

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

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AM Service

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Text:

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. 17: 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. 18: Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. 19: And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? 20: For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. 21: (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.) 22: 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. 23: For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. 24: 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; 25: Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26: And hath made of one blood 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; 27: That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: 28: 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. 29: Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. 30: And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31: Because he hath appointed a day, in the 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. 32: And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. 33: So Paul departed from among them. 34: Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Introduction

In John 4:22 we read the words of our Lord to the woman at the well, “Ye worship ye know not what ...” It is sad to say but **there are many today who fit these words** that our Lord said to the Samaritan woman. You worship, but **you do not know what you worship**. There are many who

come to church services and **go through the mechanics of worship** but **do not know who God is** and are **not connected to Jesus Christ**.

God needs to be known before He can be worshiped. This is why it is **important to be in the Word of God** as believers, for **God makes Himself known** through the pages of **His Word**. **Those who know Him best worship Him most.** It takes knowing who God is to be able to worship and praise Him.

Today we will continue to look at the ‘**who**’ of worship. Who is to be **the object of our worship**? Whom do we worship? The answer we give to this question reveals whether or not our worship is the kind of worship God is looking for. **Our worship is real only when we worship the real God.** Our worship is true only when we worship the true God. And who is this true God? **There are many gods and goddesses but there is only one true and living God.** Isn’t it disheartening to know that today, **this true and living God is unknown to many people.** And there is nothing new under the sun, many people in the Apostle’s day, did not know the true God. Because they do not know Him, **they come up with all kinds of gods and goddesses.**

Paul found this out first hand when he travelled to Athens. Athens was the **intellectual center of Greece**. It was **known for being supreme** when it came to **philosophy and philosophers**. Athens was the **city of many philosophers**. They were in love with their own wisdom. It was the home to the most renowned philosophers like **Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle**. Two other significant philosophers taught there are **Epicurus and Zeno**. They are the founder of **two leading philosophies in Greece**, namely the philosophy of the **Epicureans** and the philosophy of the **Stoicks**.

The **Epicureans** taught that the **chief end of man was the avoidance of pain**. Their **chief goal in life was pleasure**. They believed **man was just another animal that returns to dust**. They do not believe in after life, so, eat, drink, and be merry. Epicureans were materialists - they did not deny the existence of God, but **they believed He did not become involved with the affairs of men**. When a person died, they believed his body and soul disintegrated.

The **Stoicks** on the other hand taught that their **chief goal in life was to not care**, not to believe anything, to reach a place of **indifference to pleasure and pain**. Be **dead to feelings and emotions**, even if you have a death in the family, major illness, catastrophe, etc.

So, the Epicureans said “**enjoy life**”, the Stoicks said “**endure life**”. One said “**indulgence**” and the other “**indifference**”. But one thing common in these philosophies, they are **not biblical** way of thinking. These two philosophies are also widely embraced in our world today.

Now, when the apostle Paul came to Athens, he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Athens was not only the **city of many philosophers**, but also it’s **the city of many gods**. Athens is not only the **intellectual center of Greece** but it is also **the religious center of Greece**. The city was full

of idols. One ancient writer said **it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens**. When the apostle Paul saw city was full of idols **his spirit was deeply troubled** and it **broke his heart**.
[Acts 17:16](#) Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

The idolatry of Athens moved Paul. **Many Christians** today are **unmoved by anything but their own needs**. O, how we need the same compassion and conviction that gripped the Apostle Paul when he saw **the city of Athens wholly given to idolatry**. There were idols and altars everywhere. But what caught the Apostle Paul's attention was one particular altar and this altar has inscribed on it the following - **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**.

[Acts 17:23](#) For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.**

The Athenians were a very religious people, given to the worship of many gods. The true God was an unknown God to the people. Paul's concern is "**to turn them from the service of idols to the service of the true and living God**" in Christ. He was filled with **concern for the glory of God**, which he saw given to idols. He was filled with **compassion to the souls of men**, which he saw them enslaved to Satan.

And so, Paul set out to declare unto them who God is.

[Acts 17:23](#) For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.**

Paul declares the UNKNOWN GOD to these Athenians philosophers by giving them a **four-fold revelation of God**, namely, the **Greatness** of God, the **Goodness** of God, the **Government** of God, and the **Grace** of God.

Paul starts with the ...

I – The Greatness of God

[Acts 17:24](#) 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; [25](#): Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

Paul starts by declaring the greatness of God. If these people are to become true worshipers, they must understand the greatness of the true and living God. And the greatness of God is seen by the world He has made and all the things in it.

[Acts 17:24](#) God that made the world and all things therein ...

The **Epicureans believed something similar to evolution**. They believe that the universe is the **product of time and chance**. Again there is nothing new under the sun. The world has taught a generation of young people that they **came from monkeys**. They are being taught to believe that we are **no different from animals**. Though they say man is the **highest form of animals but still we are just animals**. No wonder there are many in our society that are behaving like animals.

There are **many children that are confused today**. This reminds of the story about a little boy who went to his mother saying, “*Mom, dad says we come from apes, but you say that we are really created in the image of God. What do I believe?*” The mom responded, “*son, dad can only tell you about his side of the family. I can tell you about the side of my family.*”

There are **two basic views** concerning the **origin of the universe and life**. One is **evolution**, which teaches that everything is **the result of pure blind random chance** over the billions of years since the universe evolved. The other one is **creation**, which asserts that **everything is the result of Divine Creation** which took place in six literal 24 hour days just a few thousand years ago.

This is what Paul boldly declares. He declares that this UNKNOWN GOD, as the **Creator**. He made the world and all things in it.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning **God created** the heaven and the earth.

Hebrews 11:3 Through faith we understand that **the worlds were framed by the word of God**, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

By faith we understand that the universe came into existence at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. It did not create itself.

Atheistic evolutionists say, “**Nothing created everything.**” The Bible says, “**God created everything out of nothing.**”

Psalm 100:3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: **it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves**; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

II - The Goodness of God

If the Athenians are to become true worshipers, they must not only understand the **greatness of God**, but they must also understand the **goodness of God**. And the goodness of God is once again seen by the world He has made and all the things in it.

During each day of creation, **God looked at what He had created and saw that it was good.**

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2: And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. 3: And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. 4: And **God saw the light, that it was good**: and God divided the light from the darkness.

Genesis 1:10 And God called the **dry land Earth**; and the gathering together of **the waters called he Seas**: and **God saw that it was good.**

Genesis 1:12 And the earth brought forth **grass**, and **herb yielding seed** after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and **God saw that it was good.**

Genesis 1:18 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness [the sun, the moon and the stars]: and **God saw that it was good.**

Genesis 1:21 And God created **great whales**, and **every living creature** that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every **winged fowl** after his kind [the great whales, the fish and the birds]: and **God saw that it was good.**

Genesis 1:25 And God made **the beast of the earth** after his kind, and **cattle** after their kind, and **every thing that creepeth** upon the earth after his kind [the wild animals, the cattle, and the insects]: and **God saw that it was good.**

Genesis 1:31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, **it was very good.** And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

After God is done with creation, He was pleased, for He saw every thing that He had made, and it was very good.

Psalms 33:5 He loveth righteousness and judgment: **the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.**

How great in number are the works of the LORD! In wisdom He made them all. The earth is full of His riches and goodness.

Think about the creation of God. **They are not only many in number but many in variety**, such as the sun, moon, stars, planets, galaxies; mountains, valleys, plains, desert; lakes, river, ocean; snow, rain, hail, clouds; plants and trees, flowers, fruits; animals, insects; fish and sea creatures, etc.

Not the number and variety of God's creation but also the beauty of God's earth reminds us of His goodness.

Psalms 104:24 O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. 25: So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts.

God made the universe and everything in it. He exercised great wisdom when He made all. Creation is a display of His goodness.

But we see the goodness of God most clearly in **the crown of all His creation - man.** The **more closely you study the human anatomy, the more the goodness of its Creator becomes clear and obvious.** Everything about the structure of our bodies attests the goodness of God.

God made man with five senses to enjoy every thing that He has created. God made man with **eyes to see and appreciate the beauty** of nature, **ears to hear its lovely sounds and music, nostrils to enjoy its pleasant aromas, taste buds** to relish its infinite variety of eatable

delights, **a sense of touch to help communicate love** to someone precious to him, and **a mind to comprehend** the meaning of it all.

Psalm 139:14 I will praise Thee, for **I am fearfully and wonderfully made**: marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.

It is true in Genesis chapter three, sin entered. Adam and Eve's sin called forth God's anger and justice and judgment but it also called forth manifestations of the grace and mercy of God in new dimension. And **God continued to be good**.

In spite of the fact that this planet is cursed with the effects of sin (cf. Rom. 8:20-22), there is still sufficient testimony of God's goodness.

But we also see the goodness of God in the way He provides to all.

Acts 17:24 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; 25: Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

The **gods and goddesses of the Athenians**, according to their beliefs, were **hungry**, and **needed to be fed**, and **so they bring costly offerings** of food and drink. But unlike the gods that these people worship, **God is not a receiver but a Giver**. The Creator and the Ruler and Sustainer of all things is **not dependent upon the creature**. Paul declares the the UNKNOWN GOD is an all-sufficient God. God does not dwell in temples and buildings that man made. He is worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing. He doesn't need a thing! He made the world and everything in it.

Paul wanted the men of Athens to know that He's the constant supply of life, breath—everything!

Romans 11:34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? 35: Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? 36: For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

We can offer Him nothing. He is the provider of all things to all. He provides for His creation.

Psalm 104:24 O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

Psalm 104 celebrates the goodness of God over all His works and over all His creation ...

Psalm 104:12 By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. 13: He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. 14: **He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man**: that he may bring forth **food out of the earth**;

Psalm 65:9 **Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it**: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: **thou preparest them corn**, when thou hast so provided for it. 10:

Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof.

We say, oh it's raining today while the Psalmist says, "*Thou waterest the earth.*"

In the Gospels God sends His rain and His sun.

Matthew 5:45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

In Matthew, we read the Father feeds the birds.

Matthew 6:26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Psalm 136:25 Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Do you know the UNKNOWN GOD?

Closing Thoughts

God wants you to know Him. He wants you to know His greatness and His goodness. Paul in Acts 17:27 declares, "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us."

The greatness and the goodness of God is intended **to move** and **motivate** people to seek the Lord, **reach out for Him and find Him**. If they seek Him He will be found for He is actually not far from any one of us. God is near, but **He is only near to those who approach Him in humility and truth**.

In Jeremiah 29:13 it says, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

This is **an invitation to seek God** and **a promise to find Him and know Him**. And this invitation is **given to all**. This is so important for men and women, boys and girls to know that **no one is excluded from this invitation to know Him**. He can be known by those **who seek Him**. He can be known by those **who desire to know Him**.

Searching for Him is **not like looking for a needle in a theological haystack**. God is **not hiding**. In fact, the opposite is true. He has been **seeking for you**. He has been **looking for you** for a long, long time. **He sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ into He world seeking for you**.

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Jesus Christ, God's Son appeared in human flesh and dwelt among us, **walked this earth in plain sight** so that **anyone seeking God could find their way to Him**.

God is not playing hide and seek. God wants you to know who He is. He wants you to know that **you are the object of His great love and affection.** He wants you to know that you were created in His image, made by Him and for Him. He wants you to know that your soul will continue to be restless until you find your rest in Him; until you find Him and know Him.

Psalm 145:18 The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. 19: He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.

Call upon Him in truth. Call upon Him today. Call upon Him and be saved. Call upon Him and become a true worshiper!

AMEN!