

Text— Acts 17:22-34

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

At the time in history in which the events recorded in our Scripture selection took place, Greece was well known for its culture and learning, as well as its athletic events. Hence, old time Greece with its philosophers was not unlike modern day America.

Unfortunately, paganism was quite popular in Greece, as the apostle Paul noted while in Athens awaiting the arrival of fellow Christians – Silas and Timothy – to join him, for in Acts 17:16-21, we read, “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)” Interestingly, Areopagus is a rocky hill also known as Mars’ hill, which extended from a 520 foot high plateau called the Acropolis. The city of Athens grew up around the Acropolis.

When the events recorded in our Scripture selection took place, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, was surrounded by people in Athens who did not know the true God, the triune God, and it bothered him very deeply. You see, the vast majority of folks in Athens were idolaters, as we read moments ago in the verses preceding our sermon text. Consequently, Paul was not about to pass on an invitation to speak God’s

truth; therefore, our sermon text relates:

“PAUL’S PREACHING ABOUT THE TRUE GOD TO THE ATHENIANS”

With that as our theme, may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) Why Paul’s preaching was needed right then and there
- 2) What Paul preached about the true God
- 3) What Paul called upon his audience to do in regards to the true God and why
- 4) How various members of Paul’s audience reacted to his preaching

-1-

Verses 22 & 23, ----- (Acts 17:22-23)

Paul was a man who was bold and not bashful, for while standing in the midst of Mars’ hill where all the great thinkers of the day were gathered, he told those people of Athens: *I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.*

Accordingly, Paul’s preaching was needed right then and there because those folks were stuck in superstition as they practiced all sorts of idolatry and falsehoods in regards to religion and various gods which they worshiped. The men of Athens seemingly attempted to cover all-the-bases when it came to their ideas of religiously reverencing various gods.

The apostle Paul used one of the Athenians’ altars as a way to introduce those people to the one true God, for when Paul *passed by, and beheld* their devotions, he *found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.* Hence, Paul said to the men of Athens: *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.* Yes, the true God was unknown to the Athenians; consequently,

Paul's preaching was needed right then and there so that the people would be introduced to the one true God who must NOT be worshiped in ignorance, for Jesus says in John 4:23-24, "the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Furthermore, Jesus, who cannot lie, says in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Indeed, there is NO spiritual and eternal life outside of the one true God. So, it's a fact that as the apostle Paul stood on Mar's hill addressing the idolatrous people of Athens, his preaching was needed right then and there.

-2-

As we ponder the next few verses of our sermon text, let us see what Paul preached about the true God.

Verses 24-28, ----- (Acts 17:24-28)

In verse 24 of our text, we just read: *God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.* Thus, the apostle Paul put forth the fact that the true God is the Creator of the world and ALL things in it; and, He is LORD of heaven and earth, the supreme Ruler of all; consequently, the true God does not dwell in temples made with hands because He is not confined to any one space or time.

Yes, the one true God is the Creator and Lord of all, for Hebrews 3:4 informs us, "every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God." Psalm 96:4-5 adds, "the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens." Furthermore, we read in Isaiah 66:1-2, "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things

hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Hence, the one true God who is Lord of all is great beyond our ability to comprehend; and therefore, He is to be looked up to in repentance and faith, and honored.

Let's think about the Lord God who is the Creator. The opening words of the Holy Bible declare, in Genesis 1:1-3, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." Accordingly, we see the Creator is one God but three distinct Persons: God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son who is the living spoken Word, for John 1:1-3 & 14 supplies us with the following details, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Oh, the Father was not made flesh, nor was the Holy Spirit made flesh, but the Son – the eternal living Word – was made flesh and His name is Jesus Christ who is the only begotten Son of God. Thus, the triune God is the one true God, for 1 John 5:7 reports, "there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." So, Paul pointed the Athenians to the one true God.

My friends the triune God is the one true God whom the apostle Paul preached, for he closes his second epistle to the Corinthians with the following words, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." (2 Corinthians 13:14) Take it to heart that any god other than the true triune God is a false god and an idol. Hence, Paul preached about the true God to the men of Athens that they might come to

know the true God and worship Him.

Looking again at our sermon text, note that Paul emphasized the fact that not only did the Lord God create heaven, earth, and all things therein; but, the Lord God is He who, *Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.* Thus, the Lord God is the SOURCE and PRESERVER of life and breath and all things to every living creature. God does NOT NEED anything from us since He is self-existing and eternal, without beginning and without end. The Lord God is truly awesome, as we read in Romans 11:33-36, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

The apostle Paul also preached that the one true God *hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.*

Note it well: ALL human beings are descended from Adam and Eve, the first man and woman created by God. It matters not whether a person is white or black or any shade in between— ALL human beings are of one blood; and, it's NOT animal blood but human blood. Therefore, evolutionary theories of every kind are lies of the devil who seeks to rob God of the glory due His name. Every nation and people has its particular location in the world which they settled, for God dispersed the people after the world-wide flood when they were attempting to remain together in constructing the tower of Babel. Furthermore, the bounds of our habitation as human beings is the appointed life-span given to us in this world by God, for Psalm 90:10 states, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their

strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

Paul's makes the point to the people of Athens that our limited life span as human beings is to urge folks to *seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*

The Lord God grants and sustains physical life since He is the Creator of human life, having formed our first father, Adam, from the dust of the ground and then breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. Paul's comment regarding Grecian poets does not refer to them believing in the Lord God; rather, Paul's comment reflects the fact that some of the Grecian poets acknowledged that a divine entity brought forth human life in the first place. Hence, Paul's argument that the true God is the Source and Preserver of life should not have been thought of as something difficult for the men of Athens to accept.

Thus, the apostle Paul desired that his audience would realize that the Lord God is the Source not only of physical life, but also spiritual and eternal life since He is all-powerful.

-3-

As we continue with the next few verses of our sermon text, let us see what Paul called upon his audience to do in regards to the true God and why.

Verse 29, ----- (Acts 17:29)

Observe that Paul emphasizes that it is wrong and ridiculous to hold that God is some piece of carved stone or a cast metal idol, for Paul said to the Athenians: *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.* Indeed, since human beings are living creatures, it is the height of folly to hold that the Godhead is something fashioned by man in the

form of a statue. Accordingly, the psalmist writes in Psalm 115:1-8, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." Hence, idolatry is indeed foolish and stupid.

Verses 30 & 31, -----. (Acts 17:30-31)

The ignorance of idolatry God winked at— not that He closed His eyes to it completely and overlooked it; but rather, God exercised great patience with human beings in their foolishness. Nevertheless, the time had come for repentance because God had sent the promised Messiah, the Christ, into the world to redeem the world. There was no excuse and is no excuse for anyone to remain stuck in the sin of idolatry since Jesus Christ has been in the world and has plainly proclaimed the truth that He is the only Savior of sinners. Jesus proved His divinity by the numerous miracles which He did, for such acts showed folks that He is indeed true God in addition to being true man. Jesus died for the sins of all people, shedding His holy and precious blood while nailed to the tree of the cross; then He was buried; and then, He victoriously and bodily rose from the dead after three days in the grave, being seen of many people for 40 days before He visibly ascended into heaven.

Thus, it is a fact that God *now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* Yes, Jesus Christ will visibly return to earth in glory to judge

all people, for 2 Corinthians 5:10 declares, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

Hence, the apostle Paul rightly called upon his audience gathered on Mars' hill to repent, that is, to turn from their sins and turn to the Lord in heart-deep faith.

My friends, the same call goes out to all people today, for Holy Scripture plainly states, "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." (1 Timothy 2:5-6; Mark 1:15; John 3:16, 18; 1 John 1:8-10)

We ALL need Jesus Christ, for Holy Writ declares, "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. [And] the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 6:23; John 3:36) Thus, it's clear why Paul called on his audience to repent of their sins and believe on the true God.

-4-

As we ponder the remaining verses of our sermon text, let us see how various members of Paul's

audience reacted to his preaching.

Verses 32-34, ----- (Acts 17:32-34)

The reaction to what Paul preached is the same as always happens when God's Word is proclaimed aright: some mocked and totally blew-off the message they heard as they were hardened in unbelief; some remained unbelieving but were polite as they said they were open to listening to more at a later date; and, a few did come to faith and believe.

So, Paul departed from the group assembled at Mars' hill, for he had preached what they needed to hear about the true God.

My friends, Paul was fully aware of the fact that one can only preach God's Word; one cannot force anyone to believe it; only God can work faith in Christ in one's heart, for Romans 10:17 plainly states: "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

God grant that we regularly take His Word to heart when it is preached, for we've seen how important it is as we've pondered Paul's preaching about the true God to the Athenians.

Let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins; and, let us cling to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith as our personal Savior and Lord. Yes, let us do so, for 1 John 5:20-21 says, "we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen." Indeed. Amen.

m.e.l.