The Life of Paul
Week 17

When Paul walked into Athens, he was walking into a culture that had its own definition of wisdom, its own definition of strength, and its own understanding of what it meant to live a good life.

Epicureans: They believed the goal of life was to achieve freedom from emotional and physical pain and it would produce the perfect peace. They didn't believe in God's that desired a relationship. They didn't believe in a Heaven or Hell. They elevated personal happiness, comfort, and freedom from emotional or physical pain as the ultimate goals of human life.

Stoics: Stoicism is the modern idol of Self-Sufficiency. I don't need nobody, I can do it or manage it by myself. Stoics would turn spiritual disciplines like praying, Bible reading, fasting, and serving as steps to become self-sufficient. How many times do we think, If I pray enough, read enough, and serve enough I will find be able to control things.

If we're honest, we live in a world that still preaches that same message. Be independent. Don't show weakness. Get control of your emotions. Work harder. Trust yourself. Don't let anybody see you struggle. We can become so focused on being strong Christians that we forget Christianity is about depending on a strong Savior.

Have you become so committed to managing your life that you've stopped depending on God?

So here's the question I want you to wrestle with: Is your faith making you more dependent on God, or just more confident in yourself? The goal of following Jesus isn't to become so strong that you never need Him. Have you ever realized we can turn the very things that are meant to deepen our dependence on God (prayer, reading the word, and serving) into tools for becoming independent and self-sufficient.

We start believing that if we pray enough, read enough Scripture, and serve enough, we can create our own peace, control our circumstances, and become strong enough to ha ndle
Life on our own.

Acts 17:19-34 [19] Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? [20] You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." **(SHOW 3 PICTURES)** This location was

called *Areopagus*, it is a combination of the Greek words for “god of war” and “stone”: In Roman the God of war is called Mars, thus Mars Hill.

If someone wanted to introduce a new philosophy, religion, or foreign deity into Athens, they had to present it to the philosophers on Mars Hill to see if it was worthy of the city. Paul used this opportunity before the Areopagus to deliver one of the New Testament’s most dynamic moments of evangelism.

[21] (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

[22] Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, Could we be a modern day Athens? When Paul said, “I can see you are very Religious, was this a good thing? To the Athenians yes they probably though this was a compliment. Religious doesn’t mean righteous. Being "religious" meant an outward devotion to religious activities, and trying to follow rules to find favor before God. Paul understand that their Religious Acts were a preplacement for a relationship with God.

You can be deeply religious, sincerely devoted, and actively involved in spiritual practice
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and still not know the God you are trying to worship. When we think about religion and compare what they were doing in Athens to what we do today, what does that look like?

- Athenians prayed, worshiped, and sacrificed to different Gods to meet different needs.

  Today we approach God as though he were a collection of Gods, we pray and ask him to provide financially, we pray and ask him to heal us physically, we pray and ask him to protect our family, or solve our problems, but we don’t submit our lives to him daily and allow him to direct our lives.

- Athenians made offerings to gain Godly favor for their lives.

  Today we can treat prayer, giving, church attendance, and serving no more than a spiritual transaction. Like God ok I have now done my part I need you to your and do what I am asking you.

- Athens was so saturated with religious activity. They had temples, altars around every corner. Religious activities were everywhere.

Today we can grow up in church, know the Christian lingo, attend service, serve in ministry while never allowing Jesus to change our priorites, our actions, or surrender control of our lives.

I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship, and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. Yikes, man I love it. Paul is standing on Mars Hill in front of the greatest philosophers and he just says, "YOU ARE IGNORANT OF THE VERY THING YOU SAY IS IMPORTANT TO YOU!

Paul is standing at an altar that is an altar to "The Unknown God." The Athenians didn't want to miss out on a God that they haven't defined yet. Paul is saying, "Let me introduce to you the Unknown God, that you don't know, because I know him." This is what was intriguing to these philosophers. This guy knows the "Unknown God." This is how Paul defines the unknown God.

[24] "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.[25] And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.[26] From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

Paul just said, "The Unknown God:

- **Created the world and everything in it.**
- **Does not live in temples built by human hands**
- **God is not something created by human hands**
- **God doesn't need anything from humans, he gives everything life and breath.**

Paul is so wise, and easier way to say what Paul just said to these philosophers was, "How can something made by human hands adequately represent the God who made human hands? **Paul is showing them that instead of worshiping the God who created them, they are worshiping things they created.**

[27] God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. [28] 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'[b] As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'[c]

[29] "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. [30] In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Paul says, “God use to overlook your ignorance, but now he commands you to repent.” What does that mean? Why does God not overlook people’s ignorance anymore? BUT NOW means something has changed.

Paul is explaining that God was patient with humanity because people hadn’t fully understood God and who he was, and he hadn’t fully revealed himself, but something changed what was it. Something happened in history that caused God to move to requiring repentance and judgement? **31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”**

The change is that God has now revealed His answer to humanity's ignorance through Jesus Christ, and the resurrection confirms that a day of judgment is coming.

(SHOW MAP OF PAUL’S 1st and 2ND Missionary Journey) Before Christ those who believe in God were isolated to Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Syria, Egypt. So this part of the world had really seen or heard a lot about this Unknown God. This the purpose of Paul! The majority of the know world had lived in ignorance of the God Paul was proclaiming. God had revealed himself through creation and Israel. Think about where has all of the miracles happened through the Old Testament? **(MAP)** People had heard but not a lot of revelation.

Now Paul is announcing the resurrection of God in the flesh to the nations, and his name is Jesus. God in very deceive way has revealed who he is to the world, and because of that now repentance of sin is required, because the world cannot deny an empty tomb.

32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” 33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.