

Living out our faith Pt 22

Acts 17:16-33

V16-20

- The journey from Berea to Athens was long and the fact some brethren accompanied Paul showed their commitment to the Christian faith and their immense gratitude for the Apostle Paul who God used to open their eyes to the truth. Athens was the most culturally sophisticated city in the known world and also the intellectual center of the world. It was home to the foremost philosophers of their day: Socrates, and his most famous student Plato, and his most famous student Aristotle, and his most famous pupil Alexander the Great. But it didn't stop there; if you were into entertainment it had a 60,000-seat stadium and temples for every vice, every emotion and every worldly desire that man could muster. If you were into pleasure the temple of Aphrodite and its temple prostitutes would come down into the city to promote sexual promiscuity, there also was the temple Bacchus dedicated to those who like to drink and for those who sought power there was the temple dedicated to Zeus.
- Yet we see that Paul wasn't impressed by the architecture or history of the city of Athens. He didn't come to sightsee. He came to win souls, and I believe we need to pay heed to his example. Many saints have become infatuated with the allurements and trappings of this world, and instead of following Jesus' council to be "in the world but not of the world" they give themselves over to it; instead of being a soul winner they've become an accumulator of things that have no eternal value. But Paul kept the proper perspective. This allowed him to see past the beautiful works of art, past the architecture and the history and see into the spiritual heartbeat of the city – which was idolatry. The result, his heart was stirred – meaning to be sharpened; an intense anger began to grow inside. The more he saw the sharper he became because he knew that idolatry is not harmless but harmful, and it broke his heart. I believe, like Paul, we need open eyes and broken hearts if we're going to impact today's ungodly culture. Verse 17 tells us that Paul is waging battle on two fronts:
 1. In the synagogue a meeting place for Jews and God fearing gentiles. They had knowledge of scripture and a form of godliness but they denied the power of God.
 2. And in the marketplace a gathering of worldly thinkers and philosophers
(**1 Corinthians 1:26, 1 Timothy 6:20-21**).
- There were two schools of thought that Paul encountered. One philosophy was that there was no after life so the chief goal in life is pleasure – an epicurean lifestyle. And there were the stoics who believed god was everywhere and impersonal and angry; they said all life would end tragically. Today, we must be aware that we should not expect only to do battle outside the church with the unsaved that do not follow Christ. But because secularism is so prevalent today, we have to understand that the same battles we engage in outside the church we need to be ready to engage inside the church (**Jude 3-4**). We must stand for truth, if we are to maintain the biblical standards set forth in scripture.
- Verse 19 – so they bring him before the Areopagus, their council, on Mar's hill, and they ask him to share openly what he believed. Verse 18 – two teachings seem to grab their attention Jesus and the Resurrection both of which are still attention getters today; this is what makes Christianity so attractive as it boasts both a Savior and Redeemer if you'll surrender to Him.

V21-34

- Athenians were busy bodies, always trying to hear the latest gossip or trend. But God will even use their willingness to listen. Observe the example Paul sets for us when giving the gospel:
 1. He meets them where they were – they did have a desire to worship something Verse 22.
 2. He uses the familiar to introduce the unfamiliar – you know there’s something more Verse 23.
 3. He focuses their attention upon God and His attributes – creator, self-sufficient and that God has a plan – Verses 24-27.
 4. He uses illustrations they could understand – quoting a line from one of their poets Verse 28.
 5. He makes the message personal – God commands that you must repent Verse 29-31.
- Often when the gospel message is shared all that is told is your story, my story; that alone will not save anyone, we must tell Jesus’ story. Of course the Lord will use our life and experiences but we must remember the example John the Baptist set for us in **John 3:30**. Remember that they called Paul a “seed picker” meaning they thought he was just going to tell them something that they had heard before, something old and repackaged. But, after hearing this message it solicited much soul searching. Three classic responses ensue:
 1. Some laughed, mocked and ridiculed the conviction away – verse 32
 2. Procrastinated – not outright rejection but not committing either –verse 32. These days’ people rejoice over this response, but it is not salvation.
 3. Believed – this makes the persecution, inconvenience, and aggravation worthwhile.
- Even one of the council members Dionysius believed. Who would have thought that such a thing was possible in these parts? That a Jew could convince these great minds of a simple message that they were sinners in need of a Savior, and that the body wasn’t just a prisoner for them to attempt to satisfy. That the Lord wanted to set them free.