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“Taking Jesus to the Marketplace”

Acts 17:16-34

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People who don't normally come to church or know anything about the Bible will not understand who Jesus is unless Christians tell them. In Acts 17, Paul went to the “marketplace” and explained Jesus in terms that “unchurched” people could understand. His conversation and interaction with the pagan people of Athens teaches us some important things about taking Jesus to a lost world outside the church.

1. [Acts 17:16-34](#) - *“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, ‘What does this babbler want to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,’ because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.’ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 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: 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. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 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; 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." 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. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 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.' And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.' So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them."*

## 2. The apostle Paul in Athens

- a. Athens was a pagan city full of idols
- b. The city was considered the intellectual center of the known world
- c. Paul was distressed at the presence of the idols
  - i. The idols were symptomatic of the people's lack of relationship with the Lord
- d. Paul "reasoned" with the people, sharing the good news of Jesus

## 3. What can we learn from Paul's encounter with the people of Athens?

- a. Be willing to "dialogue" with people who don't know Jesus
  - i. Paul reasoned with people both inside and outside the synagogue
    1. For those outside, he would translate the Scriptures into language they could understand
  - ii. We have to have conversations with people
    1. We must be willing to share the knowledge of Jesus Christ and how to have relationship with Him
  - iii. Don't "beat people over the head with the Bible"; walk through doors as God opens them
- b. People have an innate need to connect with God
  - i. The people of Athens knew there was something greater than themselves
  - ii. We are spiritual beings, made in the image and likeness of God
    1. **Genesis 1:26** - *"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"*
  - iii. We will try to fill the need for God with all sorts of things until we understand that we need Jesus
- c. A "religious" person does not mean a "redeemed" person
  - i. Redemption is accomplished through the paying of a ransom to purchase something that has been lost

1. [Ephesians 1:7](#) - *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”*
  2. People are redeemed when they choose to believe in Jesus as Savior
- d. All people have an “entry point” for you to connect them with Jesus
- i. Paul used the inscription *“TO THE UNKNOWN GOD”* as his entry point
  - ii. If you are listening, you will find entry points in conversations with others
- e. A relationship with Jesus starts with repentance: turning from sin and turning to God
- i. We must do more than provide people with the “feel good” information; they need to repent and be converted
    1. [Acts 3:19a](#) - *“Repent therefore and be converted.”*
- f. Results may vary, but do your best and leave the rest to God
- i. Some mocked Paul, some were curious about what he said, and some believed
  - ii. We only need to do what God calls us to do; He is the one who saves
  - iii. A prayer to share Jesus with the lost:

*God give me eyes to see the lost*

*A heart that loves the lost*

*A will to win the lost*

*A mouth to tell the lost about Jesus*

### Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 17:16-34](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why was Paul distressed in Athens? How did he respond? (See #2c and #2d above)
3. What does it look like to “dialogue” with people who don’t know Jesus? (See #3a above)
4. Read [Genesis 1:26](#). Why do we have an “innate need to connect with God”? What will people do when this need is not met? (See #3b above)
5. Read [Ephesians 1:7](#). Discuss the difference between “religious” and “redeemed.” (See #3c above)
6. What “entry point” did Paul use to connect with the people? How can you find

entry points in conversations with others? Discuss a time where God opened a door for you to speak with someone about your faith. (See #3d above)

7. Read [Acts 3:19a](#). Why is repentance important? (See #3e above)
8. What does it look like to “do your best and leave the rest to God?” (See #3f above)
9. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)