

## Acts 17:16-35 “Second MJ -In Athens” 9/29/2024

### **Intro & Review:**

This occurs during Paul's **second** missionary journey.

Last time we saw Paul and his companions they were in Thessalonica and Berea.

Today, we will look at a very famous sermon that Paul preached in Athens. As most of you know, Athens was the center of philosophical inquiry. It was where Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle had their schools. It was where Alexander the Great was taught. The fact that we know so much about Greek philosophy and culture is probably a result of Alexander's conquests. Additionally, the language that the New Testament was written in was koine or common Greek. This was a direct result of Alexander as well. If Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish religion, then Athens was the center of such for the Greco-Roman world. The only other city after this that was in similar prominence would be Rome. Of course, Paul wanted to visit there as well and actually does at the end of Acts. Nevertheless, Athens was the **intellectual** capital of the Roman empire.

### ***I. V16-21 Background***

V17 -Paul goes to the **Jew** first, as he always did.

V18 -Engages with the Epicureans and Stoics

Epicureanism -pleasure in the simple things of life, not hedonistic excess as is commonly misunderstood. Live for the day, with common goods of everyday existence. Tranquilistic. Shunned risk taking. Not involved in political life. Individualistic. The Divine creator does not impact the ways of men. In Seneca's words, Epicurus was a brave man who practiced effeminate philosophy. These were YOLO, carpe diem type folk.

Stoicism -believed that the gods were interacting and there was nothing you could do about it so you might as well accept your fate. Unemotional, logical and calculating. Involved in politics and was more compatible with Christianity. The stoics were “grin and bear it” kind of people.

19 Areopagus or “Mars Hill” was an outcropping of rock in Athens that you can still visit today. There is even a plaque there referring to the event we just read. V19 Areopagus or Mars Hill was the outdoor **debate hall** for philosophers.

## ***II. Content of Paul's Sermon to the Athenians***

V22-29 **Contact:** Common Ground

God is the ultimate creator.

We are made in His image

Because Paul quotes two of Greek poets in v28, many people for the last 20 years or so have used this as justification to be cultural cool kids. They liked Starbucks before it was cool. Of course, now they only frequent bespoke local coffee shops. They listen to obscure music, drink locally sourced IPAs, wear skinny jeans, and quote Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, and Foucault. They all want to live in Austin or turn everywhere into an Austin-esque hipster hellscape. They love modern architecture and “ethically sourced coffee.”

All of this is done in the name of “contextualization.” Contextualization is the idea that the message of the gospel is malleable enough to adopt the culture and customs of a given people group while maintaining fidelity to the necessary content. In other words, contextualization is the idea that it's ok to change methods but not the message. Or at least to change the packaging but not the package.

Contextualization is right and proper but one must also evaluate the actual culture itself. Many Christians have checked their brains at the door and have abandoned any form of discernment or wisdom as it relates to cultural values. Some things are just evil. Some practices are antithetical to Christian values and theology.

Examples: when people have more dogs than children. When people kill their unborn children and falsely calling it women's rights. When people worship their children and conduct child centered parenting. When families sacrifice their church, and family lives to chase travel ball. When cities refuse to prosecute theft and violence. When crimes are recategorized as racist reparations. When words are redefined to meet political agendas. When coastal elites are idolized over the everyday heartland people. When moms refuse to train up their children in the way they should go, hold on to them too long, and create a failure to launch situation. When gender identities are separated from biological sex categories. When men look more like women and women look like men, or you can't tell the difference. These things are all evil.

You can't contextualize with those behaviors because Jesus is opposed to those things. In fact, he commands that they abandon those ideas, and embrace His kingship...

Should we try to find common ground? Sure, but the tendency in our day and time has been to go way too far and end up with cultural appropriation.

### V30-31 **Conflict**: The Gospel Proper

Everyone is **commanded** to repent

This fact that Paul is confronting the Athenians is the missing element to people's contextualization. There is seldom a call to repentance. There is always just this skinny jean & glasses wearing hipster with lots, and I mean LOTS, of hand movements.

...because **judgement** is coming

Here we see that Paul is not holding back. We do people a disservice when we truncate the gospel into something like "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." Had Paul not heard of John 3:16? Doesn't Paul know that Jesus loves everyone and would never judge anyone? Why doesn't Paul tell everyone that they need to "accept Him as their personal Lord and savior"? Why doesn't Paul lead with God's love for them. Didn't Paul know about the four spiritual laws? Didn't Paul want them to be saved? Why doesn't Paul tell them how much God loves them and is up in heaven wringing His hands, begging them to love Him back?

Because judgement is coming. God's love is not toward them in their current state. His judgement is on them, and unless they repent, they will die in that state and be judged. They must trust Christ, not their own philosophy, not their own intellect, but they must bend the knee to King Jesus, submit to Him and be born again.

... from **Jesus**

Notice that JESUS is the one who will judge them. This is antithetical to the modern effeminate, lamb petting, soft faced Jesus we see so much of the time. To illustrate this, have y'all seen the billboards posted along the highways from the "Rome Boys"? It's like they picked the gayest second commandment violation they could find. It's a depiction of Jesus on a pink background with His hands open outward by His side and it says, "Jesus, I trust you." That is not the depiction of Jesus we see here in Paul's sermon. It is not the picture of Jesus in the book of Revelation where He has a sword coming out of His mouth. It is not what we see in Isaiah 63:3 where He is stomping on people and their blood is spattering on His garments.

...who God raised from the dead

The resurrection is the proof that Jesus is who He said He was. It is validation of Jesus' claim to be God in the flesh. It is the consummate link between the immaterial and material. It is the example and future hope of the Christian.

## **V32-34 The Results: Dismissed, Delayed, Salvation**

Sneering, Curious, Some believed

### **-The legend of Dionysius**

Two named: Dionysius is considered by many to be the first pastor of the church in Athens.

Others also followed

### **Application and Conclusion:**

1. Was contextualization the correct method? The message was not greatly received.
2. Is success an indicator of being right?
3. What should we insist that the response to the gospel include?
4. What happens with an incomplete gospel with an incorrect call to action?

### **Closing Prayer:**

Father, thank you for this word. Work in us to be led by Your Spirit to those that need to hear the gospel. Glorify Yourself in and through us to make Yourself known. Find us faithful servants. And now, as we take the Lord's supper, we remember the death of the Lord Jesus, that He gave His life as a ransom for many. In His name we pray, Amen.