

DEVOTIONS

PAUL SPEAKS THE WORD AT ATHENS

Athens was the queen city of ancient Greece. It was a city crowded with many false gods. Paul at one point on his second missionary journey was in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy. It doesn't appear from Luke's narrative that Athens was one of the cities to which Paul purposely went to preach. But while waiting at Athens "his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols." Acts 17:16

Let's consider; what Paul's message was, where he preached it, to whom he preached and why.

WHAT DID PAUL PREACH?

In Paul's sermon on the Areopagus he told the listeners that the one true God has revealed Himself in this creation which He made so that man might seek, feel after Him and find Him. Now, He commands men everywhere to repent in view of the coming judgment. There can be no question of all this in that we have the assurance of it in the resurrected Lord. There is escape from the judgment through faith in Jesus Christ.

The people of Athens had many false gods. They had a god of the sea, a god of the hunt, a god of this and a god of that. Paul used this acknowledging of something higher than man in nature to point to the Creator, the one true God who is not contained in statues of stone or metal. That the Athenians were somewhat unsure of who the gods exactly were is seen in their altar to "the unknown god." Paul explained who this true God is.

The Lord reveals many of His qualities in nature. The very fact that God exists is clearly demonstrated in nature. But it is up to Paul and you and I to bring the revealed knowledge of God in the Word to mankind.

We do not just bring them some knowledge for their minds. We come with the message of repentance. "...now he commands all men everywhere to repent." Acts 17:30 To just know that God exists is not enough to believe in Him and have him as Savior. First we must see our unworthiness and crying need of help over sin. Men must look at their personal lives and regret how often evil is done instead of good. They must also be aware that evil deserves punishment. If men sorrow over their lost condition, then a hungering and thirsting after righteousness develops in them. The judgment is coming in which evil will be punished.

The one way of escape Paul disclosed to the men and women on the Areopagus. It is Christ. The proof of all that God has said that it is true is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Jesus is now the living Lord who beckons all to come to Him. Are you weary from your load of sin? Trust in His redemptive work. Are you burdened by guilt for what you have done? Look to the resurrected Christ for assurance that in Him you have eternal life and no judgment.

Let us like Paul preach the clear message of God's Word. Let us preach the Law of God to convict of sin. And let us preach the Gospel of Christ to convince of forgiveness.

WHERE DID PAUL PREACH?

We read of Paul's address to the learned Athenians on the Areopagus. This was the place of discussion of new and strange ideas.

Here there was debate on a high intellectual level. Paul did not hesitate to accept the invitation to explain what he believed on the Areopagus.

We should not hesitate to go to such a place and to such people. But we will take with us the wisdom Paul expressed in his insightful comment, "...we preach Christ crucified, ...folly to the Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God...not many of you were wise according to worldly standards...but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise...He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom..." I Cor.1:23-30 There were only a few of the worldly wise on the Areopagus who believed. But praise God they did believe and praise God that Paul did go.

Paul eventually came to the Areopagus because some from the Areopagus heard him in the market place. Paul "...argued...in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there." v.17 He looked for every chance to witness to the idolaters of this city. In the market area there were many opportunities to speak with people. The market was not only a place to sell goods, but a meeting place for discussion. There some of the well-educated philosophers were who mocked him when they heard him in the market. But we can imagine that there were also common people for whom Paul's message stirred up hope.

We know of the many markets held in the villages in many countries. These are like that at Athens, a place for selling of goods and for discussion. Are we stirred up enough that we would go to the market on market day and look for opportunities to witness to our Savior? Or at least we should teach our people to look for the opportunities as they sit with their goods and meet so many people from their village area and from elsewhere.

As was Paul's practice he also went into the synagogue and "...argued...with the Jews and the devout persons." v.17 In the synagogue were the people who hopefully were looking for the Messiah. Paul's task there was to show them from Scripture prophecy and fulfillment that Jesus was the Messiah. It ironically was also in the synagogue where Paul found the greatest opposition to the Good News of Jesus. Undaunted Paul would thoroughly present the Word. Very often there would be a heated exchange of words and debate.

We Christians today can be just as well-prepared to witness to Christ as Paul. The Lord has not intervened in our lives by a voice from heaven and a powerful shaft of light. He has instead given us His complete Word which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. In the Bible God speaks to us. He says, "Go, make disciples..."

TO WHOM DID PAUL SPEAK

Paul spoke the Word to any and to all. Jesus is the Savior of all men. I Tim. 4:10 He reconciled the world to God. II Cor. 5:19 It is this whole, wicked world that, wonder of wonders, God so loved that He gave His onlybegotten Son. Jn. 3:16

And so it was that Paul would (and you and I should) speak to: male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich and poor, common and noble, stranger, friend and enemy. The message is for all of them whether they believe it or not, whether they think they need it or not, whether they want it or not. Ours is the task to reach them with the message of repentance and escape from judgment through faith in the Risen Christ.

We know the troubles that tribalism cause in places like Nigeria as well as all of Africa. A church so often can be formed around the tribe. If another tribe seeks to have a part in the church, conflict arises because this church is of our tribe, of our people. The authority, the offices, the benefits belong to our tribe. So to see in politics, this is even sadder to see in the church. The church must never become an exclusive club for 'our' people. That is a direct contradiction of Jesus "is the Savior of all men."

Listen to Paul's outgoing approach, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law--though not being myself under the law--that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law--not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ--that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." I Cor. 9:19-23

As much as in us lies we should want to be able to witness to any and all, like Paul did. We must work hard to keep down our prejudices, for they hinder us in going to some.

WHY DID PAUL SPEAK THE WORD?

The immediate cause of his speaking the Word in Athens was, "his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols." v.16 It was not just hatred of idolatry that moved him. The love of God motivated him to speak. Paul knew, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12 Paul wrote to Timothy, "For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all..." I Tim. 2:5-6 Without Christ men are lost and facing an eternity in hell. Knowing the love of God for lost man, as he himself had experienced it, he in turn reached out with the Gospel for salvation.

To us it seems such a simple question and such a clear answer. Remember though that there are many, even within visible Christendom who teach that there are many 'ways' to God. They say that the way of Christ is a very good way, but there are other ways to God also. The president of Zambia, Kenneth Kuanda, a prominent Christian has stated this as have others in Africa. Those of them who believe that all are saved are called universalists. Do not be led astray by some prominent Christian's statements. Listen to the Word of God.

We have considered two passages already which demonstrate that the only way of salvation is through faith in the Savior, Jesus. Our Savior clearly taught, "I am the truth, the way and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." John 14:6 Other ways to heaven? Other saviors? Other methods of salvation than by simple faith in Jesus? No! The Muslims are not saved. The animists are not saved. The Brotherhood of the Cross and the Star members do not have salvation as long as they follow the false god.

The Lord of love has set before us a large task. We are to speak the message of salvation in Christ to any and to all wherever we may find them because God loves all.