

Witness For Worship

Acts 17:22-34

April 6, 2025

Pastor Francis Bezzam

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring. ²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

My message is titled, “Witness for Worship”. Sub-title “Put away your idols”

Do you know God has given you incredible capacities for worship?

God desires that you use all your faculties – your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, your body (your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit) for worshipping God.

We have said many times from this pulpit “..whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” 1 Corinthians 10:31.

And giving glory to God has to do with who you worship and who is worthy of true worship.

Jesus said “*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*”. Mark 12:30.

And when God is truly worshipped, what you value becomes evident in your life. As Martin Luther once wrote in his song – “A Mighty Fortress” - “*Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever.*”

And the blessings of true worship are many. Your life is full of blessing, joy and gladness in your soul.

True worship, therefore, implies that there is false worship. This is why Paul is in Athens. To proclaim and persuade the Athenians that there is One who is truly worthy of worship. God is looking for true worshippers (“*true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him*” John 4:23)

Now, some may say, “how do you know what worship is false?”. Well, I pray this passage will help us.

Last Sunday, we looked at Paul’s journey to Athens. Ancient Athens worshipped all kinds of deities: Nike, the god of victory, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, Zeus, the god of thunder and others. And there was one god I did not mention. It was the Greek sun god Helios. Worship of the sun is not new to history. The sun was worshipped by Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and even in our present day, there are many sun worshippers. According to Hindu philosophy the sun is the soul of all beings. Sun worship is special because it is the only one “deity” that is visible to the eye.

The rationale for sun worship is that the sun is a store house of inexhaustible power and radiance and therefore it is worthy of worship.

It’s very likely Paul spoke to sun worshippers at Athens.

Our claim when we witness about God and Christ is that the God of the Bible is so Supreme and Great that even the sun rises at His command.

The problem is that not all are worshippers of the God of the Bible. This world is a world

of worshippers – they worship themselves, they worship inanimate objects or even celestial objects.

Here are some idols of our day - Technology, social media or gadgets have become the new idols of our day. Sociological statistics tell us that technology has left many young people empty. And there is the idol of distorted sexuality. And this idol has left so many lonely and confused. Political identity can become an idol very quickly. Anything that is elevated above God is idolatry.

Here in our passage, Paul has presented Jesus and the resurrection to the Athenians. He's got their attention and they ask him "*May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?*" (Acts 17:19). And they grab Paul and bring him to Mars Hill. Let's see what Paul presents.

Verses 22 through 25.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Observation#1: Gospel witness begins with the supremacy and self-sufficiency of God.

Notice, Paul does not begin by denouncing or condemning other religious practices but by affirming they were worshippers too. He says "I perceive you are very religious". Which they cannot deny. Paul is also an observant man. He notices an inscription that is dedicated to a god but no one knows the name of the god. They worship a god but the god is unknown. This is a brilliant strategy to get their attention and yet not be accused of introducing a foreign god.

Remember, Paul is in a very delicate situation. If the council concludes that Paul has introduced a new god, he could very well be put to death. Now Paul is not a timid man. Paul is actually quite bold but he is not tactless. In his previous trip to Lystra and Iconium, he was stoned because of his Gospel witness but he picked himself up and moved on. In the previous chapter, in his trip to Phillipi, because of his Gospel witness,

he was beaten with rods and was thrown in jail. His body was full of bruises as he sat in jail. But God uses Paul to save the Philippian jailor. And the converted jailor is so grateful that he takes Paul and washes Paul's wounds. Now Paul is in Athens and in another dangerous situation. Paul is wise and persuasive.

After his introduction, Paul quickly moves to introduce the God of the Bible. Who is God? Self-sufficient, supreme and the giver of life.

Idols don't have breath in them. They have man-made mouths but can't speak but God is the Giver of life.

The Gospel begins with God. If the gods of the Greeks were gods of their own realms, Paul introduces God as the God of all gods and the God over all. The God of the Bible does not need anything to add to his self-worth. He is eternal and he is Lord over all. So God is transcendent meaning, God has no equals.

Observation#2: Gospel witness reveals the spiritual blindness.

Look at verses 26 through 29.

²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." ²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

Paul tells the Athenians that the Sovereign God is also involved in the affairs of humanity. How? By creating man and woman. And giving humans a place to live, to work, to thrive, to multiply and to eventually give glory to God. To acknowledge their Maker. God is transcendent but God is also knowable and near.

Paul quotes two Greek poets in the defense of the Gospel. The first quote is from a Greek poet supposedly by the name of Epimenides. And the second quote is from a Stoic author's poem called Aratus. The Stoics definitely knew about Aratus. And Aratus believed that humans were children of Zeus. What is Paul doing? He wants to scrutinize and critique their system of idolatry using their own authors. Paul does not affirm Zeus but rather wants to show that God is a Fatherly figure. We don't get to define God but God defines us.

So, observation number two – Gospel witness reveals spiritual blindness.

Observation#3: Gospel witness mandates repentance and faith in Christ.

Look at verses 30 through 31.

³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Paul has found common ground with the Athenians. They are religious. They are worshippers, idol worshippers. But they are ignorant of true worship. They are blind to the God who gives life. The corrective is to not remove old gods and add new gods. The corrective is to *repent* of false worship. The corrective is to abandon and put away idols. As a believer you may started well but now have you accumulated idols in your life? Are there idols you that have taken hold in your life? Put them away.

Because there is a day coming when Jesus will return and judge all those who worshipped idols that did not give life. How do we know Jesus will return? He died and rose again from the dead. People saw him after he rose and worshipped him before he ascended into heaven. Notice, Paul says God commands all people everywhere to repent. Knowing the true God requires repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Observation#4: Gospel witness may result in rejection or reverence of God.

Look at verses 32 through 34.

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Paul is in a delicate situation. Verse 33 tells that he went out from their midst. He’s done preaching the Gospel. It’s up to them to consider this precious Gospel and respond. As he leaves, Paul sees from fruit. Some men believed. Some put their faith in Jesus Christ. And one of them was a council member. And a woman named Damaris and others. What a great joy. Idol worshippers have become worshippers of the living God.

However, not everyone who hears the Gospel will believe in Christ. Witnessing is not forcing a belief but spreading seed on the ground and leaving it to God to make the seed a sapling. When repentance and faith in the death and resurrection of Christ are preached, there are going to be mockers and scoffers. Some will reject but some will revere God. When we see repentance and faith in God, we rejoice because God is the one who changes hearts.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Witness For Worship. Acts 17:22-34

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What do you observe in Paul's address to the Athenians? What can we learn from Paul's view of God in Gospel witnessing?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe Gospel witnessing must include a call to repent and believe in Jesus Christ? Why or why not?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What will you change to witness about Christ to others?