

Acts: The Gospel Gone Viral
Lesson 36 “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 of well educated people that as *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.

1. Athens is similar to much of modern day America. We have more knowledge than ever before, but less wisdom.
2. Knowledge for knowledge’s sake is worthless unless we act on it. This is true wisdom and where at some point when we see the truth we must push away from the debate table and act on the truth we have.
3. Example of sharing the gospel with someone and they believe what the Bible says about Jesus, but they can’t get an answer on dinosaurs so they won’t get saved yet. We need to walk in the light we have while we pray for more light.

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. Paul’s obedience on this little thing opened up the opportunity for him to minister at Mars Hill (Areopagus). ex: my example with taking the mission trip to Russia opened an opportunity to be Barry Bennet’s intern.
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 that 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 there 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 Hill of Mars: the seat of the ancient and venerable Athenian court which decided the most solemn questions connected with religion. Socrates was arraigned and condemned here 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.** The trial was held on a hill adjacent to the Acropolis of Athens, known as the Areopagus. Ares was acquitted. The judges sat in the open air upon seats hewn out in the rock, on a platform ascended by a flight of stone steps immediately from the market-place. A temple of Mars was on the brow of the edifice, and the sanctuary of the Furies was in a broken cleft of the rock immediately below the judges' seats. **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 so 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** amount 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 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. Paul said prior to Jesus’s coming, God overlooked people’s ignorance, but since Jesus has come people need to repent.

- a. Some ask how can God be a God of love and mercy and send people to hell? He poured out all of His wrath on Jesus who paid for sin. God doesn’t hate people, but He does hate what hurts people, which sin is.
- 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. 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.

This is a perfect illustration of free will and how God will protect our right to choose which tree in the garden to partake of.

III. Conclusion - God has set before us life and death, but we have to make the choice. There is a place for acquiring knowledge, but you don’t need total knowledge in order to believe. Sometimes you just need to act on the truth you know. It is sufficient.

- A. Call Up Prayer Team
- B. Pray Closing Prayer