

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.””

'Paul on Mars Hill... Exposing Vain Philosophies'

I want to first extend a BIG thank you to all those who served here at Church of King in the past few weeks so your pastor could enjoy some restful time off with his lovely bride! I appreciate Mike and Blake bringing the Word of God and all those who stepped up to do all those little things that must be done week after week! Now we will see if I can rightly return to preaching after three weeks off ☺

As I mentioned when we began chapter 17 of Luke's orderly account, we are coming now to Paul's address on Mars Hill and this is a portion of the Scriptures that is especially dear to me! Perhaps it is not wise to focus on “favorite” verses or passages, but we all certainly have those that have had a great impact in our lives. It was Paul's sermon here in Athens that laid the foundation of my conversion so you can see why it is special to me... *[tell the story]*

When we get to the end of chapter 17 we will not see thousands converted as we did in Jerusalem nor even the many that are hinted at in other cities where Paul visits... Here Luke will tell us that only certain men clave unto him and believed giving us only two names: A man and a women. It should remind us again that we are NOT to despise small beginnings... Paul in his flesh may have come away from this day thinking, wow, that did not work out very well!” And yet, here we have an apologetic that has encouraged Christians for thousands of years and brought many including myself to the Lord...

- From a human standpoint, without this sermon on Mars Hill, my six children would not have been raised in a solid Christian home, if our home had survived at all. We would not have been blessed with 22 grandchildren, I would not have been able to be a voice for Biblical wisdom in our state's civil affairs for twenty plus years and Church of the King would not exist!
- And that is just the impact in one small life almost two thousand years after Paul spoke.

Now of course none of us are going to be called as the Apostle to the Gentiles nor will we get to author any new Scriptures:

- So what does all of this mean for us today?
- I hope to show that it is much in many ways in the coming weeks.

When last we were together here in Acts we saw Paul coming to Athens. He went first to the Jews as was his custom, but he also met daily with those who were interesting in the market place. Luke tells us that he confronted the Epicureans and Stoics... The philosophers of that day.

We saw that they were very similar to the evolutionary humanists of our day who say there is no God, thinking that material is eternal and the eastern mystics who believe that God is in everything. Thus as we see how Paul presents the Gospel, the Good News to these citizens of Athens I trust we will learn how we face the same challenge today.

- We will see Paul present God as the Creator and sustainer of all there is.
- We will see Paul present God as the judge of all men.
- And we will see Paul being faithful to his Lord as he is a witness to His resurrection!

Lord-willing we will look at each of these in more detail over the next three weeks and then we will be off to Corinth and the rest of Paul's journey. Today I want to focus on the heart with which Paul comes to these pagans and the methods that he was willing to use.

- We considered how Paul was provoked by what he saw there in Athens: A city full of idols.

We have discussed idolatry in the past because we don't have the statues and temples Paul would have seen here.

- We must remember that John's admonition to stay away from idols or Paul's warnings to the Church of Colossi are still applicable in our day, even though idolatry is not practiced in the same way.

However, I do find it interesting that the foolishness of men's hearts today can be demonstrated by the fact that we look to the wisdom of the Greek and Roman thinkers while ignoring or laughing at their idolatrous ways.

- For being 'smart' people, they practiced and believed some pretty dumb things!

Those of us who have been studying Augustine's City of God have learned more than we could care to remember:

Here is an example: City of God, Book IV, chapter nine: "But how is it possible to recount in one part of this book all the names of gods or goddesses, which they could scarcely comprise in great volumes, distributing among these divinities their peculiar offices about single things? They have not even thought that the charge of their lands should be committed to any one god: but they have entrusted their farms to Rusina; the ridges of the mountains to Jugatinus; over the downs they have set the goddess Collatina; over the valleys, Vallonia. Nor could they even find one Segetia so competent, that they could commend to her care all their corn crops at once; but so long as their seed-corn was still under the ground, they would have the goddess Seia set over it; then, whenever it was above ground and formed straw, they set over it the goddess Segetia; and when the grain was collected and stored, they set over it the goddess Tutilina, that it might be kept safe. Who would not have thought that goddess Segetia sufficient to take care of the standing corn until it had passed from the first green blades to the dry ears? Yet she was not enough for men, who loved a multitude of gods, that the miserable soul, despising the chaste embrace of the one true God, should be prostituted to a crowd of demons. Therefore they set Proserpina over the germinating seeds; over the joints and knots of the stems, the god Nodotus; over the sheaths enfolding the ears, the goddess Voluntina; when the sheaths opened that the spike might shoot forth, it was ascribed to the goddess Patelana; when the stems stood all equal with new ears, because the ancients described this equalizing by the term hostire, it was ascribed to the goddess Hostilina; when the grain was in flower, it was dedicated to the goddess Flora; when full of milk, to the god Lacturnus; when maturing, to the goddess Matuta; when the crop was runcated,—that is, removed from the soil,—to the goddess Runcina. Nor do I yet recount them all, for I am sick of all this, though it gives them no shame."

- Obviously Augustine was provoked by all of this and so was the Apostle Paul

Now it is important to remember that Paul, nor Augustine were NOT troubled by all these idols because he thought God would be threatened. They knew their Scriptures well and knew that idols were worthless and foolish: There is no better description of this than what we find in Isaiah chapter 45:

God first draws a clear contrast between Himself and the idols of men:

Isaiah 44:6 “Thus says Jehovah, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. 7 And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. 8 Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.' " 9 Those who make an image, all of them are useless, And their precious things shall not profit; They are their own witnesses; They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed.”

NONE of the idols that filled Athens could speak or hear or even move and the Prophet goes on to show just how foolish it is to give them worship...

➤ Here is how Isaiah describes a man who makes an idol:

Isaiah 44:14 “He cuts down cedars for himself, And takes the cypress and the oak; He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it. 15 Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself; Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships it; He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. 16 “He burns half of it in the fire; With this half he eats meat; He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire." 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, Prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" "

- This surely gives us a stunning picture of why Paul would be provoked by what he saw and moved to share the Good News that can deliver those in Athens from their foolishness and despair.
- But what we need to understand is that it is no different today:

God used craftsmen to build His Temple and to serve Him down through the years. Their talents brought glory to God and fulfillment in their hearts.

- Without God here in Isaiah, these same skills lead them to create false gods that were of no help and an abomination to Jehovah, the one true God they should have served.
- We need to understand that it is much the same with science and technology today:
- When Christians used their minds to discover, to explore, & to master the mysteries of God’s creation it brought glory to God and many great blessings to man.

Today we have not only turned our back on God in these areas, but demanded that He have NO role to play whatsoever in science or history.

Just like Isaiah’s sad craftsman who warmed himself with some of the wood he cut, we now have all of our creature comforts coming from the material world through the wonders of our science and technologies. At the same time we have taken those very same discoveries and declared them to be our gods:

- There is no longer any need for God because science and technology give us all we need.
- But you see when it comes to the real issues of life, they are as silent as the half of the tree the craftsman fashioned into an idol.

Man claims to have conquered nature and now bows to mother nature to give her thanks [as an example of how pervasive this thinking is; Microsoft Word wants mother nature capitalized!]: The result however, is what C.S. Lewis rightly calls the abolition of man.

-- Science can tell us more and more about how the unborn child develops in a mother's womb but cannot tell us why they have value. So sadly a third of our children are lost to the violence of abortion.

-- Science can tell us more and more about how our sexual organs work, but cannot tell us why marriage is of value. So sadly half of our marriages end in divorce and many people now choose to never marry in the first place.

-- Science can show us how to work more productively and produce more and more material goods, but they cannot tell us how to be content with these abundant goods. So sadly, we see record growth in visits to psychiatrists and drug use in the midst of all these creature comforts.

-- Science can tell us more and more about how the universe works, but they cannot give us a clue about how or why it came into being. Sadly this growing knowledge brings growing despair.

And finally, science can certainly tell us when a man or woman has died, but they cannot tell us where their soul has gone or even if they really had one.

- **So I hope you can see that while it might be easy for us to chuckle at all of the idols and gods that the Greeks and Romans looked to, the world is really no better off today.**
- **They no longer believe that man is made in the image of God... He or she is part of the machine with no ultimate purpose or value.**
- **Yes, there are few idols adorning the streets of our state, and yet we should be just as provoked by what we see around us!**

I believe that it was such a heart that drove Wilbur Smith to pen his great apologetics book and one of the chapters where he exposed the despair of our modern world hit me particularly hard... He wrote an entire chapter on the Pessimism of Our Modern Skeptics. He rightly points out that whether philosophers ever settle in their minds if man is made for joy, it has never been in question with the human heart. Mr. Smith writes, "Any normal man, at any time, prefers joy to despair, prefers happiness to gloom, hope to pessimism."

He then contrasts the joy that we find in the New Testament with the pessimism of the modern age... Something the world tries to keep hidden. [read from the article on Currie]

Contrast this with what Mr. Smith presents on page 191: "Let us tarry a moment longer in this ever brilliant, cultured, atheistic and now saddened France, to consider the verdict of the greatest famous woman of France since the French Revolution, indeed the woman to adorn the history of modern science, probably the most famous woman of France since Joan of Arc. I refer to Madame Curie. No more fascinating biography has appeared in our generation than the life of Madame Curie by her brilliant daughter, Eve Curie. That we might not unjustly judge of the true mood of Madame Curie's soul, and her deepest attitude toward life, let me turn to this volume, then, at three different periods of her life. In 1904, when pregnant with her second child, her daughter says, "It seemed that she no longer loved anything: neither science nor life, and not even the child which was about to be born. She cried out, 'Why am I bringing this creature into the world? Existence is too hard, too barren. We ought not to inflict it on innocent ones.'"

- **Mr. Smith goes on to tell of her despair over the loss of her beloved husband in an accident in 1906 showing how she received no comfort from her skeptic friends.**

And finally, a third account I have never forgotten describing how this woman who gave us so much in the field of medical science had to face her own death. Her daughter and other family members went to great lengths to hide the fact that she was dying: A fact that Madame Currie knew herself but could not face. Her daughter writes that when her fever broke, indicating beyond all doubt that the end had come, she assured her that this was the sign of her cure, and that she was going to be well now. Her daughter then tells us that, “looking at the open window, turning hopefully toward the sun and the motionless mountain, [Madame Currie said] ‘It wasn’t the medicines that made me better, it was the pure air and the altitude.’”

Mr. Smith rightly adds, “And so the woman who made so many great discoveries in the realm of nature, at the end of her life had to be lied to about the great and final truth, that death had come. What is the use of a life devoted to the pursuit of truth in physics and chemistry, when the truths that concern the soul we never take the time to consider or to confirm?”

We as Christians have an obligation to see and understand the despair that surrounds us today: To be provoked as Paul was and to be ready to be those beautiful feet that bring Good News.

- The Apostle Paul will give us a great example of how we are to confront those who are lost and the results in Corinth and other cities will give us great hope!

I want to leave us this morning with some wise words that Paul shared with the Saints in Colossi: The Apostle Paul understood well that all of this is not just a philosophical debate or discussion:

- We are talking about the great story of God’s salvation.

Paul wants us to know who we are and to always be growing in our knowledge of Jesus, ready to confront the false religions of the world. Paul also gives us a warning about the dangers of such contact with the world... We should carefully heed both messages!

Colossians 2:1 “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.”

- Jesus said He came to give us life and life abundant!
- Our salvation is not just a ticket to get into heaven, it is an entrance into a new life here & now that will be full of joy and contentment IF we are rooted and built up in Jesus!

And as we properly confront the world we must remember that we can never allow them to take away that trust and foundation that we have in Jesus: 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.”

- The Spirit knows His job and He knows where history is going... Our job is to believe and serve!

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55:

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David.”