

A God Greater and Nearer **Acts 17:16-34**

Acts tells us how the Gospel impacted people from all the different strata of society. Today we will see it go to the leading thinkers of the day.

In Search of Something

Paul had a strong emotional reaction to the idols in Athens: they dishonoured God. But they also mislead the people. Whilst we do not worship stone idols, we still have idols – anything that becomes an ultimate thing for us. But Paul knew that idols can never give you what you are really looking for.

In response, Paul did not withdraw or get angry with people. Instead he engaged with the culture and took the gospel to them in words they understood. As he did so he encountered two groups of philosophers: the Epicureans, who were the agnostics and relativists of their day: you should pursue that which gives you pleasure; and the Stoics who emphasised duty, and doing the right thing. You can see some overlaps with today's world!

When Paul was invited to the Areopagus he addressed their inner need, revealed by their altars to the 'Unknown God.' They knew there was a God, but they knew they didn't know him. It's the god-shaped hole in each of us.

In addressing their sense of need he tells them two things about God.

God is Greater than you Think

Paul gives them a vision of God greater than they could imagine. He is the Creator of everything, the God over all. And God does not need them – rather they need God. God does not need our service, rather he delights to serve us.

God is Nearer than you Think

God has put a desire to find him in every heart. For all God's greatness, God is near and can be found. And yet we are like blind people searching for something, and we don't really know what it is.

By quoting from the Greeks' own poets, Paul says we can learn something about God from looking at ourselves, and he is not like an idol. Instead of making idols, we should turn to God in repentance, not just to have more of God in our lives, but because judgment is coming.

But if we are stumbling in the dark, and face judgment for our sin, we need God to come and find us.

The Man and His Resurrection

Paul says that God has done just that. He does not dwell in a temple, but has come as a man to make himself known to us. He has come so near as to give his life to save us. The resurrection proves that Jesus is not just one more god. The philosophers mock Paul for the resurrection. Paul can take the mocking, because he knew Jesus was mocked for him.

Like Paul we can engage with our culture, even facing mocking, because the resurrection proved that Christ and not the mockers was right.