

Acts
 “Jesus” The Sequel
III.) Chp. 13-28 “Witnesses to the end of the earth”
Chp. 15-18:21 Traditions and the road less traveled (2nd trip)
17:16-21
 “What’s playing at the Areopagus? (part a)”

I.) Intro.

II.) Vs. Vs. 16-18a Three different features

III.) Vs. 18b-21 Now playing, “Seed-picker”

I.) Intro.

The brothers of Berea sent Paul to Athens because of the trouble started by those who did not believe from Thessalonica that had stirred the crowds up. And verse 16 starts off with Paul waiting in Athens for Silas and Timothy who remained in Berea to encourage the believers before joining him. Athens was about 400 years past its prim as the most important city of the world, but it still was thought of as the intellectual capital of the world. Two hundred years before Jesus it was home of the world’s great thinkers and their philosophies. Socrates, who had a brilliant student, named Plato and Plato who had a student named Aristotle. It was Aristotle who would coin the definition of philosophy as, “**The science which considers truth!**” Through out the years in Athens men and their opinions about life such as Epicurus and his philosophy called Epicureanism or Zeno and his philosophy called Stoicism, swirled around the world. So into this philosophical capital of the world comes Paul by him self fleeing the persecution from religious and political people. History tells us that Athens was probably no larger then 10,000 but Luke tells in verse 21 that the vast majority of that population “**spent their time in nothing else but to either to tell or hear some new thing**”. These folks were stuck in the past and

Luke records for us what Paul saw, felt, did and said while waiting for his friends to arrive.

Over the years mankind has created some interesting ways in which they view life. These philosophies come and go as actors on a stage, only to be reintroduced later on in the show. They may have different costumes on but they are still the same underneath. As I read this section of scripture it is not difficult to place myself in Paul's shoes. I had the privilege to go to the former Soviet Union soon after its collapse. In fact as we were in Moscow the scaffolding was just being removed from the repairs that were being made upon the president's house which was partially destroyed during a failed coup. In the two cities where we visited we were the first Americans that had ever visited the city. In fact we made quite a stir in one city as the T.V. crew came out to film us because our Bible seminar was taking place on the 10th floor auditorium which formally housed the communist party for that region. You could still see the silhouette behind where we taught of Lenin. In the second city we had a free day to sight see which happened to coincide with a city wide celebration for those that had fought in the 2nd world war. How do the claims of Christianity stand up to the other philosophies of life? That is what Paul and us are about to discover while in Athens.

II.) Vs. Vs. 16-18a Three different features

Vs. 16 Based upon verse 16 we know that Paul did what most of us would do if we were alone in a foreign city, sight see. What Paul saw was what one ancient historian speaking of Athens claimed that, "*It was easier to find a god in Athens than it was a man.*" With over 30,000 idols in the city that only had 10,000 people not counting the ones owned privately it is no wonder why that comment was made. The craftsmanship of these idols

was quite beautiful but Paul saw something that the artists did not intend to sculpt as he saw the hopelessness and emptiness that worshipping them created in human hearts.

The word “*given over*” in verse 16 means **to put under** and it is used elsewhere to describe someone drowning. Like many today, ***Athens and the people who dwelt there were drowning in the things they worshiped!*** Each idol that Paul saw revealed two things:

1. The capacity of people to worship
2. The twisted way in which this worship had been manipulated into nothing more than the worship of self

Most people today don't think that they are worshipping idols but the truth is that ***whatever is the master passion of your life is what you are worshipping.*** The only difference is that back then people had statues made up to represent their master passions; whereas today people carry around in their actions, attitudes and life styles the idols that make up their master passions. ***The truth is that we are created to worship, the only question is what it is we are worshipping.***

Vs. 17-18a Luke uses the same word that we saw last week to describe what Paul did about the emptiness of the people of Athens, he “**reasoned**” with them or as we would say in our English word he **dialogued** with them. Now in the text we can see that Paul opened up a discussion with **three different groups** who were all searching for truth (*albeit in completely different ways*) to make sense out of their lives. We will find these same three groups around today:

1. Vs. 17 **RELIGION!** “*in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshippers*”: Evidently there was a synagogue in Athens so Paul went right in

on the Sabbath and started dialoging with those who were religious. Luke tells us that the religious folks were made up of Jews as well as Gentile worshipers. These were the people who had left the emptiness of the worship of self for a set of rules to help them worship God and make sense out of life. In a city filled with 30,000 idols there was a group of people that had gotten together to run away from the emptiness of the worship of self and they began to do certain things and not do other things trying to find some sort of meaning in their lives apart from life revolving around themselves. But instead of life revolving around themselves life was now revolving around rules and regulations. And when you really stop to think about it, no matter how noble the attempt, in the end it is still self worship only now it is in what person does or doesn't do! Paul described the religious this way in 2 Tim. 3:5 "*having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*"

Prior to saying this Paul tells Timothy that the outcome of religion shows it's self by being, "*lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*"

Religion has no answers to the idols of the world and instead makes its experience just another idol to be worshiped. Folks though this synagogue was in Athens and opposed idolatry it offered nothing to prevent it only another thing to worship.

2. Vs. 17 **SUPERSTITIOUS!** “*in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there*”: In Athens the market place was the famed **agora** which was an outdoor mall, full of business’s and trades people. Paul went daily to the mall to talk with the common citizens of Athens. These were those who were worshiping idols. They had tried to make some sense out of life by any means possible and ended up just worshipping the Greek gods becoming **SUPERSTITIOUS**. Today we see many in our society are over taken by superstitions. Personal psychics, astrological signs and aliens from another galaxy, are all presented to try to make sense out of life so they can navigate across the mine field of life. Such thing are indications that people are searching for answers to the questions of this life. These superstitions work well as long as life goes along according to our expectations but when the folks who practice them face a crisis then these superstitions are worthless and are usually drop for another one.
3. Vs. 18 **PHILOSOPHERS!** “*certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers*”: Here Paul lists the last group that he entered a dialogue with the, philosophers. Here we see systems of beliefs based upon intellectual arguments as **people had left the superstitions and idols to pursue intellectual ideologies which formed concepts of living**. Now Paul lists two of the three rival systems “which were considered as truth” that were popular at that time, (*the third which Paul doesn’t mention was the Cynics*). These systems of thought are still very much alive today.

- a. **Epicurean:** “*Philosophy of the gardens*” was founded by Epicurus who died in 270 BC. He and his followers held that **pleasure was the chief aim of life.** Though he taught that there were gods he thought that they were so remote as to not be interested in the affairs of humans, so they were in practicality atheists. **Things that happened to people did so by chance** and for this philosophy there was no life after death so live for the moment which made them **materialists.** Their motto is still popular today, “**Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.**” Today we see this philosophy on bumper stickers and tee-shirts that say, “***The one that dies with the most toys wins.***” “***You only live once, so might as well go for it!***” Folks that live under this philosophy are thrill seekers, adrenaline junkies and materialists.
- b. **Stoics:** “*Painted colonnade*” so named for the place where the founder Zeno taught this philosophy. Zeno died in 265 BC and popularized the thought that said **all of life was determined by fate.** He believed that everything was god and god was in everything. **Self-mastery was the goal of life and being indifferent to life’s ups and downs and apathy was their highest virtue.** The motto they lived under would have sounded like our sayings of, “*What will be, will be*” “*Grin and bare it.*” or “*No Pain no gain*”. Since god was in all and all was

in him they sought to live in harmony with nature. They would have been the tree huggers and new agers of today.

To simplify these two thoughts you could say that the:

- **Epicurean** said **enjoy life!**
- **Stoics** said **endure life!**

Now what these three groups all had in common was that they were all seeking answers for the questions of life. They were all seeking help and guidance trying to make sense out of life in this world. So it is into these three groups that Paul comes into Athens with a new world view, a new way of living life.

III.) Vs. 18b-21 Now playing, “Seed-picker”

Vs. 18b-21 So Paul shares with them a different worldview, different then:

- Religion
- Superstitions
- Philosophies

Paul “*preached*” or proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection (verse 18). And **in proclaiming the resurrection he must have proclaimed the cross.** Later, Paul would write to the Corinthians, “*we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.*” **To the worldviews of religion, superstition, fate and chance Paul proclaimed a relationship with God through His Son Jesus.** Their response was to call Paul a “*seed picker*” which was a put down regarding him as a little bird that moves around pecking at seeds. “*Paul*”, they said, “*Your nothing more then a person who goes around picking up little fragments of truth here and there, piling them all together in away to try to impress people!*” This would have been part of the **Epicurean’s**

philosophy **of living for the moment which came against the Bible's view of living with an eternal view.** The other view of the Gospel was from the **Stoic** view that Paul proclaimed two God's, Jesus and the Resurrection. They were somewhat interested though Luke adds only because they were always interested in some thing new. In Athens concepts were often worshiped as gods, so what Paul proclaimed could be added to what they already worshiped.

Vs. 19-21 So They show some interest in what Paul has to say and bring him up to the Areopagus or Mars Hill where the old court use to meet. These Athenians were like a lot of people today always hungering after something new and the novelty of Paul's message brought him an audience to hear what he had to say.