

I Have Many in This City Who Are My People-1 (Acts 17:10-18:22)

When you look at the sin and corruption that is around us in this world is it your tendency to condemn and withdraw to a safe place, or is it your tendency to engage with the people of brokenness in the world? Jesus is the only hope for those who need to be rescued. Jesus is the only hope for those who are called to do the rescuing. People are trapped in sin and Jesus is the only rescue. That is Paul's message to the Bereans, the Athenians and the Corinthians.

1. Paul's message to the Bereans: Jesus is the Promised Christ.

A. Leaving Thessalonica in the middle of the night.

Paul and Silas make their way to Berea (11). Again, they go to the synagogue.

Acts 17:11-15 "Now these people were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. 12 Therefore, many of them believed, along with a significant number of prominent Greek women and men. 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds. 14 Then immediately the brothers sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left."

B. The Bereans were willing to examine the claims of Paul from the OT.

It appears that those who rejected what Paul preached did so peaceably, at least until the Jews who had run Paul / Silas out of Thessalonica showed up. They were not anxious to cause a disruption in the Berea so a few of the believers took Paul and set sail for Athens. Silas and Timothy join him later.

2. Paul's message to the Athenians.

A. Paul is on his own.

Athens is the city of Socrates and Plato, a city of intellect and art. Paul was not particularly impressed but was bothered by the city. The city was full of idols. Everywhere Paul looked he saw statues, altars and temples built for the multitude of Greek gods. The acropolis was dominated by the statue of Athena, the goddess of wisdom / warfare.

Paul was deeply disturbed, not so much by the idols themselves, but by the hold the idols had over the people who worshipped the idols. This meant they were separated / estranged from the one true God. Paul's heart broke for those who are perishing.

B. What did Paul do? He began to engage.

He didn't write the people off. He went to the synagogue and to the marketplace everyday. Epicurean and Stoic philosophers conversed with him (17-18). This was not simply a marketplace of merchandise but a marketplace of ideas.

Epicureans —pursued pleasure and avoided pain / they wanted no sense of accountability.

Paul's message to them was: "you are accountable to the one true God."

Stoics — believed that god is in everything / they believed everything is determined by fate, so learn to go with the flow.

Paul came into the marketplace talking about the one true God and his Son, Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose from the dead.

The philosophers were not impressed. They insulted Paul.

Verse 18 “And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers as well were conversing with him. Some were saying, “What could this scavenger of tidbits want to say?” Others, “He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,”--because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.”

They thought they had heard of all the gods. But they had never heard of Jesus. All the religions they had heard about had “sameness” about them because of their human origins. But Paul is telling them about a God who became human and rose from the dead to save sinners. So they took him to the Areopagus, a small hill covered in stone seats. This area was once used as a forum for the rulers of Athens to hold trials, debate, and discuss important matters.

Verses 19-25 “And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? 20 “For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.” 21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) 22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in all respects. 23 “For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 24 “The God who made the world and everything that is in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;”

C. Paul began with creation.

Paul told them God made the world and everything in it. This is a different view for the Epicureans, who said that the world came to be through atoms swerving through space and the Stoics who said that everything is god. God doesn’t live in temples made by human hands. Instead he is the God who gives mankind everything good, including life itself (26-27). God not only made the world but directed the course of history, created peoples and nations who all descended from the first man, Adam. (“That they should seek God”) (27). The God who to this point has been unknown to them, has made himself known!

Verse 28 “for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His descendants.’”

Every person has been made in the image of the creator.

Verse 29 “Therefore, since we are the descendants of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and thought.”

Paul is asking the question—“How can you think that the God who made you can be reduced to something you can make with your hands out of metal or stone?” God has overlooked times of ignorance but is now calling for repentance. He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness. (30-31)

Jesus came to the city we live in and saw us in our idolatry and sensuality and immorality—and was provoked. So he engaged. We were completely identified with this world, but he drew us to himself with gospel promises of a new identity of being one of God’s own people.