has spoken truth about Himself and our salvation as we see Him enter history as the incarnate Son of God, who gives His perfect life for our sins and is raised in power.

- **So, has Paul given them good and sufficient reason to believe?**

There are aspects of each of these truths that we cannot know from a human standpoint and other aspects that can be known without any doubt.

The difference between faith and unbelief comes down to which we are willing to consider and focus on:

- **Those who reject God and smell only the stench of death when the Gospel is presented demand to know what cannot be known.**

- Those who are given the gift of faith respond to these great truths seeing in the end that they are self-evident to those who see with the eyes of faith!

Let me briefly explain what I mean: Paul began with the declaration that God is the creator and sustainer of all there is for us to see and know.

- We considered at length the importance of not compromising on this great truth!

On the one hand we are asking people to believe in something that had no eye-witnesses from a human standpoint...

- We must trust the testimony that God has given about how He created the heavens and the earth.

We must believe what Paul declares about Jesus: Colossians 1:15 “ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”

- When a skeptic says, well you can't prove that, we say, yes you are right we can't put the creation, nor Jesus in a laboratory and recreate what happened! *[of course we also remind them that they can't put Julius Caesar there either!]*

BUT, what we can do with such skeptics is what Paul did on Mars Hill, which he explains more fully in Romans one...

- Reminding him or her that the world which they got up to live in this morning is God's world: A grand creation that demonstrates “His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse!”
- God is revealed and they must suppress this great truth they live with each day in unrighteousness!

Paul in speaking to the skeptics at Athens then moves on to declare that God will be the just judge of all men:

- We studied this great truth and saw how John was shown the final great White Throne judgment.

Now Paul is telling them to believe in a future event for which we obviously cannot produce any human witnesses! Again the skeptic will say, then why should I believe that instead of what the Mayans predicted or any of Hollywood's other apocalyptic movies? Paul also addresses this in Romans chapter one when he says, Romans 1:18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.”

Just as the world around us in which we must live reveals God as the Creator, so the conscience within man reveals the coming judgment:

- We know that some things are right and others are very wrong!

And finally Paul turns to the power of the resurrection which we studied at length last week!

Now while we cannot show the forgiveness of sins in a laboratory...

- We can and should point to the evidence that God has given us regarding His power!

I could do an entire sermon on the knowable and unknowable aspects of each of these great truths, but I think we have tarried long enough on Paul's sermon on Mars Hill.

- My prayer is that we all find more comfort in our Christian walk as we reflect on the great truths about knowing God as our Creator and Judge and the power of the Resurrection!

I have often been very personal in these messages so I guess I might as well end on that note as well...

My journey to faith began with that insightful Pastor who took off his watch and asked me to consider the existence of the watchmaker... That was followed by months of excuses, some reading in Wilbur Smith's book *Therefore Stand and the Bible*, a LOT of faithful prayers from my lovely bride and finally I took a walk one evening and found myself arguing with the God who I had insisted did not exist...

- An argument that I will be eternally grateful that I lost!

There was then a LOT work that had to be done to sort out the mess I had made of my life and my mind.

God was very gracious and many faithful Christian brothers & sisters came along side as his helpers. From the young woman at work who gave me my first Francis Schaeffer book to the Sunday School teacher who drove me deep into the study of God's Word because the Armenian teaching he understood so well did not sound right according to what I was reading as a new Christian...

- God has a sense of humor!

It seemed that for years the Lord kept me focused on a very short passage in Colossians chapter two, and often on just ONE verse: "As you therefore received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk you in Him."

So simple and yet so profound: Just as I had come into the Church by simple faith I was to walk in simple faith... This is true whether we consider myself and others who came to Jesus later in life or, glance around the room at our covenant children... Those who Lord-willing have never known a day where they have not accepted Jesus as their Lord & Savior... Even on those rebellious days when they were in need of correction & forgiveness!

- Each of us should often ponder this simple but profound verse that reminds us how we are to walk in the grace we have been given.

As I close with the context in which we find this simple verse, we see that Paul wants us to know the very truths that he preached to those there on Mars Hill that morning.

And how he desires that we always hold fast to the faith not falling for the deceit offered by this world:

- The foolishness of men that blinded many there that morning in Athens and many in our day...

Colossians 2:1 "For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. 5 For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. 6 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. 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. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 1:

"16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. 18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; 20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."