

Acts: The Gospel Gone Viral
Lesson 37 “Paul at Mars Hill”

- I. We have been studying through *Acts* and how the gospel went viral through various revivals in the first century. This is what caused the gospel to spread so rapidly in the first century.
- A. Most recently we have been looking at Paul’s second missionary journey and how everywhere he went he saw both a revival and a riot. ex: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea.
- B. Today we are going to look at Paul’s trip to Athens. Athens was a city given to idolatry. The Greek word for given to can be submerged (completely under the influence of idols). Paul saw this as he walked around and looked at the idolatry.
1. Ancient writings tell us there were over 30,000 idols in Athens. These include Zeus- God of Sky, Poseidon- God of Sea, Ares- God of War, Aphrodite- Goddess of Love, Hera- Goddess of Women, Demeter- Goddess of Harvest, Athena- Goddess of Strategy, Apollo- God of the Sun, Music and Poetry.
 2. The other interesting thing about Athens is it was a very intellectual city. Education, reason, intellect was valued above all else. In many ways it was very similar to **2 Timothy 3:7** says were ***Ever learning, and never attaining to the knowledge of the truth.*** This group of people was full of knowledge, but not full of wisdom.
 3. Athens is similar to much of modern day America. We have more knowledge than ever before, but less wisdom. We are also submerged with idolatry in our nation. What is the way out?
 4. What’s a stronghold? It’s a military term for a fortified position. ex: Castle, fortress, walled city that is heavily protected. **2 Corinthians 10:3-6. The truth of God’s word is the key to tearing down strongholds. We have to counter systems of thought that have been developed over generations.**
- C. The goal for today is to learn how we can meet people with truth to tear down strongholds in their mind so we can get out from under the submergence of idolatry in our nation.

II. Paul At Mars Hill

A. **Acts 17:16-21 Paul Comes to Athens**

1. While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive from Berea, the Holy Spirit provoked him. It would have been easy for Paul to have waited, but he responded to the leading of the Lord. It would have also been easy to be overwhelmed. What’s the point? But how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. **Don’t let what we can’t do, keep us from doing what we can do.**

2. As Paul reasoned with the Greeks and Jews in the city, the Epicurians and Stoics encountered him.
 - a. Epicurians believed in the existence of God, but He was not very involved in the affairs of man. The main purpose of life was pleasure. Do we see people like that today?
 - b. Stoics believed the universe was created by God; that all things were fixed by Fate; that even God was under the dominion of fatal necessity; that the Fates were to be submitted to; the goal of life was to rise above all things and show no emotional response to pain or pleasure. Like Spock. Do we see people believe in both fate and extreme control of self as key truths about life today?
3. When Paul taught about Jesus and the resurrection of the dead, they thought he preached of foreign gods and a new doctrine. Paul got an invitation to the Areopagus because of this. *Matthew 25:23 principle*
4. It's interesting that some of the people Paul ministered to spent all their time to hear or tell some new thing. I'm all for learning new things, but when we learn truth we need to act on it. ex: Grandfather quote - "We'd have been rich if we did half of what we talked about doing."

B. Ministering at Mars Hills

1. Mars Hill - The location of the ancient Athenian court which decided the most important questions about religion. Socrates was arraigned and condemned there on the charge of innovating on the state religion. It received its name from the legend of the trial of Ares for the murder of the son of Neptune. **Ares was then tried for this in a court made up of his fellow gods. Prominent place of debate. Paul is talking to highly educated and prominent people.**
2. *Verse 22* Paul meets people where they are - this is a lesson we must all learn. Paul affirmed them in being religious (Didn't condemn them. He built a bridge.) He then brought up the tomb of the unknown God.
3. *Verses 23* - Athens was filled with statues dedicated **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Six hundred years before Paul, a terrible plague came on the city and a man name Epimenides had an idea. He let loose a flock of sheep through the town, and wherever they lay down, they sacrificed that sheep to the god that had the nearest shrine or temple. If a sheep lay down near no shrine or temple, they sacrificed the sheep **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**.
4. Paul met them where they were and then begins to take them to the ONE TRUE GOD using logic and reasoning they would understand. He tells them they worship a god they don't know and then begins to introduce them to the new God they can know.
5. *Verses 24-25* Paul takes them back to the *Genesis* account with creation and says there is one true God who created everything. He says the one true God wasn't made with hands and doesn't dwell in temples like these Greek gods.

6. *Verses 26-29* Paul begins to explain that every human from one blood. We all go back to Adam and Eve or Noah.
 - a. “In Him we live and move and have our being.” Paul explains God is the sustainer of life. He also explains we are His offspring.
 - b. Paul quotes two of their poets - These are Epimenides the Cretan [600 B.C.] and Aratus [310 B.C.].
 - c. This example demonstrates we can use secular material people are familiar with to lead people to Jesus. ex: Back To Church Sunday, Community Meal, teaching on marriage (even unbelievers want to have a good marriage, extreme example - playing “Highway to Hell” at Easter.
7. *Verses 30-31* a call to repentance. We must bring truth boldly and tell people they need to repent (change what they believe).
 - a. Some ask how can God be a God of love and mercy and send people to hell?
 - b. God is a God of love because true love requires a choice. This is why there were two trees in the garden. God wanted a people who would worship Him from love, not control. Satan is the one who seeks to control (like he did through these demonic idols). God wants us to worship Him because love wants the best for others and the truth is we become like what we worship.
8. *Verses 32-34* When Paul began to talk about the crucifixion of Jesus, many began to mock which probably cut his sermon short. Paul decided to leave and some followed along side who believed while others stayed behind and mocked.

III. Conclusion - The key to overcoming the idolatrous strongholds in our nation is truth. Some Like in Athens some will accept and some will mock, but we cannot all the mockers to keep our voices silent. **In the days of King Josiah, true worship when the word of God was rediscovered after it had been lost for generations.**

A. Call Up Prayer Team

B. Pray Closing Prayer (pray for knowledge of truth and boldness)