

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD - Part 2

Sermon Delivered on July 7th, 2019
AM Service

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Text:

Acts 17:22 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

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**. The city was full of idols. 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**.

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 words - 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.

Athens was the **intellectual center of the world** in that day. But despite their intellectual prowess, they were **spiritually ignorant** and **deeply idolatrous**. Despite their **great knowledge** and **wisdom** they have **not known God**.

1 Corinthians 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? **hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?** 21: 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.

Apologist Rob Robinson writes,

*“Scientists cannot discover God by studying the Cosmos alone. All that can be achieved by diligent study of the sciences is an awareness that everything in the universe displays evidence of design. In order to know the designer, **one must study His word** and specifically, the prophecies of the Bible which reveal His Son—the Messiah, Jesus Christ. By the time that you finish this book, having examined the larger part of the Prophetic portion of God’s word which reveals who the Messiah is and what His purpose was in coming to earth, you will have an excellent working knowledge of who God is.”*

The Athenians were very **intellectual** people, **yet they were ignorant of the true and living God**. They were given to the worship of many gods. 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** and was filled with **compassion to the souls of men**.

And so, Paul took the opportunity 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.

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 the Athenians are to become true worshipers, **they must understand the greatness of 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 ...

Stand in awe!

Psalm 33:6 **By the word of the LORD were the heavens made**; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. 7: He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the

depth in storehouses. 8: Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. 9: **For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.**

Isaiah 45:18 For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: **I am the LORD; and there is none else.**

Jeremiah 10:10 But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. 11: Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. 12: He hath made the earth **by his power**, he hath established the world **by his wisdom**, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. 13: **When he uttereth his voice**, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.

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**. After God is done with creation, He was pleased, for He saw everything that He had made, and it was very good. **It was good in the terms of beauty and benefit.**

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

But we 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 expensive offerings of food and drink. But unlike the gods that these people worship, **God is not a receiver but a Giver**. The God who created all things is **not dependent** upon the creature. Paul declares the UNKNOWN GOD is an **all-sufficient God**. He doesn't need a thing! He made the world and everything in it. Paul wanted the men of Athens to know that the true and living God is **the giver of life and breath**. He is the **giver of everything!**

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

III – The Government of God

If the Athenians are to become true worshipers, they must not only understand the **greatness** of God and the **goodness** of God, but they must also understand **the government 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;

Not only is God the **Maker** of heaven and earth, He is **also the Lord** of heaven and earth. God is the Lord of creation; **controlling, sustaining, and preserving** all things. This is the reason **we are not to worry nor fear, for God is in control**.

J. I. Packer says, *“But this is knowledge which Christians today largely lack: and that is one reason why our faith is so feeble and our worship so flabby. We are modern men, and modern men, though they cherish great thoughts of man, have as a rule small thoughts of God. When the man in the church, let alone the man on the street, uses the word ‘God,’ the thought in his mind is rarely of divine majesty”* (Knowing God pp. 73-74).

Yet, Paul says that God is in control of everything.

Colossians 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17: And he is before all things, and **by him all things consist**.

Jesus Christ is not only the One by whom all things came to be, but also the One by whom they **continue to be**. The word “**consist**” in Greek is “**sunistano**” from which we get the word “**sustain**.” All things that Jesus Christ created are now being **sustained, or held together, or kept from falling apart by Him**.

The writer of Hebrews makes a similar statement in ...

Hebrews 1:3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and **upholding all things by the word of his power**, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son not only created all things by His omnipotent Word (Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 11:3) but is now “**upholding all things by the Word of His power**.”

By the way, “**all things**” include **you** and **your life**, which is good news to me. D. DeHaan wrote, *“If God can do that with the Creation, how much more can He keep our lives from falling apart if we surrender to His sovereign rule over our lives! When your world seems to be falling apart, look to Jesus Who holds everything together.”*

How encouraging to know that the all-powerful God who upholds the vast universe is **also watching over you!**

Then Paul gives a concrete example of how God is the Lord of heaven and earth in ...

Acts 17:26 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;

Here, Paul announces **God made every nation of mankind** to inhabit the earth from one man (Adam). God in his wisdom produced the whole human race **from one man** and scattered them all over the face of the earth. This is a blow to the Athenians national pride, because **they believe that they evolved from their native soil** and were not immigrants from some other place or people group. They **thought themselves superior** to all men because they were Greeks who are superior in wisdom and knowledge and **all others were barbarians**.

But this statement “**And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth**” **puts all men on level ground**, because all were created by God. God made the human race **one family, descending from one ancestor, Adam**. Here is the answer to racism. The concept of ‘race’ has **no basis in Scripture** for all men are descended from Adam, through Noah, and therefore **all are members of only one race--the human race**.

D. De Haan writes,

“Every human being is created in the image of God—more like God than any other creature and worthy of honor. To demean that image is to wound another human being at the deepest level. There is but one race: the human race. God has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth (Acts 17:26). We are of the same family, made to be treasured and cherished by one another.” -

Then reading on ...

Acts 17:26 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**;

God not only produced the entire human race from one single man, **He also appointed when and where** every nation would be. God determined beforehand **the exact times and the boundaries** of the places where they would live. The God of creation is also the **God of history** and the **God of geography**. God made the nations. He is the One who determines the times that should exist. He is the One who determines their boundaries.

Psalm 22:28 For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is **the governor among the nations**.

Daniel 4:25c ... till thou know that **the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men**, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

God is Lord of heaven and earth!

IV - The Grace of God

If the Athenians are to become true worshipers, they must not only understand the **greatness** of God, the **goodness** of God, and the **government** of God but they must also understand the **grace of God**. And the grace of God is seen in His command for all men everywhere to repent.

Listen to Paul's closing words in ...

Acts 17:30 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.

God clearly and plainly demonstrated His grace in that, for long, long time, **God was patient with people's sin and ignorance.**

Notice Paul's words,

Acts 17:30 And **the times of this ignorance** God winked at ...

What ignorance was Paul referring to?

Acts 17:29 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.**

The ignorance of thinking of God as an idol made out of gold or silver or stone skillfully designed and formed by silversmiths and craftsmen.

Despite the people's sin of ignorance and idolatry **God held back** His righteous judgment. Paul made a similar statement in his sermon in Lystra. There he spoke of God, who in the past generations permitted all the nations to go their own ways.

Acts 14:15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: 16: **Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.**

Sirs, why are you doing this? We also are only human beings like you! We are here to bring you good news that you should **turn from these worthless idols to the living God**, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

In past generations God allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. But in due time, **God sent His only begotten Son to be the Saviour** of mankind and now commands all men to repent. Now, He commands men and women, boys and girls **to turn from trusting and worshiping their idols** and into **trusting and worshiping the true and living God.** This is the grace of God! Instead of immediately punishing those who worship and serve dead idols, **God offers them forgiveness and salvation.**

Closing Thoughts

Friends, this is the God that Paul declared to the Athenians. This is the God we believe and confess. **Behold your God!** Behold His **greatness**, His **goodness**, His **government**, and His **grace**.

Like Paul, my message to you this morning is that the UNKNOWN GOD has **made Himself known!** This UNKNOWN GOD can be known. **You and I can know Him today**, but **He can only be known through the His Son Jesus Christ.** To know Him is to have eternal life!

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

God is inviting you to know Him in real and deep way. He wants you to know Him. **What would your response be?** As Paul closes his sermon, there were three different responses to his message from Mars' Hill.

Acts 17:32 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.

Some laughed and mocked and did not take the Gospel message seriously. Others were interested but wanted to learn more before making a decision. A small group, though, accepted what Paul preached, believed in Jesus Christ, and were saved. How will you respond today?

I pray that you will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and cleave to Him.

*Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole,
I want Thee forever to live in my soul;
Break down every idol, cast out every foe;
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*Lord Jesus, for this I most humbly entreat;
I wait, blessed Lord, at Thy crucified feet;
By faith, for my cleansing I see Thy blood flow;
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*Lord Jesus, Thou seest I patiently wait;
Come now, and within me a new heart create;
To those who have sought Thee Thou never saidst, No;
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*Whiter than snow; yes, whiter than snow;
Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.*

AMEN!