



# SERMON SINGLES

## Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

#### **Grave Significance**

Easter | Acts 17:16-34

# **NOTES** INTRODUCTION Today, we are going to look at the seventeenth chapter of the book of Acts. In our key passage, the Apostle Paul is in one of the greatest cities of the world at that time, Athens, and while he was there, he had the same challenge of sharing the truth of the resurrection that we have today. He wanted to bring the sunshine of Easter into the darkness of a lost city that is so much like the lost one we live in today. As we study his words, are going to learn why that empty tomb has such grave significance and how we can most effectively present the gospel to the world. **KEY POINTS** 1. We Must Communicate To The World With Reason The city of Athens was knee-deep in idolatry. They were putting anything and everything above God. But as this was happening, it's important that we pay attention to how Paul responded to their behavior. Does he immediately begin to rebuke them? Scold them? Tell them how dumb they are to worship idols and false gods? No, what he does is brilliant: "So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there." (Acts 17:17) He began to reason with them. The Greek word for "reason" gives us the word "dialogue." It is a word that means to "think things through," "to calculate," or "to consider facts." In other words, he started where they were and simply issued the challenge to bring reason, evidence, and an examination of facts to see what best fit reality and truth. This is a great lesson we can learn from Paul as we strive to share the gospel with the people we encounter today who have put other things above Christ. 2. We Must Call The World To Repentance Do you know why Paul is calling these Athenians to repentance? He doesn't even mention their immoral actions, though there was certainly enough immorality to sink a battleship in that city. He did not talk about their intellectual arrogance. How could they honestly believe that a dead god made of wood or stone could really be of any importance or that a world could just happen? He didn't talk to them about any of those things. Instead, he talked about their idolatrous attitude.

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**NOTES** It is no coincidence that the first two of the Ten Commandments say bluntly and simply, "Don't you have any other gods before me and make for yourself any idols." Yet, those two commandments have been broken by every human being who has ever lived and that is why every human being needs to repent. If we're going to call the world to repentance, we need to be like Paul and call attention to the issue of idolatry in our world. 3. We Must Confront The World With The Resurrection Now we have to go back and see how this entire discussion got started. How did Paul begin to reason with these people and even begin a debate to begin with? "A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, What is this babbler trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.' They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). I love that Paul is speaking to all of these brilliant, educated, intellectual philosophers and scholars - nothing fancy, nothing profound, just a message even a little child can understand -the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Now, why would Paul do that? Because he understood something. He understood that our world needs the message of the resurrection. He understood that believing in the resurrection is necessary for embracing the gift of salvation. So that's where he started with his message, and we should do the same.

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#### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- 1. Do you try to use reason when you're talking to nonbelievers about Christ? If so, how has this worked well for you in the past? If not, how can you start implementing reason in your gospel conversations?
- 2. Where do you struggle with idolatry in your own life? What practical steps can you take this week to begin to reprioritize your life and rid yourself of any idolatry?

3.	Who is someone you know who is yet to be saved that you can pray for and talk to this week in order to share the message of the resurrection with them?

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