

God's Man Confronts Satan's City

Acts 17:16-34

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Now I have entitled this message for my own sake, God's Man Confronts Satan's City. It's the story of a man and it's the story of a city. Not just any man, the Apostle Paul; not just any city, Athens. Maybe there was never a greater man and maybe there was never a greater city. And here they meet head on.

Now in our study in the book of Acts we've been travelling with the Apostle Paul and company on the second missionary journey. The church was established in Antioch which of course was the real new church outside of the area of Palestine and the church was established there as a missionary base to reach the rest of the world. And Paul was sent out from there. The first time with Barnabas and the second time with Silas and here they are on that second trip. They've been around and through Galatia, they've crossed the little sea and they arrived in Philippi and founded a church. Then Thessalonica and founded a church. Berea and founded a church but all the way along there's tremendous persecution and Paul has had to flee for his life. He left Luke in Philippi to carry on the work. And having fled from Thessalonica to Berea the people in Thessalonica pursued him to Berea and he had to flee from there and he left Silas and he left Timothy and now he's in Athens. They've hustled him off and he's alone. And he's been hunted and he's been hated and he's been hassled and by the time he gets to Athens he's just going to wait until Timothy and Silas come and be with him. And some would tell us it's the low point of his life at least in his ministry. He's alone, he's facing a monumental city, he's lost all of those who are his friends having left them along to carry on the work, he's been persecuted, he can't really be with the believers he himself brought into the kingdom and he senses the loneliness but it's about then when he's at his lowest we learn the great principle which he reiterated later when he said, "When I am weak", what? "Then I am strong." And he was about to see God move in strength.

Now I want us to set the picture, it's a man and a city. It's a simple thing. One man against one city. Look at the man. Let's see what kind of a man he was. He was a Jew. And as a Jew he was beyond just being a Jew he was a Pharisee, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a student of the great teacher Gamaliel. He was expert in the law, he was expert in ceremonies, he was a leader, -..he was a teacher, he was an expert in the Old Testament. Beyond being a Jew he was a Roman, he was a Roman citizen. And with his Roman citizenship came that kind of special skill in secular affairs that belonged to the Romans, that special knowledge of the military and of politics. Beyond that he was a Greek, not by virtue of his heritage but by virtue of his environment, he was raised in a place called Tarsus which was tremendously influenced by Greek culture. He was a Hellenistic man, he was exposed to Greek art and Greek philosophy. And so he had all of the bests of all of the worlds. He was a man who was cosmopolitan in every sense. And adding to those particular things he had a brilliant and keen mind. He had an intense commitment to the cause he believed in. He was a

tireless pursuer of any goal that he set. He was a matchless orator. He was a fearless preacher. He was a brilliant question and answer dialogue man. He was well read, he was well travelled. He was an extraordinary man. An indication of the brilliance of his knowledge and of the insight that he had in the things that are beyond just Jewishness is indicated in verse 28 of Acts 17. It says, "For in Him we live and move and have our being as certain also of your own prophets have said," that's a quote from one of the Greek poets. And then he says another one; "For we are also His offspring." That's a second quote from a Greek poet. He makes two cites, Aratus and Epaminondas, I think were the two Greeks who said that. The amazing thing is this. Here is Paul the Apostle, the Christian who quotes from obscure stanzas, he quotes obscure lines in poetry by Greeks. Well, that's a well read man. He's standing on his feet there adlibbing, as it were, and he calls into memory quotations in obscurity from Greek poets.

And so this is a man who's well read, this is a very, very cosmopolitan man, a man who can drop his message in front of any backdrop because he's aware of cultural and economic and religious backgrounds.

Now beyond the man there is the city. It isn't just any city it's Athens. And some historians tell us that Athens in its prime in the 4th and 5th century B.C. was the greatest city in the world and maybe never has been equaled since. The art and the literature and the architecture and the philosophies that existed in Athens in those years has never had a match. Now Athens is in Greece. Athens was in the province of Achaia and technically Corinth was the capital of the province but Athens was the major city.

In fact, in all the world that day. At one time, in terms of culture, Rome had become the political center, Athens had lost a little of its political glow that it had when Greece ruled the world under Alexander but Athens hadn't lost any of its intellectual or philosophical or religious primacy. In fact, some historians said Athens at the time of Paul was the intellectual center and the university of the world. The minds of that part of the world congregated in Athens. In fact, it was such - it was such a proud city that it even called its university The Eye of Greece and the Mother of Arts. And Athens offered a home, incidentally, to almost every god in existence. In a place called the pantheon they had a god for everything. They had every god there and every public building in Athens was a shrine to a god. The record house, for example, like the Hall of Records today, was dedicated to the Mother of gods. The Council House housed a statue of Apollo and Jupiter and everything was religious. As I told you last week, some comments were made such as - You can easily find a god in Athens rather than a man. Gods were everywhere. And it was a pagan city in the fullest sense, super cultured. And all of its art had false deities in mind, great monuments were built, great beautiful buildings were built as tributes to gods. Apart from its religion was its tremendous philosophical bent. Socrates and Plato were from Athens. Athens was the adopted city of Aristotle, Epicurus who founded the Epicureans and Zeno who founded the Stoics. And here was the great mind of the world as it were. And from it came the directions that resulted in the activities of other parts of the world. So Athens was some city. Master-pieces of architecture, masterpieces of art, sculpture, the greatest orators who ever lived gave orations in Athens. Well all of the breathtaking beauty and magnificence of that city it still was a city without God. It was a city which had a god for everything and then you know what the terrible, unbeliev-able, emptiness of that kind of religion is? It had a god for everything and then after they had all of those gods they had another god called the unknown god" just because all the gods they had never satisfied them they still looked for another one. You see, that's the absolute frustration for idolatry.

Now emotionally at the time Paul comes to this particular city he is really at a low ebb but God is about to do a mighty thing as he confronts the city. This is the cross verses the cults. Now I want you to see just two major points in your outline, you've got it there with you if you want to follow and we'll pull some principles out of here. You and I live in a city. We live in a city not unlike Athens. It's got people in it, it's got culture, it's got certain features. And I think if we look at Paul here we may see some really great insights on how to head-on into our city and make a dent. Paul, one man, really put a dent in Athens. And you can do the same in your city given certain things.

Now we're going to consider how Athens affected Paul and secondly, how Paul affected Athens. This is a picture of impressions.

Now first of all how did Athens effect Paul? Paul has arrived there, in this city he's undoubtedly heard about, that is such a famous city and everybody knows about Athens and he's there, - what does it do to him? How does it affect him? First of all, it aroused his spiritual interests, I want you to notice that, and the key to that is the word spiritual, you need to underline that. It aroused his spiritual interests. In a few months some of us in Grace Church are going to take a tour to the Holy Land and one of the stops along the way is going to be the city of Athens. And we're going to have the experience of standing in that city and looking at this glorious architecture. You say, - Well not much is left. But enough is left to see the genius. And we'll have the opportunity to just sort of see what is left of the majesty that once was this great city; ancient temples, monuments, sculpture that really is beyond description, fantastic art forms were left there. And we'll be able to run our minds back to the great days of the philosophers and all the orators and everything and it will be kind of absorbing. Well, can you imagine and this is how Athens effects everybody but you can imagine in Paul's day when everything was alive and vital and the buildings weren't in ruins they were real and the marble and the gold glittered@ from one end of the city to the next. And the statues were all over every-where and the thing was absolutely breathtaking. And you can imagine going to that city and just being absolutely drowned in the wonder of the culture and the wonder of the arts, the wonder of the architecture and everything that was there. And I want you to see how it affected Paul.

Look at verse 16; "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, he was just going to wait awhile until Silas and Timothy arrived, "His spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city", and here's the literal Greek, "Full of idols". You know what impressed Paul? He didn't say, - Oh, look at this place, look at that building over there, it is terrific and man, do I like this art. He looked over Athens and he said, - I have one comment about this city - it's full of idols. That was his own comment. You know comment? Because he could see pass the superficial, why that was his couldn't he? He had the ability to look beyond the cultural facade and see the reality of men's hearts. There's not a line in Paul's writings about architecture. Paul doesn't say, - You know, I went over here to this city and what a terrific place, there was a lovely little building and a nice little thing, he never does that. He isn't even interested in superficialities. I mean - but have you ever analyzed, and I've done this, you know, I fly to some city and I say - and my first reaction is - What a terrific place, look over there and look over there, see. I'm on that same superficial wave length, see. Paul would fly to a city and he'd look around and he'd say, - You know something? This place is full of lost people. That was his reaction. He had that spiritual perception. In fact, Renan, the French atheist said, "That ugly little Jew abused Greek art by describing those statues as idols." See. He could have cared less about all that stuff. He only saw the lostness of men. There was a guy who visited Athens and visited Greece fifty years later his name was Pausanias and he was so overwhelmed with the place that he wrote six volumes describing it. You know what Paul says to describe it? It's full of idols - period, paragraph. And here was a man who was indifferent to the things that usually pre-occupied us, wasn't he. We are usually

satisfied with the facade. But Paul saw past to the spiritual issue. Beloved, that's the mark of a spiritual man, isn't it? He sees things with spiritual eyes. Man looks on the outward appearance, God looks where? On the heart. How do you see your city? A bricklayer comes into a building and what is the first thing he's going to notice? He's going to see if there's any crooked bricks. An architect sees a building and he immediately sees it from an architectural standpoint. A street cleaner arrives in a new city and immediately looks in the gutter. See how the street cleaners are doing. We view the world from our perspectives don't we? You know, I find this in my own life. I meet an individual, you know what my first thought is? I wonder where he is spiritually. That is the first thought that enters my mind. Sometimes it's a little difficult to project that to a whole city but Paul had the kind of mind that when he saw something he saw it in its spiritual context, you see? Boy, I wish we could do that. I wish we had spiritual eyes so that we just wouldn't be contented to see the glitter and facade of a cultural class of well-dressed, well-bred society but we'd see down deep the lostness of men that are doomed and damned to a Christless eternity. That's what hurt Paul. That's what aroused him. He didn't get real excited about the superficial things. In Revelations chapter 3 we have a little insight on how that kind of spiritual sight works. Revelations 3, you remember the church at Laodicea verse 17, and the lord says, "You say I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing", that's our world, isn't it? Got it all, and He says, "And you don't know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked! Our Lord saw that the false church at Laodicea with spiritual eyes. Beloved, somewhere

along the line we have to look at the world like that. Paul walked into this town, he saw two things; one, full of idols verse 16, - two, verse 23, "For as I passed by and beheld your devotions I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore you ignorantly worshipped." The only thing he commented on about the art of that place was the statue to the UNKNOWN GOD. How pathetic, how unfulfilling. You've got all these gods and you're still looking, for another one. That's unsatisfaction, isn't it? That's all he saw. He saw the spiritual lostness of these people. I hope I can see like Paul. I think I get into my little car and I putt-putt down here and arrive at the church. I drive through the city and don't think a thing. I don't think about it. God, give us spiritual eyes.

How do you see your city? How do you see your block? Do you see it like Athens? Our people have filled our city with idols to imaginary deities and they are - they are lost. Wholly it says in verse 16, look at it, w-h-o-l-l-y, full of idols. The terrible, terrible, lostness of men. Jesus sat over the city of Jerusalem, what a lovely spot, what a lovely spot to sit upon the Mount of Olives and just look over the city of Jerusalem and you know what Jesus did? He cried and He saw Jerusalem and He said, "Oh Jerusalem, Jeru-salem", He said, "How oft I would have gathered thee". He says, - You're the ones that killed the prophets but how oft I would have gathered thee as a hen gathers her brood - and He cried didn't He? Because He saw the lostness of Jerusalem. Paul saw the lostness of Athens.

And so his interest was aroused. Second thing, Athens impressed Paul secondly - it stirred his emotions. It aroused his interest - one, his spiritual interest - two, it stirred his emotions. Verse 16, "His spirit was stirred in him." There's that word paroxysm again or provoked. He was really torn up inside, it's used in 15:39 of Acts in the noun form to speak of a sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas, a real agitation. Paul was stirred up. You say, - Paul, what stirred you up? That city full- of Idols. He got emotional. You know what he didn't like about idolatry? Because it stole the glory that belonged to God, right? God deserved the glory and Paul couldn't stand the fact that God wasn't glorified. See? He saw all these idols and, and it began to eat him up. He got emotional about God and he said - God is not being glorified. You know, he was so preoccupied with the glory of God,

we've covered this over and over again but it's here, it dominates the Scripture. Paul said, - I'm preaching Christ, the obedience of the faith for the sake of His name, for the sake of His glory. I Cor. 10 Paul says, - I don't care what you do even if it's eating and drinking do it all - what? To the glory of God. Paul went out to win people to Jesus Christ. Do you know why he did that? II Cor. 4:15 tells you why, listen; "For all things are for your sakes for the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many rebound for the glory of God." He says if more people get saved by grace that just makes a bigger thanksgiving choir to give God glory. He was busy leading people to Christ in order that they might give God glory. In Philippians he says in chapter 2 verse 9 concerning Christ; "Wherefore, God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord", why? "To the glory of God", you see. The single glory of God. There's no other God, that's Paul's pre-occupation. In I Timothy chapter 2 he says this, listen this is 3 and follow-ing; "God our Savior who will have all men to be saved and come to the know-ledge of the truth", why - Paul, why all men to be saved? Next verse, "For

there is one God." You see? Paul was totally absorbed with one God who deserves all the glory and when he saw all these people worshipping false gods it ate him up. That's how much he loved the glory of God. Oh Israel was worshipping Baal and Elijah was really angry, oh how Elijah was hurt. He saw them worshipping Baal- this is what he said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord the God of hosts", see. And what provoked Elijah and what provoked Paul is what ought to provoke us. They were jealous for the name of God. Paul was burning inside. Henry Martyn that great missionary to India said he had a dream and in his dream he saw a Hindu god and at the foot of the Hindu god was Jesus bowing down to the Hindu god in his dream. He said that excited more horror in me than I could ever express. He said I was cut to the soul at that blasphemy. "I could not endure existence if Jesus wasn't glorified, it would be hell to me if He were to be always thus dishonored." And that's how he felt. And a Moslem one time asked him, "Why do you feel like that about the glory of God?" And Martyn says, "If somebody plucks out your eyes there's no saying why you feel pain it's feeling. It is because I am one with Christ that I am dreadfully wounded." See. Martyn knew what it was to love the glory of God and the glory and majesty of Christ and he didn't want it to share with anybody and that's the way Paul felt. He saw those false gods and it tore him up. Now watch, here are two great motives for really making a dent in your city. One - when you see the lostness of men and - two -when you really contemplate the glory of God. That's looking at it from both sides. The human side, you see how lost men are. The divine side, you see how unjust it is for God not to be glorified. I hope you love His name that much to care about His glory. That was Paul. He was in a rage. I mean he was furious. Every time he went - every time he saw an idol I imagine he got mad. Just - you know. I know how he feels. I'd like to go over there with a sledge-hammer, you know, and just knock those heads off those idols. You say, - Well you shouldn't get mad. The Bible says you're not to get angry. No, there's the right kind of anger. You know, you have a right to get mad over certain things, don't you? Till just give you a couple of very interesting illustrations.

One is Exodus 32 and you'll be familiar with it, I'm sure. Moses has been up in the mountain getting the law of God and he comes down and in Exodus 32:19 he comes down and then he looks and he can't even believe what he sees. He sees all the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf, you see. And Aaron is the ring-leader. Verse 19, "It came to pass as he came near the camp he saw the calf and the dancing, and look what happened, "And Moses' anger burned," Moses got righteously indignant which is in the vernacular - spiritually ticked. And he got those - he had those tables of stone that God had actually carved out the ten commandments and he was so furious that he smashed those things and he - this is what he did, he took the calf which they had made and he burned it in the fire and after it had all melted down he smashed it into powder, he scattered it on the

water and he made the children of Israel drink it. Boy, you say, he was mad! Listen, he was jealous for the glory of God.

In Numbers 25 oh, we really see righteous indignation. Numbers 25, "In Israel the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab." This was a thanks to Balaam, that would-be-prophet-for-sale, and they started committing harlotry with Moab and God was really upset. They called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods and the people did eat and bow down to their gods, Israel worshipping false gods. Watch what happens, "And Israel joined himself unto Baal-Peor and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." God was so mad and He said to Moses, "Take all the heads of the people and hang them up". That's serious. "The fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay everyone of his men that were joined unto Baal-Peor." Slay them all and hang their heads up. God does not tolerate competition. God gets very angry when glory is taken from Him to give to Satan.

In Psalm 69:9 this is what the psalmist said - David, "For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." David was getting torn up because of his zeal for God. Do you know who quoted that Psalm later on? Jesus. And you know when He quoted it? When He cleared the temple. He got angry in the Temple and He threw them out. He started smashing and throwing tables over.

You know old Jeremiah, he got hot too. He was kind of a mild guy, he cried a lot but he got mad too. But in Jeremiah 20 verse 8 he says, "For since I spoke I cried out - I cried, Violence and spoil because the Word of the Lord was made a reproach and a derision and I said, I will not make mention of Him nor speak anymore in His name." He says, I'm not even going to talk about God anymore, I'm so - these people won't hear me. And then I love this, he says, "But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones and I couldn't stop", see. He was so angry about what was going on he just couldn't keep it in he had to say it, you know. Sure, there's a place to get angry. I hope you look at your city and get angry. I hope you get angry at Satan's activity at setting up all kinds of false gods that people are bowing down to. How did Paul look at the city? One, he saw the lostness of men. Two, he saw the glory that God deserved. There's a third thing and this is really the best of all. It compelled his service. Yes, it aroused his spiritual interest and it stirred his emotion but best it compelled his service. You can get emotionally involved and do nothing. Right? You have. So have I. I'm so glad he did something. Verse 17, "Therefore", what's the therefore there for? To point backwards. Because of the lostness of men and because of the glory of God "He disputed in the synagogue with the Jews". And the word there is *dialogomai*, he had a dialogue with the Jews, and when he got done in the synagogues, well of course in the synagogue he also talked with the devout persons that would be Gentiles attached to the synagogue, and then he left there and he went to the marketplace daily and with them that met him he had the same dialogue. The literal Greek for them that met him is anybody who happened to cross his path. He just was cold turkey. He got into the market that place and just mixed it up. Now the exciting thing about this guy is he actually did something when he got stirred up. He went running out there and he went right to the synagogue and he preached to the Jews and the devout Gentiles and he went to the marketplace, he gave the Judaism backdrop and he put Christ in that context. He gave the Gentile picture and fit Christ into that. He was busy. You know what most of us would do? And I look at myself, you know, well, I've got to reach my city. So we'd have a committee meeting. We'd got to plan it out. You know what he did - he never had a committee meeting, I never saw Paul ever in a committee meeting. The only time he ever shows up anywhere is in Jerusalem. He's not interested in a committee, he does things, see. How do you win the world? Well, you just go out there and you find just whoever's around and you just tell them about Jesus Christ, see. People say to me often, - Do you have an evangelism

program in your church? I say, - I sure hope so. I'm not too sure about it but I think we've got some going. I don't want an evangelism program organized by me I want an evangelism program done by you, you see, that's the idea. Evangelism is to be done not planned.

Anyway, Paul just took off and he was preaching everywhere, in the market-place and he was really serving Christ and this is the thing that's so important - Not only that you're motivated but something comes out of your motivation. The marketplace is interesting, it's the word agora, and in the towns in those times they had a center place, maybe a large area, court kind of a thing, you know, the public buildings were there, the temples were there and around this big area would be a colonnade. And in the colonnade would be little shops and farmers would even bring on the outside areas their cattle in and any goods they'd raised on the countryside and it was a big marketplace. And in the middle area philosophers would walk around with their little groups, you know, and there was always a group of people in the agora, many different kinds, you know, there were peripatetic teachers, philosophers, magicians, hucksters, you know, step right up, folks - that kind of thing, sleight of hand artists

where you could gamble and all kinds of things. And so Paul just, man, after he'd finish at the synagogue, we don't know what happened there, he slid into the agora and off he went. And anybody who came across his path - whom he chanced to come across - is literally what it says, he communicated. He preached the gospel. It says at the end of verse 18, "He preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection." Now they had a real hang-up on the resurrection so he hit the issue. He always hit the issue. If he went to the synagogue if he preached about a dead, resurrected Messiah. He went to Athens and they had a hang-up on resurrection he preached on resurrection. And we'll see that more next week. But the beauty of the thing is simply this, Paul had his interests aroused, his emotions stirred but he actually turned it into service. That's critical.

Alright, now that's how Athens affected Paul. It aroused him, it stirred him and it compelled him to served. Second point, How did Paul effect Athens? You say, - Boy, it's one thing for Athens to affect him it's something else for him to affect it. I mean that is really trying to sweep away the Pacific Ocean with a broom. How could you ever have an effect on a city like that, one guy? Well, he wasn't really just one guy, he was one Spirit-controlled guy, the power of God was in him. So look what happens. He affected Athens four ways, three first of all and finally a fourth. The first way he affected Athens was and I just use the word contempt - contempt verse 18. "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and the Stoics encountered him. And some said, "What will this babbler say?" Stop there. Look at this babbler, the literal word is seed-picker. What does this seed-picker know? See. Now, he ran into two groups. First of all it was the Epicureans they got their name from Epicurus who was a philosopher in Athens who has started this movement. He was born in about 342 B.C. so he was long dead and this is like 400 years later but his movement is still going great. Now Epicureans just to give you a little identification believed - 1. that everything happened by chance. They believed everything happened by chance. There was no real reason or rhyme for anything and nobody was running the show. They were the rationalists, see. Second thing, death was the end of everything. You died and that was it. Three, there were gods, they believed in all the gods but they figured the gods were remote and didn't get involved and didn't care. Now if you believe everything happens by chance and death is the end of everything and nobody up there cares then the fourth principle of Epicureans is very easy, - pleasure is the main purpose in life. Translated into the modern day - grab all the gusto you can get - you only go around once. See. Which is a very, - which is a beer version of existentialism. Pleasure is the chief end of men. Listen if you believe everything happened by chance and everything was random and you believed that death was the end of everything and you just went into the grave and it was over and you believed that there weren't any gods who cared

what you did, you'd be an Epicurean too, wouldn't you? Atheistic rationalism ends up in pleasure is the chief end of men. Grab it here, grab it now, do your own thing, live it up. This is ancient existentialism. Well, on the other hand you had the Stoics. They were the nice guys. They weren't out each for themselves. They were sort of the humanitarian bunch. They believed, first of all, that everything was God. The trees were God, the dirt was God, they were God, everything was God, the buildings were God, everybody, the birds were God, the snakes were God, the fish were God, the water was God, pantheism. You know what pantheism is? It's atheism. If everything's God, nothing's God. So everything is God. Secondly, everything is the will of God. No matter what happens in the will of God wills it. They were fatalists. See. The will of God everything. And they believed every so often the world disintegrated and then started all over again. It goes through that cycle every so many years. And, of course, for them believing that every-thing was God, everything was sort of divine and they were Gods and they had to act like Gods and they had to treat everybody else like Gods. So they were a real humanitarian bunch. The authentic voice of the Stoics is heard in the called words of Henley who wrote this poem invictus. Have you ever heard it?

Listen to his word. This is Stoic philosophy. "Out of the night that covers me black is the pit from pole to pole T thank whatever Gods may be for my unconquerable soul." See. "In the fell clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud, under the bludgeoning of chance my head is bloody but unbowed. Beyond this place of wrath and tears looms but the horror of the shade and yet the menace of the years finds and shall find me unafraid. It matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishments the scroll, T am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." What a bunch of boloney. That was - the Stoic was God, you see, everything was Gods will being expressed. And he was invincible. Now the Epicurean had a little different view. That's indicated in Swinburne's poem. This is the Epicurean view. "From too much love of living, some hope and fear set free, we thank with brief thanksgiving whatever gods may be that no life lives forever, that dead men rise up never that even the weariest river winds somewhere to the sea. That's the end. It's a lot of platitudes. Love of living was the Epicurean. Just live it up, do your thing. The Stoic was that God that unconquerable part of the universe. And so these two groups run into Paul. And the first reaction is this babbler and as T said this word means seed- picker. It was referred to a gutter-sparrow. The gutter-sparrows, you know, they go around and pick up little bits and pieces and scraps of stuff and, you know, that's how they live. And so this common term which really refers to gutter-sparrows became used for paupers who prowled around the marketplace, parasites who lived off what they could pick up. And it was translated into the philosophy thing and what they were saying was, - Paul, you're not telling us a philosophy you're nothing but a philosophical seed-picker. You've picked up bits and pieces of philosophy and religion and slapped it all together and you're trying to pawn it off as knowledge. See. It's like calling him an eclectic in a negative sense. What an uneducated babble you're trying to pawn off, bits and scraps of all kinds of random philosophies and religions being passed off as information that is true. And so they mocked him. You know, it's an old story with Christianity but everybody who really believes the Bible and really preaches it at one time or another runs into the mockers who say you're entell - you're intellectually not with it, you - you just, I mean, that's old wives tales, that's for old ladies and little kids that believe that Christianity bit. I mean, we intellectuals we're pass that. You know, I get that when I go on a college campus. And I don't pose to be an intellectual. But, you know you always hear well, you know Christianity is not even intelligent, well, it's not even reasonable all that stuff in a Bible. But, you know, I feel in good company because, you know, that's what they said to Jesus In John 7:15, you know, Jesus taught and when He taught it was astounding. And you know what the Jews said? How can He know these things? He's never been to our school. See. And then the disciples on the day of Pen-tecost when they spoke in all those languages they said, - This cannot be these are Galileans, you know, they're those hay-seeds from the north, what do they know? How can they speak these languages? But you know what Paul

said I Cor. he said this, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish", what? "Foolishness" In chapter 3 verse 18 he said, "Let no man deceive you, if any man among you seems to be wise in this age let him become a fool that he really may become wise for the wisdom of this world is but foolishness with God." He says, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, they are vain therefore let no man glory in men." The world thinks it's wise but it isn't. So the first group mocked and there have always been mockers. And you'll go out in your city and you'll be aroused and you'll be stirred and you'll be compelled to serve and you'll preach Christ and invariably someone will laugh. The second group they weren't contemptuous, they were questioning. Verse 18, "Others", it says in the middle of the verse, "Others, they didn't mock, others said, Hmm, he seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods because he preached Jesus and the resurrection." Hey, new gods, gang. See? They were really big on lots of gods and, in fact, it's interesting that the plural is used, since he only preached Jesus and the resurrection how did they get a plural out of it, strange gods? One historical explanation is that the word for resurrection is anastasis from which we get Anastasia which is a feminine name now days, or used to be. I don't know if it's used much anymore. That were what they really thinking what they were hearing was that there were two new gods being presented, Jesus and Anastasia because they had a way of personifying deities. They had god of piety, and god of mercy and the god of modesty, so they may have just assumed that resurrection was just some feminine god that went along with Jesus who was a masculine god. Whatever their assumption they didn't listen very well. He preached Jesus and the resurrection. They didn't really hear it that way apparently which is typical. But they were curious in terms of questioning. He seems to be a setter forth of strange gods. And they were looking for something new. This was interesting for them.

There's a third group. They went beyond questioning they really got curious. We'll just call this the curious bunch. Verse 19, "This group got him and took him to Areopagus and they said, May we know what this new doctrine whereof thou speakest is?" Tell us about this new thing. You say, Oh terrific, they're under spiritual conviction. No way. No spiritual conviction at all. "For thou bringest strange things to our ears, we would know therefore what these things mean." You say, - Oh, isn't this terrific, a revival is beginning. I say - no. Look at verse 21, the Holy Spirit just puts a beautiful little thing here. "For all the Athenians and strangers who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." They weren't convicted. It was another new deal. "They lived in the lust of the mind", Ephesians 2 . You know that? The desires of the mind, they were just - their fulfillment came in intellectual gains. And here was a new god and a new thing. And so they hauled Paul up - I'm sure there were seed-pickers all over the place but they didn't make it to the Areopagus. Paul must have really been unusual. And I know he was. The Areopagus was the name of the court. The Areopagus is the name of a court. The word is Areopagus in the Greek. If you translate Areopagus into English it's the Hill of Aros. The Latin for Aries is Mars so Mars Hill is just translating Areopagus and adding the Latin form. So really Areopagus ought to be in verse 22, it should say Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus. It is not a place it's a court. It happened to meet on a hill called Areopagus, at one time it didn't by the time Paul lived. And so Paul goes to this court called the Areopagus made up of at least thirty men who were the real supreme judges in this area in Athens. They took care of murders, they took care of all kinds of things. Here was a new guy with a new deal and he needed to be approved, he needed to be checked out by the court 'cause they protected the gods against blasphemy. And so they needed to hear this thing to see if it was legit and could be added to the plethora of stuff that was already available. You know it's such a dangerous thing to get into that intellectual game thing, you know. And there are a lot of people like that in our world today, intellectualism is a god. They bow to the god of the mind. Paul said to the Colossians 2:8, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit". You know, you can become like sour milk if you stay around that stuff too long, philosophy - watch out for it. I Timothy 6:20 Paul said to Timothy, - "Hey, Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust and avoid

profane and vain babblings and oppositions of knowledge falsely so called." Don't get hung up in debates with people who have no real knowledge, don't waste your time with that vain babblings. In II Timothy 2:16 he says, "Shun provane and vain babblings for they will increase unto more ungodliness", listen, "and their word will eat as a gangrene", and then he says, Remember Hymenaeus and Philetus, it happened to them. So these guys were just playing mental games and they hauled Paul up there but what was so neat about it is that once he got up there it didn't matter why they got him there God used him. It's really exciting. So Paul gets up there in verse 22 and he preaches a mini-theology through verse 31 on God, the person of God, Christ and the resurrection. And you say, - What happened? Well, T told you, some contempt, some questioning, some curiosity and fourthly - conversion some people got saved. I - that's so exciting. You say, - Who got saved? Look down at verse 34. First of all Dionysius the Areopagite, one of the guys in the court got saved. And adding to that a woman by the name of Damaris who was given no title or credentials indicating a common woman. Here we see the beauty of the gospel it reaches the highest level of Athens and the lowest level, the common woman in town. Isn't that beautiful that two people at those ends of the post got saved on the same sermon? That's the power of the gospel to bridge the gaps. But, you know, before the conversions ever happened there was the same old responses.

Verse 32, "And when they heard", he just preached this sermon about the resurrection and about Christ, "Some mocked". They mocked. The Epicureans didn't believe in a resurrection at all they thought death was the end of it. The Stoics believed in a spiritual resurrection but not a physical one so they wouldn't buy it either. So here Paul preaches the resurrection and they laugh at him. That's nothing new. Remember in Acts chapter 2 they laughed and they said, - Oh, you guys are drunk, verse 13. And over in Acts 26 with Agrippa and this is a most interesting account of Agrippa and Festus, Paul's defense there. In 26:8 he has told Agrippa about the resurrection and Agrippa has not believed it and he says in 8, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" Old Agrippa says, - Oh, Paul, you don't believe that! Well, what's so incredible about that. Later on Festus says the same thing, verse 24, "Festus said with a loud voice", he yelled, he says, "Paul, you're beside yourself much learning has made you mad." You're out of your tree, Paul, you know what you're saying? Paul says, "I'm not mad, noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. "You know, there has always been and there always will be people who mock the gospel, it's expected. The sad thing is the comedy always ends in tragedy, doesn't it? Always ends in tragedy. You know, in the last days in which we live we're going to have to expect more of this. In Jude 17, just listen to this, "Beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ", listen, 'How they told you there should be mockers in the last time who should walk after their own ungodly lusts, these are they who separate themselves sensual having not the Spirit." Expect it there shall be mockers in the last times. But believe me the end of it is tragic, tragic. 11 Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." There were not only mockers but this time after his sermon in the middle of the Areopagus there were questioners. "Others said, "We will hear thee again of this matter!" You know, that's almost as deadly as mocking the gospel. That's procrastinating. That's saying, - Well, that's interesting, I may look into that. You know what Felix said? It's very interesting, Paul, when I have a convenient season, what? I'll call for you, Acts 24:25- Oh my, it's a dangerous thing to postpone the gospel, to postpone faith in Jesus Christ, to hear again at a later

time. Today is the day of salvation, Paul said. In Hebrews chapter 3 it says, "Harden not your hearts as in the day of provocation." What you're going to do - do today, Hebrews 3:8- So the tragedy of mockery, contempt, the tragedy of questioning postpones.

But then there were some curious, there were some curious on that occasion and I like this. "Paul departed from among them, verse 33. And you know why he did that? I think he just did that to pull out of there the real ones, he just decided - Now, I'll leave and I'll see the response. And he left, and I love this, verse 34, "Nevertheless certain men joined him." There's a Greek word kollao and it means glue. The word join here is kollao, it's the verb. They just glued themselves to Paul. They were curious, they wanted to know more. They followed Paul out of there and then it says, "The ones who were the curious ones believed." And there you have the conversion. And one was a member of the court and one was just a woman who was not any-thing particularly special. Special to God, though. There was a man who made a dent in a city. You say, - Anybody else? A few it says and others with them at the end of verse 34.

Paul had a dramatic affect on a city at the top level. Why? Because he was willing to go down in the marketplace and get his feet dirty and his clothes dirty, bumping elbows with people on the common level. And God used him to spin the heads with the leaders of that great city. Beloved, our nation is still an Athens, we still worship Athenia, the deification of the mental. We worship Demeter, the earth mother, we call it ecology. We worship Zeus the god of force and power. We worship Bacchus and Remor the gods of lust. And we've got shrines to those gods everywhere. We still have our Epicureans, existentialists, materialists, heathenists. We have our Stoics. They're in ethical society talking about brotherhood and helping the poor and God is in you and you're God, they're everywhere. The city is there. Your Athens waits for you to make claims on it. It will never happen until you're provoked like Paul. And when that happens you can have an effect on it.

F.W. H. Myers wrote concerning a Christian in the city, these words, I close. "Only like souls I see the folk there under bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings. Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder sadly contented with a show of things." Then he looked at a city and he said this, "Then the rush, the intolerable craving shivers throughout me like a trumpet call. Oh to save these to perish in the saving, to die for their life, to be offered for them all." Let's pray,

Father, we thank You that Paul again gives us a pattern of care and concern motivation to reach a world that is dying without Christ. God, help us to be the kind of people who are aroused spiritually with the lostness of men who are stirred emotionally with the glory of God who are compelled to service because of these two things. And, Father, as we're faithful to confront the world with the claims of Christ we know that the world will have contempt, some will question, some will be curious, Praise God, some will be converted. Use us to that end in Jesus name. Amen

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