

CP — 11/5/23

Acts 17:16-21 — Paul in Athens

Sermon Outline

Athens

- Foremost greek city since the 5th century
- Incorporated into Rome but kept a proud intellectual independence / was a free city
- Rich philosophical tradition inherited from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.
- Its literature, art, and accomplishments was unmatched.
- It was a shell of itself by this time but lived in its “great past”
- It was the intellectual metropolis of the world.
- Aesthetically magnificent
- Sophisticated, philosophical, and religious

Paul

- Called
- Alone
- Disappointed
- Lowest Moment

1. What Paul saw (17:16)

- “city was full of idols”
- The city was full of beautiful buildings, architecture, and monuments.
- **He wasn’t impressed by them but was oppressed by how the Athenians used their God-given artistic creativity for idolatry.**
- Application:
 - How do we respond when we get in our “feels”?
 - Behind the bright and shiny things, are we able to see things for what they are?
 - Idol = that which takes the place of God
 - What consumes our thoughts, worries, and affections?
 - What altars to we sacrifice to?
 - Politics, wealth, job, spouse, children, college football, etc?
 - We want to worship something, but usually it is things made by human hands.

2. What Paul felt (17:16)

- “his spirit was provoked within him”
- “paraxyno” - greatly distressed
 - Medical = seizure or epileptic fit
 - Irritate or raise to anger
 - The verb is in imperfect tense, indicating it was a continual, settled reaction.
 - The more he saw, the stronger it became.

- The verb form used regularly of the Holy One of Israel
 - God's reaction to idolatry
 - The golden calf and idolatry to Baal
 - "Provoked the Lord to anger"
- Paul was provoked by idolatry just as God himself is and for the same reason.
 - For the honor and glory of His name
- Jealousy
 - **Exodus 34:14— "for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God"**
 - Jealous = resentment of rivals
 - Good or bad depends on if the rival has any business there.
 - To be jealous of someone in beauty, brains, and sports is sinful because none of us have a monopoly in those areas.
 - To be jealous of a third part entering your marriage is right because that person has no business there.
 - And it's the same with God!
 - **Isaiah 42:8— "I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols."**
 - God has the right to exclusive allegiance and is jealous if we transfer it to anyone or anything else.
 - Moreover, the people of God, who loves God's name, should share in that jealousy for His name, honor, and glory.
 - **1 Kings 19:10— "He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away"**
 - **2 Corinthians 11:2— "For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ"**
 - So, the pain that Paul felt was not due to a bad temper, pity, or even fear of their eternal salvation.
 - It was due to his hatred for idolatry, which aroused a deep strong jealousy for the name of God as he saw humans giving honor and glory to idols instead of the One who alone is due it.

Application:

- God does not share His glory with anyone or anything.
- God's glory was the motivation of Paul's mission.
- Motivations for missions:
 - Obedience
 - Compassion
 - For the glory of Jesus
 - The Father has given the Son supreme honor that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess His Lordship. When He is denied that, we should feel it.

3. What Paul did (17:17–18)

- The stirring in his spirit with holy indignation caused him to open his mouth.
- He engaged them with the gospel.
- He sought to convince them to turn from idols to the Lord Jesus.
- First, in the synagogue (reasoned) (17)
- Second, in the marketplace everyday to the casual passer-by (17)
 - Reasoned in both places (Q&A)
- Thirdly, with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers
 - Epicureans
 - The gods are remote and take no interest or influence in human affairs.
 - The world was due to ache and randomness.
 - There is no afterlife and no judgment.
 - Humans should pursue pleasure and avoid pain and fear.
 - Stoics
 - Pantheistic
 - Fatalist: everything determined by fate (predetermined and inevitable)
 - Pursue duty and harmony with life
 - Develop self-sufficiency
 - Endure pain
- You will hear echoes of this is Paul's speech next week
- They called him a babbler ("seed picker")
- Brought him to the Areopagus

Application:

- May our passion for the Lord's honor and glory lead us to share the gospel.
- The gospel is for all people.

Small Group Discussion

1. How did the Holy Spirit speak to you in the Scripture passage and sermon Sunday?
2. What did Paul see in Athens? How was he able to see beyond what his physical eyes saw? What are the "idols" that we struggle with today?
3. What is an idol? Why did the sight of idolatry cause Paul great distress within his spirit? Do we respond the same way to idolatry? How does idolatry rob God of the glory and honor that He alone is due?
4. What did Paul see and felt cause him to do? Where did he preach the gospel? What can we learn from how and where he preached the gospel?
5. Spend time in prayer that we would be able to see things on a spiritual level, become jealous for the name of God and his glory, and go and preach the good news.