

The True and Living God (Part 1)

Acts 17: 22-34

Our text today reveals a very challenging time in Paul's ministry. He had faithfully proclaimed the Gospel in Thessalonica, with a great multitude of Greeks coming to faith in Christ. Unhappy with his message, the Jews incited a riot that forced Paul and Silas to flee to Berea. True to his calling, Paul immediately began to proclaim the Gospel in Berea as well. The Jews of Thessalonica soon heard of his preaching and made their way to Berea in an attempt to silence Paul again. After this uproar, Paul made his way to Athens alone, where we find him in the text.

There is no doubt that God had led Paul to Athens, but it proved challenging. He comes to Mars Hill, prepared to preach the Gospel. This was no ordinary place. Mars Hill had hosted the great philosophers of that era: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. These had shared the latest philosophies, but Paul sought to share the truth of the Gospel with a people who worshiped gods they did not know.

Our society is much different, and yet many similarities remain. We are experiencing an increase in varied worship. People are encouraged to worship God, or many gods, whoever and whatever we perceive them to be. The Bible declares there is one God and there is but one Savior! We need to know Jesus, the Savior and Redeemer of the world. I want to begin considering the [aspects](#) of Paul's encounter as we think on: [The True and Living God](#).

I. The Dilemma in Athens (22-23) – Upon arriving in Athens, Paul soon realized there was a great dilemma among the people. Notice:

A. Their Confusion (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.](#) Paul immediately discerned there was great spiritual confusion at Athens. He declared they were too superstitious. The true meaning of Paul's statement is not what we expect today. It actually reveals that the people in Athens were religious; in fact some were devoutly religious. They worshiped many gods. The problem was their religious practices were motivated by fear and uncertainty rather than through a relationship with Christ. They feared perceived consequences if they failed to worship the gods.

- We continue to face such confusion as well today. I don't know of any who worship the mystic gods of the Greeks, but many are very religious. They are committed to a form of worship, but their motivation is often faulty. I possess a holy and reverent fear for the Lord, but I have not come today simply out of fear. I worship the Lord because He bore my sin and judgment, providing salvation and eternal life for me. I am not here to make a deal with the Lord in an effort

to appease His wrath. The righteous demands of God were fully satisfied as Christ offered Himself the sacrificial atonement for sin.

B. Their Compromise (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.](#) Paul described the altar built for devotion and worship of the UNKNOWN GOD. These readily admitted they did not fully know the god they worshiped, and yet they continued the vain practice. Rather than seeking to discover and know the true and living God, they compromised in worship to an unknown god. This was acceptable by society and they saw no need to behave any different.

- Are we not experiencing the same compromise today? The accepted practice of many is to worship whatever God or gods we choose. Most deny there is only one God to whom all men are accountable. Most argue that while we may worship different gods, we will all reach our desired end. Few are willing to stand and proclaim that God alone is the true and living God. Even fewer are willing to proclaim that salvation through Jesus Christ is the only means of acceptance to God and eternal life.

C. Their Complacency (23b) – [Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.](#) Paul offered a stinging rebuke. He declared the people may have worshiped, but it was an ignorant worship. Their worship was offered to a god they did not know or understand. They were worshiping in hopes the gods would be appeased by their efforts and provide prosperity and peace. They seemed content to continue this vain form of worship. Paul desired to reveal the true God unto them.

- It is tragic, but this trend continues today. The majority of the world's population is engaged in some form of worship, even if they don't understand who or what they worship. Many worship idols made of stone or precious metals. Some worship false gods or deities. They continue their ritual worship, without fail, but it produces no lasting result. There is no inward change, no real joy and assurance. Even though they fail to find real peace through their worship, they continue the practice faithfully.

II. The Declaration in Athens (24-31) – After encountering the altar to the UNKNOWN GOD, Paul determines to present the true and living God to them. He reveals:

A. The Power of God (24a) – [God that made the world and all things therein...](#) Perceiving they did not know the Lord, Paul declares God is the creator of the world and all it contains. They sought to

know the latest philosophies, debating the creation and existence of men, but failed to acknowledge God as the great creator and sustainer of the world and all humanity.

- This continues to be a point of contention and debate today. Few recognize the awesome power and wonder of God in creation. Society and educational institutions support the “Big Bang” and the “theory of evolution.” They refuse to admit, or even consider, the omnipotent God who created the universe and all it contains. [Gen.1:1 – In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.](#) [Col.1:16-17 – For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: ^{\[17\]} And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.](#)

B. The Presence of God (24b) – [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;](#) The people of Athens gathered at an altar to an unknown deity, seeking to worship an idol of man’s creation. Paul declared that God is the Lord of heaven and earth, and that He doesn’t dwell in temples or idols created of men. They sought to know God, but failed to sense His greatness and majesty. God cannot be contained in a statue or within a building constructed of men. He is almighty and omnipresent.

- I enjoy our time together within the sanctuary, this being a special place set aside to meet with the Lord and worship Him. However, I am glad to know God is not confined within these four walls. He dwells within believers through His Holy Spirit. We can and do encounter God here, but we can also fellowship with Him anywhere. We are the body of Christ, the actual church of the living Lord. [1 Cor.3:16 – Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?](#) [2 Cor.6:16 – And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.](#)

C. The Perception of God (25a, 29) – [Neither is worshipped with men's hands, ^{\[29\]} 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.](#) Paul witnessed an altar created in order to worship an unknown god. He had seen idols of gold, silver, and stone created in an attempt to capture the image and essence of God. Many believed their idols would gain the favor of God and capture His power and glory within their creation. Paul declared that God was not to be worshiped through the creation of men’s hands or through their works. It was impossible to capture God within in idol made of men. Paul really couldn’t comprehend the ignorance of such “educated” people. He knew that we were created in the image of God and he never imagined the image of God to be portrayed through the works of stone or precious metals.

- I will admit that the true essence of God is beyond my ability to comprehend, but I know He does not dwell within idols. They do not capture the glory He possesses. They do not reflect the wonder, majesty, and power of our Lord. We do not please Him through the works of our hands, but through submissive, faithful worship in Christ our Savior. Although I cannot comprehend God, I never want to lose the awe and wonder of Him!

D. The Provision of God (25b, 28) – Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ^[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. The people of Athens failed to realize the blessing bestowed on them of the true and living God, even though they failed to worship Him. Paul declared that it was God who provided the breath they breathed and the life they enjoyed. It was by and through the power and mercy of God they were able to live, and move, and have their being. God had given them the ability to work, to think, to breath, to exist. Paul wanted them to acknowledge the Creator as the source of their very existence!

- Many tend to feel as if they are self-made. They feel as if their prosperity has been secured through their own abilities, hard work, and wisdom. While these certainly contribute to the lives we live, we must acknowledge the provision of God. Were it not for His abundant blessing in any of our lives, we would be unable to accomplish anything. He provides the breath we breath, the strength to work, the ability to think and reason...God provides all that we experience in life. By and through Him we live, and move, and have our being!

E. The Preeminence of God (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. No doubt those of Athens felt superior to men of other races and nationalities. There was a sense of pride in their wisdom and accomplishments. Paul declares that God alone had allowed them to exist as they were. He had appointed their place on the earth and the time of their existence. They were not there by mere chance or through the dedication of previous generations. They were there because God allowed it and ordained it to be so. He is sovereign and in complete control.

- I rejoice to know I serve a preeminent, sovereign God. He is not alarmed or surprised at the condition of the world today. We are not here by mere chance. We were born where we were and given the opportunities and blessings we enjoy because God ordained it. I am not simply floating along in a mass of humanity. My life and yours is directed and governed by a sovereign God. He is in absolute control. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't want to serve a God who wasn't preeminent! We can rest in His sovereign power.

Conclusion: For sake of time we will stop here today and conclude this study next week. There is much more we need to consider. This passage may have seemed a bit strange when we read the text, but it has great application for today. Many are living their lives as if there is no God or that it is impossible to truly know Him. I am thankful that He knows us and desires us to know Him!

Jesus came in the form of a man to offer Himself a sacrifice for sin. He gave His life on the cross so we could be reconciled to God and justified of sin. He rose again from the dead, providing the promise of eternal life for all who believe. He doesn't exist as an unknown God, but as the true and living God, Savior and Redeemer of our souls. Do you know Christ as your personal Savior? If not, you can. He stands ready to reveal Himself to you and save you today. Why not respond to His gracious call in salvation?