

## **Into the Marketplace with the Gospel**

Text: Acts 17:15-34

A definition of marketplace is: any sphere considered as a place where ideas, thoughts, artistic creations, etc., compete for recognition. This perfectly describes the world of Athens in which Paul now ministered. Although Rome had taken over the dominion of the known world, Athens was considered the hub of culture. What Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard or Yale would be to our intellectual world or what Jerusalem is to the Jew or Mecca to the Muslim would be to the religious world, Athens was the epicenter of intellectualism as espoused by her esteemed philosophers and her religion of myriads of mythology. It is here where God's apostle and perhaps the greatest mind of the age has landed.

### **I. PAUL ALONE**

Acts 17: 15, 16a

Paul left Luke at Philippi to continue the work of the Lord. He had to flee from Thessalonica to Berea where he left Silas and Timothy. And now Paul arrives in Athens alone. God often gives us His greatest illuminations when we are alone with Him. David said in Psalm 39:3, "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned...."

There was work to be done and Paul was alone. In our day and age we are often too busy with electronic devices and too occupied with people company. Aloneness with God is often the spark that sets our hearts afire.

### **II. FIRST IMPRESSION**

Acts 17:16b

In the history of the world, there has never been such a magnificent display of man's ingenious architecture than in Athens. The only exception would be Solomon's Temple, which God must receive the credit for its outstanding beauty. Paul is now in Athens and while surrounded by these magnificent temples, he is not in awe. Although this is the hometown of Plato, Socrates, the adopted town of Aristotle and the launching platform of Epicurus' Epicurean philosophy and Zeno's Stoicism philosophy, Paul is not intimidated. The apostle is appalled at a city wholly given over to idolatry. An architect would see the buildings, a secular educator would study the philosophers, but Paul, God's soul-winner is preoccupied with the souls of the lost people.

### **III. OPENING SALVO**

Acts 17:17

This is in keeping with Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Paul begins his witness to the Jews, then to the devout persons and finally to anyone who will listen.

### **IV. THE BELIEFS OF A WORLD WITHOUT GOD**

Acts 17:18

Paul was up against Epicureanism, the philosophy taught by Epicurius (341–270 BC). This is the belief that everything happens by chance. No one is in charge and

if there are any deities they are indifferent. When you are dead, you are dead “like Rover; dead all over.” Since there are no god or gods to answer to, there are no consequences. Therefore, living for pleasure was the ultimate goal and chief end of life.

Stoicism was taught by Zeno (335-263 BC). The name “Stoic,” is taken from the Greek word *stoa*, which means porch. It was believed that Zeno taught from a porch and those who went up to the porch were called, “porchers,” or Stoics. The Stoics believe everything is god, the word of nature, even you are god, therefore you, like the Epicureans, have no one to answer to but yourself. One other difference however, the Stoics are extremely deterministic, in other words, totally fatalistic. Whatever will be, will be. They took greater pleasure in controlling themselves rather than letting their desires go unabated. Their control contributed to their idea of their own god-like presupposition.

These arrogant philosophers consider Paul a “babblers.” This is from a word that meant in Greek a seed-picker. This was referencing the little birds who would come and gather seeds or any perceived delectability from hither to yon. It was an insult that insinuated that you had no original ideas, but rather gathered all that you believe from nearby and distant cultures. Interestingly, this is basically what the Athenians were constantly doing themselves, as seen in these words in Acts 17:21: “For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.”

## **V. WELCOME TO MARS' HILL**

Acts 17:19-22

Areopagus and Mars' Hill are synonymous. "Hill of Ares," is the literal translation of Areopogus. Ares was the Greek god of war. Mars is the Roman name for the same god. When philosophy or religion was being discussed, they did so on Mars' Hill, which is why Paul was shuttled over to that historic spot. The Athenians wanted to hear the new doctrine Paul was teaching. Paul told the Athenians that they were too superstitious, which could just as easily be translated “religious.” He rightly viewed the Greek diversity of roads to a diversity of gods as wrong. He was going to present the only road to the One and Only Savior.

## **VI. INTRODUCTIOIN TO THE TRUE AND LIVING GOD**

ACTS 17:23-29

There were several hundred gods, but the most intriguing altar that Paul discovered was the one to the UNKNOWN GOD. The story that was attached to this altar goes back six centuries before Christ. A plague was covering Athens and it appeared no god could be appeased by a sacrifice, so a man by the name of Epimenides suggested that an unknown god had been offended. Then he suggested that a flock of sheep be brought to the hill, let loose and wherever they stopped grazing and lay down, and those sheep should be sacrificed on the very spot on an altar that would be raised to THE UNKNOWN GOD. Soon the plague was stayed and the Athenians, for a while, became monotheistic. But they soon returned to polytheism. Paul took advantage of the story and the altar, explaining that he would now introduce them to the One and Only True and Living God.

He went on to preach that it was senseless to worship a god who was made by human hands (Acts 17:24, 25). We did not make God; God made us. Acts 17:26: “And

hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” According to this verse Paul was making the argument of Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” And this would lead him into making the point of Romans 10:12, 13: “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Acts 17:28 continues Paul’s discourse, “For in him we live, and move and have our being...” (some authorities believe this saying is based on an earlier saying of Epimenides of Knossos in 6th century B.C.).... ”For we also are his offspring.” It appears Paul quoted Aratus of Soli, a third-century B.C. poet from Cilicia.

## **VII. WE ARE ALL ACCOUNTABLE**

Acts 17:30, 31

Since the days of Noah and the destruction of the entire earth, God has been merciful to mankind (Genesis 9: 12-15). Now that Christ has come and paid the penalty for our sins, there is coming a day that judgement will be made according to what we did with this Christ. This is verified not only by Christ’s death, but by the one act that has never been duplicated, i.e., His resurrection.

## **VIII. THE RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL**

Acts 17:32-34.

There are three responses of those who hear the Gospel.

- A. Unbelief: Acts 17:32a: “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked....”
- B. Procrastination: Acts 17:32b: “...and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.”
- C. Belief: Acts 17:34: “Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

**Conclusion:** Dionysius was an Athenian judge at the Areopagus Court. Little is known of Damarius, other than she was a woman. This brings us to a great summation of the all-encompassing power of the Gospel. In this most highly acclaimed center of the civilization in the known world, the most esteemed man on Mars’ Hill accepted Christ. The significance of a woman receiving Christ is reminding us of the equalizing effect of the Gospel. In a day when women were often not recipients of respectful and benevolent behavior, this woman who was considered by some commentators to be from a bourgeois family received just as great salvation than the most respected man on Mars’ Hill.

-Pastor Pope-