

## 1 The Areopagus Impulse

- Is God's patience running out?

## 2 Scripture

- Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. (Acts 17:22)
- For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. (Acts 17:23a)
- Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. (Acts 17:23b)

## 3 Scripture

- 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 hands. (Acts 17:24)
- And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. (Acts 17:25)
- From one man (Adam)
  - he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and
  - he determined the times set for them and
  - the exact places where they should live. (Acts 17:26)

## 4 Scripture

- God did this so that men would
  - seek him and
  - perhaps reach out for him and
  - find him,
- though he is not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:27)
- 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' (Acts 17:28a)
- As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' (Acts 17:28b)

## 5 Scripture

- 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 man's design and skill. (Acts 17:29)

## 6 Scripture

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- In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30)
- For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. (Acts 17:31a)
- He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:31b)

## 7 Introduction

- Seems like everywhere Christians turn these days, there's another article or survey about the decline of faith and the rise of secularism in Western culture.
- In fact, according to the latest surveys, there is now in America a rise in those who claim "no religious faith."
- These people are called "Nomes" and in the U.S. they account for 21.6% of the population.
- In other words, statistically speaking, there are just as many "nomes" as there are Roman Catholics in the United States.
- We generally think of something like this as another indication of the rise of secularism, but not so fast.

## 8 Introduction

- According to David Zahl in his book, *Seculosity*, what is really going on in our culture is a rebranding of religion not the extinguishing of religion.
- It is a religion where the ultimate pursuit is happiness or as Zahl describes as the pursuit of "enoughness."

## 9 Introduction

- According to Zahl, "enoughness" is the idea that if we could be just . . .
  - successful enough,
  - happy enough,
  - thin enough,
  - woke enough, or
  - good enough then
  - we would be enough.
- Or in other words, obtaining our perceived "satisfaction goals" is really the most important thing in our lives.
- According to Zahl, it is a quest that has more in common with a religion and the worship of idols than any thing else.

## 10 Athens

- It's not hard to see the connection between the current state of our culture and the story of Paul's encounter in
- In a cosmopolitan city known for its many gods, pursuits, ideas and pleasures, . . .
- Paul will point out the religious impulse in people and redirect it to the "Unknown God" who trumps all the others.

## 11 Athens

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- As Paul waits for his companions Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens, Paul is “deeply distressed to see that the city is full of idols” (v. 16).
- The pantheon of Greek gods and goddesses was well-known in the ancient world, and many of the same gods had been adopted and rebranded by the Romans.

## 12 Athens

- Most of those gods were linked with some aspect of life, be it . . .
  - romance (Aphrodite/Venus),
  - reason (Athena/Minerva),
  - war (Ares/Mars) or even
  - messaging (Hermes/Mercury).
- Religious cults developed around each god or goddess, and their temples were well-known across the Roman world.

## 13 Athens

- In addition to the stone visages of the gods, philosophers were also present on the streets touting their ideas.
- Paul debated in the synagogue with his fellow Jews, but also with Epicureans and Stoics who wrestled over the culture’s worldview.

## 14 Athens

- The Epicureans were upper-class elites — deists who believed the gods weren’t that involved in human life and, if they were, they basically wanted people to be happy.
- Life for the Epicureans involved the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.
- The Stoics, on the other hand, knew too much of a good thing was a bad thing, so they encouraged moderation and self-control.
- They still professed belief in the gods but had issues with the old traditions.

## 15 Today

- According to David Zahl and other, the gods and goddesses of the ancient world are still around today; they’re just not made into statues. Instead they are pursuits.
- In fact, they are things many people believe will give them status, admiration, and freedom (autonomy), much like a god.
- Such as . . .
  - Money
  - Education or Skill Development
  - Hard Work
  - Healthy Living

- Networking, or even
- Politics

## 16 Today

- “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” is a term that was introduced by Christian Smith in the book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (2005).
- The term is used to describe what constitutes common beliefs among American youth and, in many ways, in American culture in general:
  - A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
  - This god wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and in most world religions.
  - The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about one’s self.
  - God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when god is needed to resolve a problem.
  - Good people in general go to heaven when they die.

## 17 Today

- The moral of the story today is that we live in a very religious society.
- We may not have idols made of gold, silver, or stone, but we do have assumptions about how the world works that we’re willing to sacrifice a lot to gain the good life and the adoration of others.
- Unfortunately, this often leaves us empty inside and like the Athenians, leaves us totally unprepared with what is about to happen on the earth.

## 18 The Areopagus

- When Paul spoke to the Athenians it was the result of an invitation from the philosophers who heard him teach in the Agora (marketplace) who wanted to know more about what he was proclaiming.
- According to Luke, All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. (Acts 17:21)
- So when they heard Paul speak, they said, “What is this babbler trying to say?” (Acts 17:18)

## 19 Areopagus

- According to Greek mythology Areopagus was the place where Ares (the god of war) stood trial before the other gods for the murder of Poseidon’s son.
  - Since this was a place the god’s chose to have court, so did the Greeks.
  - The Areopagus served as the meeting place for the Areopagus Court, the highest court in Athens for civil, criminal, and religious matters.
  - Even under Roman rule in the time of the New Testament, the Areopagus remained an important meeting place where philosophy, religion, and law were discussed.
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- The Romans called the Areopagus, Mars Hill.

## 20 **Areopagus (Mars Hill)**

### 21 **The Areopagus**

- So it is here on Mars Hill (Areopagus) the Athenians come to judge Paul's teaching and see if it is worthy of their respect.
- Using the account of the altar of the "UNKNOWN GOD," Paul declares to his listeners that this god is really his God.
- Who is the God?
  - The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth. (Acts 17:24)
  - The God who is not served by human hands because he himself gives all men life and breath, and everything else. [See Acts 17:25]
  - Out of one man he made every nation of men . . . , and
  - Gave them land in which to live, prosper, and find happiness.

### 22 **The Areopagus**

- According to Paul, God did this so that men [out of appreciation] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him . . . (Acts 17:27)
- Paul bases the logic of this argument on how even with the Greeks, God is not far from any of us.
- Therefore, Paul says, 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 man's design and skill. (Acts 17:29)

### 23 **The Areopagus**

- In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30)
- Why?
  - For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man (Jesus) he has appointed. (Acts 17:31)
- And by what proof does Paul have?
  - Paul says, God, has given proof of this to all men by raising him (Jesus) from the dead." (Acts 17:31)
- When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered. (Acts 17:32)

### 24 **Spiritual Ignorance**

- It seems to me that the more educated we become, the dumber we get spiritually.
- When Jesus denounced the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent, he said something very interesting about those who did repent.

- Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. (Luke 10:21)
- In fact, God revealing himself to the humble and not to the arrogant was a common truth in the Bible.
- Why? God hates the proud and arrogant. [See Proverbs 8:13]

## 25 **Spiritual Ignorance**

- Even today, worldly education can easily cause people to think more highly of themselves than they should.
- It puffs them up where they have an exaggerated sense of their own importance, abilities, or position.
- They then look down on everyone around them judging themselves as superior and exempt from any self-introspection.
- The Pharisees and Sadducees had the same problem.
- Even though they too were highly educated in religion, Jesus referred to them as blind guides who strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. [See Matthew 23:16-24]

## 26 **Arrogance**

- No only was the resurrection not part of the worldview of the Greeks, but so was the message of the cross.
- For them, they didn't understand that surrendering to the will of God was a sign of victory, not defeat.
- To a Greek church in Corinth, Paul wrote;
  - For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)
  - For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." (1 Corinthians 1:19)
  - Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

## 27 **Idolatry in the Past**

- However, I want to also point out to you that in Paul's discourse to the Athenians, the main point to his audience was a warning.
- He was warning them that the "UNKNOWN" God who has been kind and generous to them in the past, is running out of patience.
- In fact, he is commanding everyone to repent as the resurrection of Christ proves.

- Meaning, that the man who predicted his own death and resurrection also promised the coming of God's Kingdom when the wicked will be judged with righteousness.

## 28 **Idolatry Today**

- However, some would argue that idolatry today is just as bad as it was then.
- In fact, not only are idols those things that replace God in our lives, but those things we think will give us true happiness and personal fulfillment, outside of serving God.
- According to Jeffery Curtis Poor, Following Jesus, when a good thing becomes an ultimate thing, it may be an idol in our life, which we must repent.
- To identify that thing or things, Jeffery, gives us four questions to ask ourselves.

## 29 **Idolatry Today**

- Four Questions to Ask Ourselves?
  - Where do I spend my time?
  - Where do I spend my money?
  - Where do I get my joy?
  - What is always on my mind?
  - If money, our identity, entertainment, sports, love interest, comfort, social status, or political affiliation is more important to us than serving God, we may need to work on our faith.

## 30 **Idolatry Today**

- Tim Keller in his book Counterfeit Gods says an idol is anything
  - more important to you than God,
  - anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, and
  - anything that you seek, which only God can give.
- A real wise person will run from idols, but those who are wise in their own eyes won't.
- In fact, they will not only embrace idols, but will also scorn the cross of Christ for both its redemptive and regenerative powers.

## 31 **Conclusion**

- So then,
  - Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?
  - Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1 Corinthians 1:20)
- Therefore, This is what the LORD says:
  - Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: . . .

- that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23–24)

## 32 Conclusion

- In the epistle of 1 John, the Apostle John writes on how important it is to have a solid relationship with God by walking in the light and remaining in the truth.
- Even then, he says this is the “last hour,” and a “new day” is already starting to dawn.
- So then John says, . . . dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. (1 John 2:28)
- Then at the end of his epistle the Apostle John says something that seems important for us today as it was then.
- He says, Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21)
- Why? According to Paul’s speech at the Areopagus, God’s patience is running out!