

Welcome

Welcome online viewers. Unfortunately still at level 3, not able to gather at church, so we need to gather around our computers or tv sets in the meantime.

Today's service will consist of prayer, bible reading and sermon. Unfortunately there will be no music today. So our worship consists of these other aspects of the service

I am Max Scott, I will be leading the service and preaching today, Sue Evans will be leading us in our intercessions and David Suchet will do our Bible Reading – Acts 17.

Let's begin our service with prayer.

Almighty God,
to you all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from you no secrets are hidden.

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen

As we approach God who is holy, we are aware that we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness.

Hear God's word to all who turn to Christ:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish
but have eternal life. *John 3:16*

If we confess our sins,
God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins
and cleanse us
from every kind of wrong.

God has promised forgiveness
to all who truly repent,
turn to Christ in faith
and are themselves forgiving.

In silence we call to mind our sins.

Let us confess our sins. (You may wish to say the words after me)

**Merciful God,
we have sinned
in what we have thought and said,
in the wrong we have done
and in the good we have not done.
We have sinned in ignorance:
we have sinned in weakness:
we have sinned through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry.
We repent and turn to you.
Forgive us, for our Saviour Christ's sake,
and renew our lives to the glory of your name. Amen.**

By the authority of Jesus Christ, I declare that
God has mercy on us,
pardons us,
and sets us free.

Be assured that we are forgiven and let us be at peace.

May God strengthen us in all goodness
and keep us in life eternal
Amen

Intercessions

Sue will lead us in our intercession, followed by the Lord's Prayer.

Sermon 24 October 2021

That was David Suchet reading the 17th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. If there is a part of Scripture you find difficult to read or understand, one thing you can do is to go youtube and search for David Suchet and his reading of that Scripture.

Tale of Three cities, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, forgot heavenly city, Hamilton – Thessalonica, Berea and Athens

Aftre leaving Philippi, P T & S pass through Amphipolis and Apollonia, synagogue?? to Thessalonica synagogue - yes

Paul begins in the synagogue in each case.

Assume Church from the lower strata of society

Paul concurs

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.¹ 1 Cor 1

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;²

But Luke, in his account of the early church wants to emphasis that Christians also came for the wealthy and influential section of society, often women. The church in Jerusalem met in the house of house of Mary, the mother of John Mark

Who became Christians in Thessalonica?

⁴ Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.³

⁵ But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.⁴

Berea?

¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.⁵

Athens?

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (1 Co 1:26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Co 1:27). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

³ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Ac 17:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 17:5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 17:12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

some men joined him and believed, among whom also were **Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris** and others with them.⁶

Paul's intention in Athens was to wait for Timothy and Silas to catch up. Does the tourist things and is greatly disturbed by the fact full of idols!

Being Paul, goes to the synagogue and "reasoned" with the Jews and devout persons. Use OT and philosophical arguments. These discussion expand out into the market place where he converses with Epicureans and Stoics.

Who are these people?

Epicureans

Atomists – Materialists

Not that they didn't believe in divinities or Gods , but they thought they had little to do with life here on earth. Secularists.

Epicureans, atomists, materialists, viewed reality as an endless combining and dispersion of atoms by chance. They would find the concept of bodily resurrection laughable (Epicurus *Epistle to Menoecus* 123–32). Most believed that death ended everything for the individual.

Not that they didn't believe in divinities or Gods , but they thought they had little to do with life here on earth. Secularists.

Stoics

We have an idea of stoic being a person who can endure pain or hardship without showing their feelings or complaining

The Stoics, materialist pantheists, identified the divine as the principle of reason, the logos, pervading all and, in the form of fate, governing all. Because of either their cyclic universe (ie, that there were periodic conflagrations of the universe after which history simply repeated itself) or their later adoption of the Platonic concept of the soul's immortality, they could not conceive of resurrection (Chrysippus *Fragment* 625; Bahnsen 1980:11). The search for God was an inner search.

Modern parallels. Thoroughgoing secularists – all by chance – when we die that's the end

God is in everyone. The search for God or the divine is internal – the divine spark.

Both resurrection laughable.

These philosophers thought Paul was proclaiming a male divinity, Iesous and a female divinity, Anastasis.

Paul requested to appear before the Areopagus (Hill of Ares) Ares Greek equivalent of Roman god of war Mars, KJV – Mars Hill.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 17:34). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

“Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.”⁷

Very clever start bridging what he has to say to both philosophical schools

not usual word for religious. Can be negative – superstitious (Epicurians) or piously religious (Stoics)

Tour altar inscription “To an Unknown God”. Fearful of the anger of the gods – unpredictable – altars to unknown gods – so that if they weren’t mentioned they wouldn’t feel left out and reek their anger out on the city of Athens.

Story attached to these altars.

Once when Athens was plagued by pestilence in the sixth century B.C. and the city rulers had exhausted all their strategies to abate it, they sent to Crete, asking the prophet Epimenides to come and help. His remedy was to drive a herd of black and white sheep away from the Areopagus and, wherever they lay down, to sacrifice them to the god of that place. The plague was stayed, and it is said that memorial altars with no god’s name inscribed on them may consequently be found throughout Attica.

What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.⁸

Again Paul is careful with his use of words. Worship – to be respectful of. What you are respectful of but don’t know, that is what I am talking about.

Not saying “You worship the real God without knowing it” But “You are ignorant of the real God whom you don’t worship.” To Stoics and Epicureans alike ignorance is a major vice.

Paul does not ascribe the worship of the true God to non-Christian religions

Unusual word for worship - be respectful.

What not **who**.

What do Muslims and Christians worship – god. Who do they worship? Very different answers.

What is the PM is a very different question from **who** is the PM.

Paul’s first major point

The Athenians don’t know God and all of these temples are a sign of their ignorance

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.⁹

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 17:22). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 17:23). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 17:24–25). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

The God whom Paul proclaimed was no local Jewish God. He was the one sovereign Lord of all humankind¹⁰

God is the creator of the world. Epicureans would regard this as a positive affirmation of the material world. As creator of the world he is both distinct from the world and within the world, and does not depend on the world for his existence contrary to what the Stoics may claim.

As one commentator describes it.

What good news Paul had for the Epicureans and Stoics living as they did under impersonal chance or inexorable fate! Behind or within reality stands neither of these but rather a gracious, personal Creator, Ruler and Sustainer of all. For modern scientific humanity, living as it does within an impersonal universe that has evolved quite by “chance” from the big bang to the last whimper of a dark and frigid night without starfire, Paul’s message is also very good news. And for postmodern humanity this gracious, personal God breaks the bonds of pantheistic “karma.”¹¹

²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.¹²

Stoicism looked at humankind in its diversity and urged it to consider itself one community, “even as a herd that feeds together and shares the pasturage of a common field” (Plutarch *Moralia* 329B). Paul affirms both the unity and diversity of humanity.¹³

God’s second design was that *people would seek him*.¹⁴ and perhaps find him. Cautious language. But sin is an issue.

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ¹⁵

¹⁰ Polhill, J. B. (1992). [Acts](#) (Vol. 26, p. 374). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹¹ Larkin, W. J., Jr. (1995). [Acts](#) (Vol. 5, Ac 17:24–29). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic.

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 17:26–27). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹³ Larkin, W. J., Jr. (1995). [Acts](#) (Vol. 5, Ac 17:24–29). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic.

¹⁴ Larkin, W. J., Jr. (1995). [Acts](#) (Vol. 5, Ac 17:24–29). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic.

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ro 1:19–23). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Paul gives 2 quotations, first from a poem from the Cretan philosopher Epimenides in which Minos, a mythic figure, addresses Zeus the chief God of the Greek gods, with these words “ in you we live and move and have our being.”

Opposite of what the Stoics believed, ie God lives in us. The search, God or truth, for is not outward, but inward. A belief that many hold today. That’s why we have confusion over gender identity. Rather than one’s sex being the gift of a good creator providing one with one’s sexual identity, the so-called good creator has got it wrong in some cases and I am really the gender that internally I feel I am. The Stoics would agree, but Paul would certainly disagree.

As Christians we are to seek God (and truth) outwardly, not inwardly. The is contrary to the idea that we know God’s presence or his truth by what we feel rather than by what we read in Scripture or observe in the world.

The second quotation is from a poem by Aratus (300BC)

How we are dependant on god.

Everywhere everyone is indebted to god.

For we are indeed his offspring

Both these quotations are about Zeus. For Paul they got the facts about God right but the person wrong.

They knew enough about god to avoid idolatry and philosophical positions contrary to that knowledge and hence were culpable for the display of ignorance in Athens both in their buildings and in their philosophy.

³⁰The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,¹⁶

With the clarity about who God is, being revealed in the person of Jesus – external reality, the incarnation of God in a real person, God no longer overlooks this ignorance.

For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, [through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,] to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just [as one who judges sin] and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.[as the one who saves from being condemned] ¹⁷

Consequence of this is that God no longer overlooks the ignorance of humanity but will eventually judge world by the very person that he has provided as evidence of who he is. Paul then points to God’s evidence of the truth of what he is saying, namely, the physical resurrection of Jesus.

Both Epicureans and Stoics would find this puzzling. If Jesus was raised from the dead, then for the Epicureans this could be the material evidence they might well desire. And for the Stoics, the logic of

¹⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 17:30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ro 3:22–26). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

what Paul says is powerful. However only a few respond positively. Some, like many of today, say well I'll think about it, and then don't.

Was there a church established in Athens? Probably not, but we are given the names of 2 influential people who did become Christians. Dionysius, a member of the council, and a woman called Damaris.

By naming these individuals, Luke, the writer of this account, is providing us with witnesses to the truth of his account.

What do we learn:

1. In order to present the gospel we need to have some knowledge of the assumptions and the world view of those we are addressing.
2. We also need to examine our world view in the light of Scripture. Does our world view, our assumptions align with God's self-revealing in Scripture or is it aligned more with the world?
3. We need to be clear that the focus of the Gospel is on the person of Jesus and not us, his death, resurrection, and future judgment.
4. We need to accept that for many the gospel won't make sense, or it will be rejected. – because it calls people to repent, to change their minds.
5. Paul made good use of his stay in Athens although was not yet on his preaching itinerary. How prepared are we to share the gospel when this isn't part of our agenda? How ready are we, like Paul, to pick up a comment by a person and use that to explain the gospel to them?

Closing Prayer

Blessing

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.¹⁸

¹⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jud 24–25). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.