

The Unknown God

Paul had just been chased out of Thessalonica and Berea (heavily Jewish population) due to persecution They escorted Paul ~300 miles to Athens (10 - 14 day trip) → a totally different culture (mostly Gentile)

The Heart of Paul

Act 17:16-34 While Paul was **waiting** for them in Athens, he was greatly **distressed to see that the city was full of idols**. (17) So he reasoned in the **synagogue** with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the **marketplace day by day** *with those who happened to be there*.

- Paul → he was concerned about the spiritual well-being of others more than his own need
- Both in synagogue and marketplace he reasoned with those who happened to be there (Day by Day)

Epicureans and Stoics

(18) A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

- Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus **AND THE RESURRECTION**
- **They were similar to the people in our world today**

Epicureans: They believed the gods existed - but were distant and uninvolved
"Life is short, so just enjoy it." They wanted a comfortable, peaceful life with as little pain or trouble as possible. They didn't worry much about the gods or what happens after death. "You only live once—make it pleasant."

For the Stoics: They believed in a kind of divine force/reason behind everything (not a personal God)
Life was about reason and accepting the order of the universe -
Stay strong, stay logical, accept your fate ... "whatever will be will be."

Areopagus

(19) Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the **Areopagus**, where they said to him, "**May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? (20) You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.**" (21) (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

- It was a public setting for explaining ideas to philosophers and leaders
- His was a "new teaching" to examine -- is it safe? acceptable? or disruptive?

The Unknown God

(22) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are **very religious**. (23) For as I walked around and looked carefully at your **objects of worship**, I even found an altar with this inscription: **TO AN UNKNOWN GOD**. So **you are ignorant of the very thing you worship**--and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

- He sought to know them, to understand them before speaking to them
- **People are often closer to truth than they realize - they just don't yet have a name for what they're looking for**

The God who made the world

(24) "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.

- **What is the temple you could build for me?** - earth is my footstool
- They might go to a temple or worship an idol - but God is bigger than this

Not served by human hands

(25) And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

- **What can you give God?** -- he gives to us life and breath and everything else

Everyone came from ONE MAN Adam

(26) From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and **he marked out their appointed** times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

- God appointed the times in history and boundaries of their lands

THIS IS HIS PURPOSE

(27) God did this **so that they would seek him** and **perhaps reach out for him** and **find him**, though he is not far from any one of us.

- Seek him
- Reach out for him
- Find him

There has been some writings among them

(28) 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' **As some of your own poets have said**, 'We are his offspring.' (29) "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by human design and skill.

- **We are God's offspring -- he cannot be gold or silver or stone or an image**

The resurrection is an early warning signal, a shot over the bow - an extended mercy

(30) In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but **now he commands all people everywhere** to repent.

(31) For **he has set a day when he will judge the world** with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given **proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.**"

- The resurrection is proof that one day there will be a judgment
- God's mercy is seen in that in the past He overlooked our ignorance
- Now he calls us to repent (this is not a negative, this is one of the greatest extensions of mercy)
 - That God is making a way for us to be forgiven of all sin and brought into relationship with him

People respond in different ways

(32) When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them **sneered**, but others said, "**We want to hear you again** on this subject." (33) At that, Paul left the Council. (34) **Some of the people became followers** of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.