

## Acts 17

A speech in Athens.

Prelim

Paul sees the place is full of idols (v16) **Act 17:16** While Paul was waiting in Athens, he was upset to see all the idols in the city.

– **What does he expect?** He was distressed about it, The King James Version says "His spirit was stirred" The Greek gives the feeling that he was exasperated.

The reality is, he senses that God isn't in these people's lives. He feels that he has to react to that.

(Now as point of application: **When do we get stirred up, or distressed that people don't have God in their lives?** When we hear a good missionary speaker, or see starving kids on an add on TV or talking to our neighbours?)

Paul is preaching a foreign deity (V18)

**Act 17:18** Some of them were Epicureans and some were Stoics, and they started arguing with him. People were asking, "What is this know-it-all trying to say?" Some even said, "Paul must be preaching about foreign gods! That's what he means when he talks about Jesus and about people rising from death." (CEV)

– **What do they expect?** – He's a foreigner! Notice some thought it was babble – We still get that reaction today. Others assumed it was about something foreign – Yep it sure was to them. Their religions were all about mythical gods and creatures being selfish and doing bizarre things. What Paul was speaking about was God's grace!!!

(Another point of application: **Some people don't get it.** Just keep on, Paul gives us another template on how to here.)

These Epicurean and Stoic philosophers are curious. – (V 19-21)

**Act 17:19** They brought Paul before a council called the Areopagus, and said, "Tell us what your new teaching is all about."

**Act 17:20** We have heard you say some strange things, and we want to know what you mean."

**Act 17:21** More than anything else the people of Athens and the foreigners living there loved to hear and to talk about anything new.

**Epicureanism** is a system of philosophy based upon the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, founded around 307 BC. His materialism led him to a general attack on superstition and divine intervention.

The Stoics taught that destructive emotions resulted from errors in judgment, of the active relationship between cosmic determinism and human freedom, and the belief that it is virtuous to maintain a will (called *prohairesis*) that is in accord with nature. To live a good life, one had to understand the rules of the natural order since they taught that everything was rooted in nature.

These guys were philosophers, thinkers, academics. It is an in built thing with some people – they want to know- So They ask for a lecture.

(Application point 3: **When people ask – answer.** This is hugely important. Too often the Christian church is trying to educate people on what it THINKS people should know. But Paul, and the other apostles and particularly in Jesus teachings – answering questions is a definite style and format for us to copy.)

Now the speech: This is not a sermon.

A **sermon** is an oration, lecture, or talk by a member of a religious institution or clergy. **Sermons** address a Biblical, theological, religious, or moral topic, usually expounding on a type of belief, law or behavior within both past and present contexts.

In difference to a speech which is: a formal address or discourse delivered to an audience.

Paul isn't treating this like he would a sermon in a synagogue he is treating this like a speech to a bunch of people who know nothing about Jesus.

He has an interesting process.

1. **He credits them as religious. (v22-23)**

**Act 17:22** So Paul stood up in front of the council and said: People of Athens, I see that you are very religious.

**Act 17:23** As I was going through your city and looking at the things you worship, I found an altar with the words, "To an Unknown God." You worship this God, but you don't really know him. So I want to tell you about him.

2. **Finds a link (v23) Altar to the unknown God.**

These people were either looking for the unknown or hedging their bets and not leaving any God out.

3. **Introduces His concept of God (v24-28)** Spells out the differences between their gods and His God.

4. **Sets out requirements (v29)** repent!

**Act 17:30** In the past, God forgave all this because people did not know what they were doing. But now he says that everyone everywhere must turn to him.

Notice the translation here says – “Turn to him” – That is what repent means – turn away from wrong and turn to right.

5. Proof of this God’s truthfulness – Someone raised from the dead. (31)

**Act 17:31** He has set a day when he will judge the world's people with fairness. And he has chosen the man Jesus to do the judging for him. God has given proof of this to all of us by raising Jesus from death.

6. Let’s them react. (v32)

**Act 17:32** As soon as the people heard Paul say that a man had been raised from death, some of them started laughing. Others said, “We will hear you talk about this some other time.”

7. Finishes with them wanting more. (v32)

“We will hear you talk about this some other time.”

8. Some believed, some didn’t (V34)

**Act 17:34** some of the men put their faith in the Lord and went with Paul. One of them was a council member named Dionysius. A woman named Damaris and several others also put their faith in the Lord.

What do we get out of this?

- a. Yes there is a format for us to follow in constructing a speech or communication about Jesus.
  - i. Credit where it is due
  - ii. Find a link
  - iii. Introduce our concept of God
  - iv. Explain requires of God – Repent!
  - v. Offer answers.
  - vi. Be available to talk more.

That’s it in a nutshell.

- b. But there is more to it than that.

There is a recognition of the state of the people – They looked for God but look in wrong places. Nothing has changed. People I believe are still looking, but often either look in the wrong place or think success, or satisfaction or whatever comes from something completely different. They are still searching and looking but looking in the wrong place.

- c. There is also the consequences to be dealt with. Look at v30.

**Act 17:30** In the past, God forgave all this because people did not know what they were doing. But now he says that everyone everywhere must turn to him.

God has let ignorance be an excuse before but now that people are being told – they have to repent or .....

See when we tell people about Jesus – they are no longer ignorant. They then have the responsibility to decide. So rather than just giving them the information we really need to make ourselves available to follow through and explain what Jesus expects. (V32)

**Act 17:32** As soon as the people heard Paul say that a man had been raised from death, some of them started laughing. Others said, "We will hear you talk about this some other time."

d. One of the really big things in this passage is that **Even though Paul tells the message, He explains it well, some are cynical (v18,v32) while some, only a few, respond. ( V34)**

**Act 17:34** some of the men put their faith in the Lord and went with Paul. One of them was a council member named Dionysius. A woman named Damaris and several others also put their faith in the Lord.

The thing is, some will want to search and look but not be interested when it is all explained, while others will listen and respond. Nothing has changed. You can share Jesus and some respond and others don't. Their call. That is sometimes difficult, sometimes infuriating and other times perplexing yet reality.

**What I want to encourage you guys about is responding to people's requests.**

(V19)

**Act 17:19** They brought Paul before a council called the Areopagus, and said, "Tell us what your new teaching is all about. (CEV)

And

**Acts 17:32b "We will hear you talk about this some other time." (CEV)**

Look out for the opportunities that arise, but also be available for further discussion- this is kind of like being friends!