



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 17:16–34

“Paul Preaching to the Intellectuals”

TRANSCRIPT

We’re turning this morning in our Scripture reading to Acts chapter 17, and reading verse 16 through verse 34. We have been following the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey, as he has made his way from Philippi down to Thessalonica and then to Berea and now he has come to the city of Athens. And he will be preaching to the intellectuals in Athens, and Luke gives us an account of the ministry that he performed there. So, let’s begin reading with the 16th verse of Acts chapter 17.

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbling say? (That word in the original text is a word that means, literally, a seed picker; and so, it’s a reference to an individual—well really, it’s a reference to a bird, first of all—who picks a little here and a little there. And then, it came to be a reference an individual that had a scrap of knowledge of this and a scrap of knowledge of that. And so, he was called “a seed picker.”) What will this babbling say? Other some, He seemeth to be a setter

forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. (The two gods that they thought Paul was preaching about was the God, Jesus, and then the god, resurrection. You can see, they were not all that sound in biblical theology.) And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?”

Now, let me just say this one thing and then we won't have to say anything about it later on. Areopagus was a word that had two senses; it referred to a place and then it referred to a group of men. And, it is likely in this context that it refers to a group of men. They did sometimes meet on the Areopagus, but most of the time did not. And so, the reference here, “brought him unto Areopagus,” is probably a reference to bringing him to a certain group of men. Then in verse 20 we read:

“For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)”

Now, as you can see, Luke the recorder of the Acts of the Holy Spirit is the one who has inserted this as a kind of ironical comment on the life of the Athenians. And that word, ‘some new thing’ is in the comparative degree in the original text and so it’s ‘some newer thing.’ So, they were interested in the latest fads. Now, we in the United States of America are not interested in the latest fads, and so, it’s difficult for us to understand this; but, they were—these Athenians.

“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. (Now, almost all biblical commentators agree that this expression translated ‘too superstitious’ is an

expression that means, simply, ‘very religious.’) For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions...”

And again, if I may be allowed a minor correction, ‘devotions’ here is not to be understood as we understand devotions in the Christian faith today. We think of a person who engages in devotions as an individual who has some private time in which he reads the Bible and prays. So, we are not to think of the Athenians as sitting on the rocks on Mars Hill or all over the city and there engaging in meditations on spiritual things. This term is a term that means ‘object of devotion’ and so it’s a reference to the idolatry, the statues and the other figures of the idols that characterized the city of Athens.

“...As I passed by, and saw your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. (You must admire the Apostle’s courage, when he came to the city of Athens. Now, he begins his message to them:

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshiped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one...”

The word ‘blood’ in the Authorized Version is found in some of the manuscripts, but it is likely to be not genuine in this case. And so, we’ll read it, “And hath made of one.” Now, the one that we have been made of is Adam, in the Garden of Eden, which means that all of us human beings go back to the same genealogical tree; and, ultimately, have the same parents, which is a very important thing for us to remember.

Now, I make the application particularly to myself, because of course, I come from South Carolina and from Charleston, so naturally, this affects me and it's a bit of a—a bit of a sacrifice for me to mention that we all have the same family tree. But, it is true.

So, the Apostle says:

“And hath made of one all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, [or, perhaps, ‘grope after him.’] and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”

You see, we are all of one, and we all have been created in the image of God. And, being in the image of God, we all have certain characteristics. And we have had implanted in our hearts, by the living God, the knowledge that there is one God. Now, we do everything that we possibly can to suppress that knowledge that has been given to us, as Paul states in Romans chapter 1, but it is there. And you can be sure that even when a man says, “I am an atheist,” that he is fighting very, very hard to suppress the knowledge that God has implanted in him, that there is a God.

Now of course, the fact that we know there is a God does not mean that we are thereby saved, for saving knowledge is knowledge of our sin and redemption through Christ. That is this work of the Holy Spirit in special revelation. But, general revelation given to all men, includes the knowledge of the existence of God. We all have it. So, Paul continues and he says:

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhood (or, divine nature—these men knew nothing of a Godhead—a Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and Paul is not trying to remind them of the fact that the true God is a triune God and that all other gods

are not really true gods. So, this word, Godhood, is actually different from the term deity. So, we'll translate it Godhood, or divine nature) is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God overlooked; but now (since the cross—since the coming of Christ) commands all men every where to repent:”

Now, he doesn't mean this was the first time repentance was preached; if one reads the Old Testament, he knows that this is the characteristic message of the prophets. They called upon men to turn. They called upon their own men to turn—to turn to the Lord. But, what he does mean is that there is a significant determinative change in the life of the human race, when Jesus Christ came and offered the one atoning sacrifice. And, in the meantime, God did not pass final judgment upon men, and you might have expected that He would. Because, He was waiting until the redeemer should come and should make known to us the seriousness of sin, found ultimately in our Lord's cry from the cross, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” as He became the sin offering. And the greatness of the divine redemption found in the blood that was shed and the forgiveness of sins preached through Him alone.

Verse 31:

“Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

May God bless this reading of His Word.

[Message] Paul was a Tarsian Jew but, now, he preaches in the city of Pericles and Demosthenes, the town that is associated with Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, with Sophocles and Euripides and others of the great intellectuals of Grecian history. Brought up in the religious capital of the world, the city of Jerusalem, the Apostle ends his days in the political capital of the world, in Rome. But, in the meantime, he has this great privilege of preaching in the intellectual capital of his day.

Athens, now, was a decadent city, a pagan city; its glory was fading fast. It has been described by one of the commentators on the book of Acts as ‘A body without a soul.’ They had now reached the stage in their history, where they were interested in the latest fads, and Luke makes reference to that when he says, that the Athenians and the strangers that were there, spent their time in either telling about or hearing some ‘newer thing.’ And so, a later Moses will confute the descendants of the wisdom of Egypt. Another Daniel will prove wiser than later Chaldeans.

When the Apostle arrived in the city of Athens, he did what he usually did when he arrived in a city, he went first to the synagogue. And there, he disputed with the Jews in the synagogue, seeking to lead them to the knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament, and that all of those messianic statements made by Moses and the Prophets pointed to Him. And, that in the events that had happened in the city of Jerusalem, there was fulfilled the story of the Old Testament.

Now, the Apostle, no doubt, from what we read in the book of Acts, followed along in that line when he went into the synagogue. And so, he reasoned with them, for that’s the meaning of the expression ‘disputed’ in the synagogue. He reasoned with them, he had the kinds of arguments and discussions that are pictured in Acts chapter 13, and other places, where the Apostle dealt with those who had questions about what he was teaching.

Now, in the city were, not only, of course, synagogues, but there were other devout persons. And so, he reasoned with them, as well. Gentiles. And he was “in the market daily with them that met with him,” and it would have been nice to have heard some of the discussions; but the Apostle

was not sightseeing. He was disturbed by what he had seen in the city. He was disturbed when he saw the city wholly given over to idolatry—not over to art, or history, or philosophy, but to idolatry—and that particularly disturbed the Apostle. And so, this is the occasion for the ministry that he will have to them.

If you had gone to Athens in the day of the Apostle, you would have seen temples to the gods on many of the corners. There were temples to Demeter, the goddess of the earth, there were many, many temples to Athena, the goddess of wisdom. There were temples and statues to the god, Zeus, the god of force; there were altars to other things that were particularly significant, such as altars to shame, altars to philanthropy, altars to rumor—so, the city was, literally, filled with the objects of human worship.

If one looks for the vanity of human wisdom, one could find it in the city of Athens. And, when Paul writes to the Corinthians, who were not far away from Athens, writing his first letter to them, he says, “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.”

So, the Greeks, who seek after wisdom, were the ones to whom Paul ministered in the city of Athens, as well as to the Jews who found the cross a stumbling block. And Paul says, “In the wisdom of God, men did not find God by human wisdom.”

So, given over to idolatry—his spirit was stirred within him—we read in verse 16, the Apostle determines that he will do his best to bring some light to that city.

Petroneous said, “It was easier to find a god than a man in the city of Athens.”

The Epicureans and the Stoics were, particularly, the leading philosophers of the day. I know that we are inclined to think, “Well, that was Athens; that’s not Texas.” That’s true—and, so much the worse for Texas, for that matter—but, the same kind of situation that prevailed in Paul’s day prevails, in kind, here.

There were in the days of Paul the Epicureans and the Stoics. The Epicureans were those who had as their chief aim of life happiness. Now, we are not interested in happiness—we are interested in self-esteem. But, the same kind of thing pertains. And, even in our Christian circles, we have men who preach self-esteem, rather than the forgiveness of sins through the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross.

The Epicureans had as their chief aim happiness, freedom from distraction. The Stoics had as their chief aim, virtue; and, also, the virtue of not being involved in anything else—*apothese* to all other claims by other things. What they hoped was that man would become self-sufficient in himself.

As far as religion is concerned, the Epicureans were theists; they did believe in god. But to believe in god is not necessarily to possess the salvation of God. The gods, they thought, were careless of mankind and so, they had a deistic kind of conception of God, that he had brought things into being by his creation, but everything ran pretty much as it runs today, by the operation of natural law. Even in Christian circles, we have people like that.

Rudolph Bultman, who said that, “This universe is closed universe, as we’re not to expect the intervention of God in any of the affairs of men, today, believe that there is really no such thing as divine providence.” Well, that would have been perfectly good doctrine, so far as the Epicureans were concerned. The gods were careless of mankind; that’s the same kind of doctrine expressed in the doctrine of freewill, in the redemptive sense. That is, that the ultimate decisions of life are human decisions, and not divine decisions. So far as the Stoics were concerned, they were pantheists; they believed that god was in everything. He was eminent. And, when a man died, the soul returned to the great soul, thus there was no real life after death. And they, too, did not believe in divine providence. Now, that will become important in the light of what Paul will say in just a moment.

Now we read that when the Apostle began to discuss with them, they listened to the Apostle for a few moments, they didn’t understand what he was talking about as is evident from the questions that they asked. They said, “He seems to be a setter forth of strange gods: he preaches the God Jesus and the god resurrection.” So, they didn’t understand him and they were saying, “What is

this babblers talking about?” So, they used the figure of a person who walks down the street, he’s poor, he’s ragged, he has nothing, he sees a piece of bread over here and something over here that he might eat and so he takes it and he puts it in his little sack—have you ever seen people like that? Well, if you lived in the depression days, you could have seen things like that.

I know a Bible teacher—a well-known Bible teacher—who’s told me that he used to go downtown in the city of Dallas, and walk down near the Adolphus Hotel and when they brought out the scraps and put them in the garbage cans—he was a teacher at Dallas Theological Seminary in the 30s, when things were not all that good—and he said, it was all I could do to keep from reaching out and taking something out of the garbage cans to eat them. So, there are individuals who do that. And we know them; we don’t know them in North Dallas—maybe we ought to get down to some other parts of town and discover that there are people like that. And then, there are some people who have a little bit of knowledge about this, and a little bit of knowledge like this—and, listen, this pertains to North Dallas, my dear friend—there are people who attend Christian church, who have a little sense of theology here and a little knowledge of the Bible here and a little knowledge there—but if you ever got them in a room and were able to ask them right face-to-face, “Explain to me the doctrine of divine reconciliation?” they would want to look around and see if you are really talking to them.

And, as a matter of fact, in Believers Chapel, we have lots of people who have sat here Sunday after Sunday, and have listened to the exposition of the Word of God—not simply from me but from others—and who still have only a seed pickers knowledge of Christian theology. Don’t go around and tell at other churches that; but that’s really true. It’s true. I admire your patience. If you are here in the audience this morning, I’m astounded that year after year you can come and listen; and you have not taken in anything. You have great patience and endurance. O, that I had the endurance that you have. And, furthermore, you smile in the midst of my comments, when if I were to ask you about one of these doctrines, you’d have to say, “Don’t ask me, Dr. Johnson.” Seed pickers.

So, what is this babbler talking about? And they get Paul and they say, “We want to know what you’re talking about?” Now, they don’t really want to know. They are more interested because it’s a fad to know the ‘latest thing.’ And, after all, they might have a cocktail party that afternoon in which they can say, “You know, today, I was down on the porch, and I heard this fellow who came from over near Jerusalem, or Tarsus somewhere, say this strange thing. Have you heard about this?” And so, they unfold the latest little doctrine, which is of great interest to them mainly because it’s the ‘latest thing.’

Have you ever seen Christians like that? They’re like that, too. They listen to the radio, they hear a radio preacher, they say, “Did you hear what that radio preacher said?” They’re not really interested in it, but they are interested in it because it’s new. And so, they want to talk about it.

Well, anyway, that’s the way things were going and so they got Paul by himself, and they brought him over in front of the men of the Areopagus. And what is Paul going to say to them? Now, there are some people who say that the Apostle, when he appeared before the cultured pagans, he didn’t have much result. And so, the reason that he didn’t have a great deal of results is because he didn’t preach to them like he preached in other places. He should have preached the same thing that he preached in the synagogue at Antioch. And, in fact, some go so far as to say, he really didn’t preach directly the truths of the New Testament. And that accounts for the fact that he didn’t have much response.

Others say, well, he was preaching to cultured pagans, the intellectuals—and you’re not expected to have too much response from there. There is some truth in that, for the Apostle will say, “Not many mighty, not many noble, not many well-born are called by God the Holy Spirit.”

But, I’d like to differ just a little bit with that. I would like to suggest to you that Paul did preach from the Word of God to the men at Athens. But, he went because of the situation back a little farther than the messianic promises, which were given to Abraham and filled out and detailed by the prophets to David and then to Jeremiah and others. Because, he argues from first principles; but the first principles are the first principles of the beginning of the Word of God. Now, let me say

to you—because some of you don’t have the opportunity that I have to appear in front of the educators of our country very often—but let me assure you that today when you appear before the educated people of this country, in our colleges and universities, you will find individuals who are just as committed to first principles as anyone in the Word of God. Their first principles, generally speaking,—now, of course, there are exceptions and I think God for those fine Christian scholars who are located here and there in the academic world—but the great majority in the academic world are individuals who have as their first principles the primacy of human reason. Often they do not even realize that, because it’s a characteristic of our day not to pay a great deal of attention to the fundamental axioms upon which we begin to talk and reason.

It is impossible for an individual to reason without fundamental basic axioms. And, if our axioms are grounded in the authority of human reason, you can be sure that we are not going to arrive at the conclusions of the divine revelation. For the Christian is one who reasons upon the basic axioms, the presuppositions of the Word of God. And, fundamental to the Word of God is the fact that this is a divine revelation. And so, in the Word of God, we have that which has come from God. That’s the Christian’s axiom, that’s the Christian’s first principle—the Bible is the Word of God—now, as I say, no one can reason who doesn’t have axioms. So, Christians reason that human reason is insufficient and the simple reason for it is that human beings are fallen men. They are men whose minds have been touched by sin. They are men whose wills are rebellious against God. They are men whose emotions are corrupt.

To put it in Paul’s language, “For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned.”

And if you will look around about upon humanity, you will see that there is a great deal of support for this, just by the empirical examination of the human beings around you.

So, the Apostle had as his presupposition the authority and primacy of divine reason and divine revelation. So, he begins. We read he stood in Mars Hill and he said, “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious.” This was the Athenians’ admission of some kind of

search for something and Paul, courteously, and cleverly, claims that he has found it. “I see that you are very religious.” But, now, the Apostle was a man of truth and so, he said, “As I passed by, and I saw your devotions, I found an altar with the inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.”

We know that such existed in Athens, some had “To the unknown gods,” plural. So, the Apostle found one, “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD,” and then, truthfully—though it must have cost him something to say this—I could have seen the blackness and shadows come over the face of those wise Athenians when he said, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”

Now, we said a minute ago, that the apostle began with the divine revelation. He didn't begin with the messianic promises. He went back just a little farther. He went back to Genesis 1. In fact, he went back to Genesis 1:1—“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” For you see, that was one of the fundamental problems in Athens. They didn't really believe that God created the heavens and the earth. And, therefore, there can be no representation of an eternal incorruptible God by a corruptible thing. Imagine, a wooden image—or, let's make it nice and pretty—imagine a gold idol, of the eternal God. Gold is long lasting, but let me assure you, gold is not eternal. Wood may be dressed up and carved in such a way as to make a very impressive figure. But wood is corrupting, and to represent the eternal incorruptible, infinite God, by that is to degrade His person. That's why God says, “Ye shall have no other gods before Me.” And He is not happy when we set up our little gods, as if they represent Him by corruptible things.

So, the Apostle begins. If I were to sum up precisely what he's saying, it would be something like this. “The true God is not an idol; He is a parent and a creator.” A parent—P-A-R-E-N-T—He is the one of whom we are all the offspring. He is our creator. Creator! And, thus, He cannot be represented by anything created.

Now, notice the principles of the Apostle, they begin in verse 24. He says, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands...” He is the creator. He is immense.

Now, I've used a term in a theological sense; no quizzes. The immensity of God! Suppose I were to say to you, You've been sitting in Believers Chapel all these years, explain to me the immensity of God? Well, let me help you. When the Bible speaks about the immensity of God, it means, simply, that He is not only omnipresent—but more so—in this universe we often hear people speak about an infinite universe; don't believe it. It's not infinite. Only God is infinite. It may be infinite so far as human observation and investigation is concerned; but it is not infinite.

There is one infinite being in this universe. It is the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the infinite God.

Now, in describing Him, as He sets himself out in the book of divine revelation, He describes Himself as one who is immense. He means by that that He fills everything in the universe and more. To be omniscient, to be omnipresent, to be omnipotent, characterize Him. To be omnipresent means, simply, that He is everywhere in this universe. There is no place in which He is not.

Well, someone might say: Is He in that pulpit? Well, yes, He's in this pulpit; but not in the sense in which He is in heaven. He is in heaven as the Lord of this universe, but He is also in this pulpit in the sense that there is no place in His creation from which He is excluded.

But, more than that, He is immense. It's as if to illustrate it I were to speak out in this room and my voice fills the whole of the room. As I've just said, my voice fills the whole of this room, and everywhere in this room you would hear my voice. But now, also, there would be people out in the hall who are hearing my voice, too. So, when we speak of God as omnipresent, we mean wherever in His creation, we have part of His creation, God is present there. When we say He is immense, He is beyond that, too.

He is the eternal God. So, Paul says, that He doesn't dwell in temples made with hands, he's not worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, since He giveth to all men life and breath. He uses words from Isaiah chapter 42, in verse 5. And, my dear friend, as I've often tried to say, you are sure of no breath, but the one that you are drawing right now. And you are, at this very

moment, in the presence of the God who controls all of our breaths. He holds them all in His hand. He is that sovereign of the universe, who controls even our breathing.

So, the Apostle says, “He’s the creator and he’s immense.” But, he also said, “He is the preserver.” Notice the 25th verse. He’s not worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, “seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.”

So, this is destructive of all Epicureanism, for Epicureans believed in the eternity of matter. But God is the maker of matter; “He is not made,” Paul says. And He is the one who gives life, gives breath. In fact, He gives all things.

And, thirdly, He is the originator of the nations. In verse 26, “And hath made of one all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth...” A blow to the proud Athenians, who regarded others as barbarians. That’s what we used to talk about when I was growing up in Charleston. We lived in Charleston and I went and I went to the college and I studied Latin and Greek. And when I studied Greek and read about the Greeks, and read that they regarded anyone who was not a Greek as a barbarian, I said, and we said, “Why that’s very much like in Charleston. Why, in Charleston, we regard Charlestonian as being the civilized people of the earth. The South Carolinians are not really quite civilized. And the rest of the world, beyond the borders of South Carolina is really the world of the *poi barbaroi*.

So, we had a lot of fun about that. But we recognized a great deal of that tendency in our fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers. And if you go over to Charleston today, you will see that that spirit is not dead.

But, of course, when we went up to Boston, we felt like the *barbaroi*, when the Bostonians began to speak, then I realized that there was contention over who was a barbarian and who was not. And so, when you travel around the world, and the Western World, you discover that there are centers of civilization in London, and Paris, and Zurich, and Geneva, and Geneva more than Zurich, and Berlin and so on. That’s characteristic of human nature—to think that we are the people and the rest are the barbarians.

And so, Paul, just brings to our attention the fact that it is God who has “made of one all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth,” and we all have the same family tree. And we all go back to the same individuals. And at the top of our family tree, all of us are related.

Science has tried to tell us otherwise. For example, the science in the days of Adolph Hitler told us that the Nordics and the Aryans were superior to the rest of us. And, that vast scientific hoax—many people didn’t believe to start with—but others had to learn it experientially. We all come from one—everyone of us—and, whether we are white or black or brown or whatever the color of our skin, we come from one; for He is the originator of the nations.

He is also the governor of history, the 26th verse says, for it goes on to say, “And hath determined the times before appointed...” So, He has set out the ages that flow through human history. If you study human history, you will have certain ideas with regard to it.

Arnold Toynbee is a famous philosopher of history. Mr. Toynbee said, as he studied philosophy of history, that there have been twenty-one significant civilizations; fourteen of them had passed off the scene, when he finished his work. Seven were still there. But, all of this, regardless of whether he is right or wrong, and there is some rightness or wrongness to some analysis of the philosophy of history. All of it is ultimately under the hand of God. And Paul calls it elsewhere, “The purpose of the ages.”

And so, when nations rise and fall, they don’t rise and fall, ultimately, because of things that happen in the human scene; they rise and fall because a providential God is guiding and governing His world in order to complete His purpose so that at the end we shall see Him as the great God of Heaven, glorified among men. We may not see it now, but we will see the purpose of God in its ultimate glorification of the Godhead in the future.

Furthermore, Paul goes on to say, “He is the predestinater of geography.” Amazing! Verse 26: “And the bounds of their habitations...” No blind fate in the rise and fall of nations; it is the providence of God.

He has set men out in a particular way that is His will. As Moses said, centuries before, “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” And so, not only as He been responsible for the rise and flow of history, but even where the nations live and dwell and work; that is part of the sovereign purpose of the Lord God.

He works, Paul says in another place, “All things according to the council of His will.”

John Wesley used to say, “I read the newspaper to see how God is governing His world.” That’s a good biblical outlook. “I read the newspaper to see how God is governing His world.” This is the refutation of Epicurus, who thought that everything happened by chance. It is the refutation of the Stoic, who thought that things happened by fate. It is the refutation of modern science, which does not recognize that there is an authority and power over them in all of their investigations. I do not speak of Christian Scientists, who have recognized the truth.

Furthermore, Paul says, “He is the eminent God.” Verse 27: “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him,” and grope after Him, “and find him, though He be not far from every one of us...” All His works are designed to urge us to seek Him who is everywhere. And the testimony to the blindness of men is the fact that in the midst of the presence of God everywhere, we don’t see Him. That’s blindness. Like a little child who tries to escape ubiquity—his mother.

Have you ever seen a little child try and escape mother? It’s impossible. He lives, he moves, he has his being from mother. But, sometimes, he’ll get so mad he doesn’t want to have anything to do with mother, but he cannot live such a life. Mother is everywhere. Mother is all his life, for a lengthy period of time, it seems.

God is even more ubiquitous; He is everywhere. And men are so blind that even though He is everywhere, they do not find Him.

Now, Paul finally concludes with, “He’s the parent of us. We are His offspring by creation.” Different from redemption—but, we are His offspring. Verse 28 and verse 29 say, “In Him we live

and move and have our being, as certain of your own prophets have said, For we are also His offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think of the Godhood, or the divine nature, as like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.” Even their poets, by flash of insight, perceive some things that, evidently, the Athenians have not. Because images of God are everywhere.

Now, the Apostle was like any good preacher, a good preacher who doesn’t make some kind of application is not really preaching according to the biblical revelation.

Mr. Whitefield, perhaps the greatest evangelist that ever came to the United States and ever preached here, for that matter, used to say—and it was one of his favorite maxims—that “The way to preach was to preach as Apples painted, for eternity.” He was struck with this fact by listening to an Irish theologian, who said to him one day over a meal, “I wish whenever I go into the pulpit, to look upon it as the last time I shall ever preach or the last time the people may hear me.” Whitefield never forgot that. He said, “Would that ministers preached for eternity! They would then act the part of true Christian orators, and not only calmly and coolly inform the understanding, but by persuasive, pathetic address, endeavor to move the affections and warm the heart. To act otherwise, bespeaks a sad ignorance of human nature and such an inexcusable indolence and indifference in the preacher as must constrain the hearers to suspect whether they will or not; that the preacher, let him be who he will, only dwelt in false commerce of unfelt truth.”

And so, Paul says, verse 30, “The times of this ignorance God winked at,” overlooked, passed by, so far as ultimate judgment is concerned, “But now commandeth all men everywhere to repent...”

So, this is the answer to the Old Testament prosperity of the wicked. People sometimes seem to have difficulty believing how it is true that God really judges and as you look around, you see the wicked are prospering. Ah, they have forgotten that the time of judgment is not yet. There is an indication of the judgment in the cross of Christ.

As I mentioned earlier, when God cries out on the cross, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” That’s an indication that there is such a thing as judgment for sin, for our Lord bears the penalty of our sin there. And there is come a time of judgment, and even though He may pass by judgment—right now—the time is coming when the ultimate judgment will come. It’s appointed unto men once to die and after this, the judgment—but we have ample warning of it now. In the work of Christ on the cross and the resurrection from the dead, and in the Word of God, regarding that future judgment.

So, Paul says, “God overlooked, saw beyond the wickedness of the Old Testament saints, but now He’s commanding men everywhere to repent. Repent of idolatry! And He has “appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained,” the Lord Jesus Christ. And in order to ensure that you know that their time is coming, when every one of us, Jew, Gentile, Church of God, shall stand before Jesus Christ; he says, “He’s given assurance...that He has raised him from the dead.”

A parent has the right to judge, and this ends on the note of Jesus and the resurrection. What they had asked about. Today, we live in a society in which there are—there is competition between worldviews—and today there are millions who live under a system that is directly opposed to the things that we have been talking about this morning.

Marxism tells us that the goal of society is a classless society. And that the principles by which we should reach a classless society are principles of economics. And, further, that the way that this is to come to pass is by class struggle; and, first cousin of Marxism is Socialism, which really has the same basic philosophy. And our society is filled with it. And, in fact, many of us do not even recognize that we live in a society permeated with these un-Christian viewpoints, in which human reason is preeminent and authoritative.

In Scripture, we have something that is quite different. We have a time of divine judgment to come; and Jesus Christ’s work is that by which we shall be judged. And, repent, is the way by which we arrive at the enjoyment of the world that is to be.

May God help us to see the truth of the Word of God.

Now, what kind of response would you expect Paul to have in the city of Athens? Why, the same kind of response he has in the city of Dallas. Exactly the same! Some mocked. And some this morning will go out of this auditorium and say, “I didn’t see anything much in what Paul said there.” It’s all right to mock at the way I preach Paul. That’s perfectly all right. I know I don’t preach Paul as he should be preached. And I would like to preach him a whole lot better. But some of you will probably go out and say, “I’m just opposed to what Paul said. I’m opposed to the Greek view of the body and the spirit and to think—to think that I’m going to be judged by this anonymous man...”

I can imagine those Athenians, by the way, saying as Paul left or came to the end, one of them turning to the other and saying, “Are we going to be judged by this anonymous fellow we’ve never heard about? None of us? And who no doubt is one of the speaker’s countrymen? He is to judge us? We are Stoics, we are Epicureans, we are polished people. We’re not to be herded to the bar of this man Jesus, in company with the [indistinct] and the other barbarians. Why, that man is mad!”

So, I can imagine us saying today, “Are we going to be judged by this man Jesus? This man, rather than all of the others? You mean salvation, sinners, in this one individual—and the we are going to be herded to His judgment, all of us? And us nice people who live in North Dallas, we’re going to be herded before Him, like the people from South Dallas and East Dallas and West Dallas and out in the country and all of the places? And even south of the border? You mean we all are going to be gathered before this one man?”

Yes, we are. All of us! All of us! Rich, poor, intellectual, nonintellectual, poor, I said rich. All of the difference that make differences among us, will all be swept away and we’ll all appear before our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we shall be judged according to His Word.

Do you have a basic trust in Him? Do you know Him as the one who died for sinners on the cross? And is your salvation securely resting in Him?

Are you trusting in your church? Your good works? Your education? Your family? Things that you've accomplished in life?

Or are you trusting, simply, in Christ, knowing that you're a sinner and lost forever, if you stood on your own merit.

So, they mocked. They little realize that Paul, one day, would be more read and discussed than Demosthenes and Plato.

There were some who were indifferent; they said, “We'll hear you again, Paul. We'd like to hear further discussion. Tuesday? Wednesday? Maybe on Saturday.”

But, when people say, “We want to talk to you again about that,” they mean, “We don't want to hear you now.” So, they didn't want to hear him now, they would hear him later—that indifferent kind of thing—later.

One well-know interpreter has said, “The most dangerous of all days is when a man discovers how easy it is to talk about tomorrow.”

But there were some people who responded, and they weren't necessarily few. We don't really know how many. Two people are marked out. They were unusual, influential, educated—Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, evidently of some importance—and then Luke adds, “And others with them.”

So, our time is up. I want to just simply say this: So, Paul, the later Moses, confutes the wisdom of the later Egypt; and the pride of religion—very religious—the pride of intellect—Stoics, Epicureans—Ah, today we say we are liberation theologians, we are process theologians, we are existentialists and further we know so much that we want to revise the creeds of the ancient church, such as Chalcedon. It has lots of flaws in it, and so, our Christian theologians are engaged in Germany and Britain and the United States and in the Western World in attempting to revise the ancient creeds of the Christian church, arrived at through, literally, generations of careful study of the Word of God. Same today! We have idolatry! We still worship Athena, the deification of the mental, Demeter, Apotheosis of the physical.

My goodness, you ride down the streets you can hardly help from running over somebody who is jogging. I said that this morning at 8:30, went out, and there was somebody jogging down Hillcrest Avenue. I thought about my own words. And, to think, the way in which our society is wholly caught up in the physical! In Chicago, over the TV, over the past week, special TV programs on women pumping iron. Big thing! Big muscles on women! Disgusting! [Laughter] Nauseating! You know, I speak only as a certain kind of man. Sorry! Nauseating! I don't want to meet one in an alley who is mad at me, of course. But, still—oh, if we just realized, it's not important how you look in the coffin. [More laughter] How can we be so concerned with the body, and we have forgotten the part of us that is eternal? Everlasting? How misguided can we be?

So, the worshipers of strength, like Zeus; the Epicureans and Stoics, with their indifference and self-righteousness—they're all here. May God help you to come to Christ! Believe in Him! Trust in Him!

Let's stand for the benediction; let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of thinking with Paul over the great things of time and eternity. Deliver us from shallowness. Help us to put first things first.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.