



Fall Study Discussion Guide #4

Sermon Title: Knowing God and Making Him Known

Biblical Reference: Acts 17:16-34

Date Preached: Sunday, November 27th, 2022, @ 11am

Fall Study Date: Wednesday, November 30th, 2022

Sermon Summary

Last Sunday we studied Paul's famous sermon he preached to the citizens of Athens. Paul could see the Athenians were wholly given to idolatry as life in Athens was permeated by idolatry. The tallest hill in the city was topped with temples to Artemis and Nike. They even had an altar set up to worship a powerful deity they did not know. The Athenians put an inscription on that altar that read "To the Unknown God".

Paul, moved with compassion for the citizens of Athens, began to preach the gospel both in the synagogues to the religious Jews and in the marketplace to the Gentiles (the non-Jewish Athenians). His message drew the philosopher's attention, they took Paul to Mars's Hill where Paul presented his message. Mar's Hill, or the Areopagus, was a place where new ideas were presented to a judging audience who tried to determine if the ideas presented were valid.

Paul boldly stood on Mar's Hill and preached the gospel. Paul said, "I saw the altar with the inscription to the unknown God whom you ignorantly worship. Him declare I unto you." Paul said I know Him, and I know how to worship Him. Paul taught us an important principle about worship. To worship God, you must first know Him. If we do not know Him, we worship in ignorance; we do not know if our worship is pleasing to Him. We looked at the contrast between how Paul worshipped God whom he knew and loved and the way the Athenians approached an unknown God.

Quick Review

Reviewing the text from this week's sermon, were there any insights the Lord showed you or anything that caught your attention, challenged, or confused you?

How did the Holy Spirit speak to your heart from this passage/sermon?

My Testimony

Ask a volunteer to read:

Act 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

Act 17:17 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.

We saw that Paul was in Athens because he had to flee Thessalonica for his own safety. He was there to wait till his ministry partners caught up with him. He did not plan to go there to minister. While he was waiting God stirred his heart for the city of Athens. It turned into a fruitful time in his ministry.

Can you give us an example of a time when you, or someone you know, ended up in an unexpected place and it became one of the most significant moments in your spiritual journey?

Digging Deeper

1. Agenda vs Sincerity

In the passage below, we will see the philosophers encountering Paul and questioning his message. They accuse him of promoting strange gods. Because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection. Instead of asking him in personal conversation what he meant, they took him to the Areopagus to have the prominent men of the city weigh in and tell them what Paul meant. Their agenda was to see if Paul would conform to their system, or if he should be destroyed.

Josephus a historian for Rome gives us insight into the laws in Athens concerning introducing strange gods and how the Athenians treated people who opposed their gods.

“As for the Athenians, while they punished those that spoke contrary to their laws about the gods, without mercy; for on what other account was it that Socrates was put to death by them? Certainly, he neither betrayed their city to its enemies, nor was he guilty of sacrilege with regard to their temples; but on this account, that he swore certain new oaths, and that he affirmed, either in earnest, or, as some say, only in jest, that a certain demon used to make signs to him [what he should not do]. For these reasons he was condemned to drink poison, and kill himself. For they very lately slew a certain priestess, because she was accused by somebody that she initiated people into the worship of strange gods, it having been forbidden so to do by one of their laws; and a capital punishment had been decreed to such as introduced a strange god.”

Even though Paul knew what they were trying to do, he risked his own life by preaching the truth to help the Athenians. This act proved to be fruitful resulting in the salvation of Dionysius the Areopagite (an Athenian judge at the Areopagus Court), and a woman named Damaris in verse 34.

Ask a volunteer to read:

Act 17:17 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.

Act 17:18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He

seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Act 17:19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

Act 17:20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

Discussion Questions:

- What stands out to you in this text?
- How are we like the philosophers in this story?
- How would you have reacted if you had been in Paul's shoes?
- What were some of the motivations they may have had in bringing Paul to the Areopagus?
- Scanning verses 22-31, what were some of the strategies Paul used in reaching the Athenians that show his sincerity?
- How did Paul use the culture around him to make a bridge into the gospel message? What are some bridges in your culture to the gospel?
- What are the missional implications (for those we want to reach for Christ)?

2. Relational vs Transactional

In the following verses we see Paul teaching the Athenians that their attempts to worship God with human efforts fell short. They were trying to fulfill a need for God expecting to receive something in return. This is not the proper way to worship God. Worship for God must flow from a right relationship with Him and this begins with knowing God.

Ask a volunteer to read:

Act 17:23 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.

Act 17:24 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;

Act 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

Act 17:26 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;

Act 17:27 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:

Act 17:28 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.

Act 17:29 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.

Discussion Questions:

- What verse in this passage is the most significant to you? Please explain.
- In your opinion what is the most harmful thing about the way the Athenians approached God?
- How are we like the people in verse 23?
- What stands out to you about the way Paul presented the Lord?
- How would you explain verse 27 to an unbeliever?
- In verses 28 and 29 Paul taught the Athenians they were the offspring of God. How could this truth help an unbeliever? How could it help a believer?

3. Certainty vs Uncertainty

In the verses below we find the Athenians spending all their time exploring new things. Yet for all their searching, they never found the Lord. They were like the people in 2 Timothy 3:7-8, who were ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Ask a volunteer to read:

Act 17:18 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.

Act 17:19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

Act 17:20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

Act 17:21 (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.)

Discussion Questions:

- What stands out to you in this text?
- How are people in the church like the people in verse 21?
- What has your experience been in attempting to witness people who are content with theorizing?
- What has helped you go from endless questions to certain truth?
- What advice would you give someone who is stuck in the question loop?

4. Known vs Unknown

In the following verse Paul tells the Athenians they did not know God. Paul testifies to them he did know God and he could declare Him to them.

Ask a volunteer to read:

Act 17:23 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.

- Who do you think most people in church identify with?
- What has been the most surprising to you about God's character as you have come to know Him?
- What were some ways early on that you ignorantly worshiped God?

5. Changed vs Unchanged

In the following verses we see Paul disputing with devout people but for all their knowledge they were left unchanged. Paul concludes his sermon by telling them we should not think the

Godhead is something we can create. A proper view of God is one where we conform to Him, and He is powerful enough to command a change and order repentance.

Ask a volunteer to read:

Act 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

Act 17:17 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.

Act 17:29 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.

Act 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

- Why do you believe there is such a disconnect between what people profess and what they practice?
- Can you give us an example of how your understanding of God lead to a change in your life?

Taking It Home

The following questions are intended to be open-ended and encourage members to consider how they felt and what they can do because of discovering the truths and principles in the text:

1. What truth or principle in this text was most impactful for you?
2. How did this truth or principal challenge, change, or affirm your thinking?
3. How will you put into practice what you have learned today?