



Sermon – September 29, 2019  
Randy Wilson

**Verses Covered**

*Acts 17:16, 23 – 34*

*Romans 1:20*

Steve, I appreciate that we sang a song today in both English and Spanish. Since I preach more in Honduras, now I feel more at home this morning. I appreciate that. If you would turn in your Bibles to Acts 17, we're going to be looking there this morning. Let me just give you a little background of where we are and kind of set the setting for the lesson today.

Paul had been up in Thessalonica and Berea. He'd been preaching there. Everywhere he went the Jews attacked him and ran him out of town. And so he had left Berea and he'd gone down to Athens and he's waiting for his team to join him. And so he's kind of hanging out in Athens and he walks out and he says these words, verse 16. Acts 17, verse 16. It says:

*<sup>16</sup>Now Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.*

How many of y'all have ever been to Athens to see. You walk through Athens and all you see are statues and temples and altars to gods of all kinds. And I've had the privilege to do that, to walk through that, to see that, and I'm just amazed at how these people could worship so many different gods. And just so many different things. But he makes a point here that made me just stop in my tracks this week and think. Am I provoked within me of the lostness around me? No, we don't walk around Bryan/College Station and see little statues and altars and temples to pagan gods. But we walk around Bryan/College Station and we see lostness. And we see lostness all the time. We greet people and we talk to people and we meet people and we see lostness. People who do not know Jesus Christ. What does that provoke within you? What does what provoke within me? Does it provoke anything in us? Or is it so commonplace that we just kind of walk through and we don't even think about? We don't think about the fact that we live in a broken world with so many people who don't understand who Jesus is.

So the town of Athens, give you a little insight into the town of Athens. Athens, I love this, it would have been considered by now days, a university town. There were two major schools of philosophy there. It was higher education. Most of our philosophers that you know came from

there or spent a lot of time in Athens. And so it was very much a school of higher education, or a town of higher education, the cradle of the Greek civilization. But there are two major groups here. The Epicureans, and this is some of their basic beliefs. I just kind of wrote down a few of them here. No divine creation. God exists, but He's way out there somewhere and He's not really involved with man. There's no life after death. There's no Hell. No concept of sin. And their chief goal was pleasure. And they define pleasure by the absence of pain. And so their goal in life was to find whatever was pleasure. And whatever pleasure and took pain away had to be good. That's what they sought after in life.

The Stoics, the Stoics believed that the world was created out of fire by logos, not the logos we know in John. But logos, the impersonal forces that create and hold together. So some god of some kind, we don't understand, really just some force. Some force out of fire kind of just made all this happen. OK. God is in everything. So they worshiped everything. But God, again, is way out there and not involved in our personal lives. Very limited belief in life after death. Your soul may exist for a short time after death, but not your body, and really not everybody, and really it was no big deal. Of course, no Hell. Again, no concept of sin. And their chief goal was to live in harmony with reason and to be at one with nature. OK. So I know this is a stretch. But do you think we can possibly think of College Station and Bryan as we talked about Athens. A university town, people just wanting to learn, pleasure is our main goal, the absence of pain, God's maybe out there, but He's not involved in our lives. If we can kind of make that jump, let's do that jump as we join into what Paul says. Because we're going to look at what he says. So jump down to verse 23. He said:

<sup>23</sup>While I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

And I think that, I think obviously is provoked. He wants to share truth. But again, these are people that thought they knew everything. And as he's walking through, he says basically, Paul's thinking, "You think you know everything and yet you have an altar over here to an unknown God that you don't know. So let me share with you something you even admit you don't know. Because I know who this God is and even you in all your education and all that you've done, you have no clue because you're ignorant of who this God is." So he shares with them. Verse 24:

<sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and all things in it,

So he starts out describing God to them. God is God Creator. In fact, God created the heavens and the earth. They were done by design. It wasn't some impersonal force. It didn't just happen. There was design here. And God made that design and God's in control. Because he says, the very next thing he says, that,

and He's Lord of heaven and earth,

So God created all of this. He has a design for all of this. And He's Lord over heaven and earth. He's in charge of all this. It's not just God way out here somewhere looking down at man and ignoring him. He's in charge and we're going to read in a few minutes how He's in charge in our

personal lives. But He made it all and if He made it all does He not understand it? You ever talk to someone who's invented something and made something and ask them about it? They can tell you every minute detail of it. That's how God is because He created this world we live in. He's Lord of heaven and earth.

and He does not dwell in temples made with hands.

God, we, through time, and even into today, we try to put God in a box we can understand. And we, even in this room here, we have a tendency to do that sometimes. If I can't understand God, if I can't understand something about Him, I feel this need to understand so I tend to make God into a place made with hands, a temple made with hands, or my thought, so that I could understand Him. That's not who God is. God's thoughts are beyond our thoughts. I will never be able to understand Him. But we continually try to make Him into something that we can understand. And that's what Paul was sharing with them. So God is God, Creator, Lord of heaven and earth, He doesn't live in temples made with by men. Then he goes on:

<sup>25</sup>nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything,

And so the next thing he says, He's creator and He doesn't need us serving Him. Now, we don't do that, right. We don't ever pray to God and say, "God, You probably don't know this, but this is going on. I need to give You insight into what's going on." Or we pray and ask God to take care of a situation. We don't like the way He's taking care of it and so we say, "God, You probably need my help in taking care of this situation because I don't think You can do it on Your own." I'm afraid we have these thoughts. Again, God doesn't work at our pace. He doesn't do things the way we want to and so we think He needs our help. And this verse he says, He doesn't need our help. He's not served by human hands. And then he goes on, to me the second half of that sentence,

since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

Do we really believe this? Do I really believe that I'm standing here today only because of God? I have breath in me only because of God. Or is it because I eat right or I exercise right or I do these things right. Why am I here today? Why even live today? Why do I have breath today? Do I really believe this verse that says that He is the One who gives me life and He's the One who gives me breath? And then we get into the last part of that. It says:

and He gives us all things.

And, again, does He give us all things? Now some of them I work pretty hard for and some of them I've sacrificed for. And some of the things, I have three degrees, so I've earned. You know, I can go on and on about me and what I've done. But do I have anything in my life that God hasn't given me? If that's true, if I really believe that, it will change the way I live my life. Because I really believe that. That everything I have from things to education to relationships, everything I have is from God, then should be able to be used by God to fulfil and to build His kingdom; shouldn't it? Am I there? Am I willing to admit that everything I own is from God? And that therefore it's His and He can use it however He wants to. He goes beyond that, verse 26;

<sup>26</sup>and He made one man, Adam, every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and boundaries of their habitation,

So God created Adam and from Adam He created Eve and then He grew every nation in the world that's ever existed, right. And it says, He determined where there were countries and where there were not. And we see that all throughout the Old Testament don't we. We see God raising up nations and we see God taking nations down. They were, their boundaries were appointed. You know, and no matter how great they were, we can go through the Greek Empire, the Roman Empire, the Medes and Persians, the Babylonians, all of them. At the time people would have said, "Oh, there's never going to be anybody bigger than this. They're going to live forever. They're going to control forever." But God raised them up and He took them down in His appointed time. It was not based upon man or how powerful they were or how good their government was. It was based upon God and the plans that He made and the plans that He had. And not only did He determine their appointed times and boundaries, but also what time, when they lived. You know. How many of y'all ever wished that you lived in a different time than you live right now? You ever think about that? Yeah. You know, and we think it would have been so simple because we don't really know the real, you know, I wish I lived in the old west. I wouldn't have a cell phone to bother me all day long. I wouldn't have a computer that doesn't work when I need it to work and works all the time when I'm really not depending on it. You know, and we wouldn't have all these things. But God ordained for you to live right now. He ordained for other people to live in a different time because He has a plan. We're not here just by chance. We're not here by accident. God is working out a plan. He's a God of creation. He's a God that gives us life. He's a God that set us at a certain time and in a certain country. He's a God that's in control. And then it says in verse 27 that He made man that they would seek God and perhaps they might grope for Him. And we know over in Romans chapter 1 in verse 20 that Paul shares with us there very clearly, it says:

<sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Now, not a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, but can you look at what God has made and realize someone bigger than you made what we look out there. You look at a sunrise, a sunset, the mountains, the ocean, whatever your, whatever appeals to you. To me, I look at the mountains or I look at the ocean, or sunrise and sunset, and I see God. Man couldn't create something like that. And I realize who He is. And I think He's given us a desire to seek Him. Now what's the problem? The problem is, most of us at points in our life, just like we saw here, seek pleasure or self and we quit listening to God. And so that natural desire of us to seek Him, we squelch and we squelch and we squelch until we no longer hear Him. We have to awaken that. As we share who God is to the world around us, we have to remind them of who God is. That, and awaken that within them. And, again, I believe the Holy Spirit will clearly, in due time, draw them. That awakening will be there. They will be drawn in. We have to be faithful to share the truth when we get to that time. So he says:

<sup>27</sup>that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from one of us;

And, again, I talk to people today who believe that maybe there's a God but He's not involved in everybody's life. That's not the God we read about in the Bible. He's very involved in life. And He's close. And this would have been strange to the people in Athens because they would have said, all these statues and everything they had, they would have said, "Yes, there's a God, but He's not close. I can't know Him." No. God can be known. And He wants us to know Him. He wants us to have a personal relationship with Him. He wants to become our Heavenly Daddy. Which is where we go next when he says,

<sup>28</sup>for in Him we live and move and exist, even as some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His children.'

In Him we live, we move, and exist. And again, I'm afraid, just being honest here, I'm afraid there's too many times that I wake up and I don't move and live and exist in a consciousness of God. I move and live and exist in a consciousness of my To Do list. Y'all have To Do lists on your computer somewhere? You know. I'm afraid for me personally, as I was reading this this week, God says, "You know what, I think sometimes you let your To Do list control you more than I control you. But I'm the very reason you exist. I'm the very reason you live. I'm the very reason you move." And He says, "You have a right to become My child. I want to be your Heavenly Daddy. I want to have this personal relationship with you." In verse 29 he says,

<sup>29</sup>Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

And I had never thought about this, but how often as we read through the Old Testament we see people worshiping an idol, something made out of stone. OK. Now look at yourself. Are you made out of stone? If you're God's child, why would you think you would look like, He would look like a stone statue that you've made. And you would be able to talk and think and reason and do all the things you do. How do we make that jump? How do we, why would we do that? And again, it's easy, if I stay there it's easy because I would doubt that any of y'all have idols sitting in your house; little stone gods that sit on your mantle and you worship your god, right. But what are inanimate things that we worship? Money. What can money do? If there was a hundred thousand dollars in case laying here, what could it do? Could it move? Could it love? Could it reason? Could it do anything? Or is it just going to lay there? And yet, we worship something that has no life in it. Power. We worship power. What can power do in itself? Now I can use it, but what can it do in itself? And as you go through the list, what do you see people worshiping? I think we've got to take the time to help them to see, you're worshiping something made by man. And yet you want to find a god that's above you and beyond you in something made by people. I think he's trying to remind us of that. It's not about images formed by the ardent thought of man. In verse 30 he says,

<sup>30</sup>Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance,

Where did we start? We started back in ignorance. They worshiped this temple out of ignorance, this unknown God. He says,

having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,

What do they need to repent of? He tells us.

<sup>31</sup>because He, God, has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man, Jesus Christ, whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men

I'm afraid too often we want to stand up and share who God is and we only want to share half of who God is. I want to tell you that God is a God who will take all of your addictions away from you. He can do that. But He's bigger than that. I want to tell you, "Oh, just trust God and you won't have problems anymore." That's a lie. Because Scripture says that they persecuted Him, they're going to persecute us, and there will be trials. Or God's just this God of love and He loves everybody and you know, all that, and we want to present a half picture of who God is. Why is it that we struggle with finishing the description like Paul does here? God is a God of love. God wants to have a personal relationship with you. He wants to give you life and breath and your existence and to show you how to move and to walk with you and to be your Heavenly Daddy. He wants to do all those things. But the second side of that is if you choose to reject that, if you choose not to repent of your beliefs of self and what you've made and if you choose not to trust God, he says there is a time of judgement coming, a righteous judgement. And it will come. There is a fixed day. And every single man will be judged. And we've got to share that truth too. We've got to share the whole picture of who God is.

So we have this sermon here that Paul preached. And it's one of the few that we have. Because I think God shared this, I think Paul shared this same message every town he went into. This is who God is. He's God Creator. He's Lord of heaven and earth. He wants a personal relationship with you. He can be found. You know there's something in you seeking something bigger than yourself. I'm telling you who this God is. And also, if you choose to reject Him, there will be a day of judgement that comes. So Paul shares this and what happens? It says,

<sup>32</sup>Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead,

Again, remember, neither group believes in the resurrection of the dead.

some began to sneer,

Some began to make fun of Paul. Do you think Paul was upset that they made fun of him? You think Paul went back home that day and said, "You know what? I was made fun of so I'm going to change my sermon before I preach it next time. I'm going to leave the part about the resurrection out because that seemed to perturb people. They sneered at me. They made fun of me. I'm going to leave that element of it out." Can we leave that element out? No. We cannot. Can we leave any element of the Gospel out just because some people make fun of it? No. We can't leave out that God is God. We can't leave out; we can't leave out that He has a plan. We can't leave out

that there is absolute truth, that there is right, there is wrong. We can't leave any of that out. It's all part of who God is. And if we ever start leaving things out because people laugh at us or joke at us or make fun of us, we're not telling them who God really is. So we've got to give the whole picture. So some made fun of him. It says,

some said, "We'll hear you again."

And from everything I read on this, it was not like, "Man, that was, I've got come hear you again. I've got to hear this." It was more of, "Man I ain't heard anything like this. This was fun. Let's come and listen to this guy again and we'll see if we can make fun of him again." It was not a seeking out of truth. It was very much a, "Hey, we want to hear you again because you're weird and you're crazy and we'll come listen to you again and make fun of you again." So some actually made fun of him. Some said, "Yeah, we'll come hear you again." And then he says,

a few believed.

He mentioned one man, one woman, and a few others. Our responsibility is not that people get saved. Our responsibility is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world we live in. But before we do that, we've got to get to where we're even provoked at the lostness of people around us. Does that impact us? Do we care? Do we care that people are living their lives of total ignorance of who God is? They're worshiping self. They're walking through life thinking they're in control and they're heading to Hell. Does that bother us? Are we provoked? Does it have an impact on us? Because that's where this starts. We have to be provoked by what we see when we see a world that doesn't understand who Jesus is.

If you've been saved a while, can you imagine life without Christ? You know, as I look back through the last five or six years of our lives and things have come and gone in our lives. Some great and some not great. But God's been consistent. And I've made it through these times because I believe in a God who stays consistent. He is not a God based upon what I feel today. He is a God of truth based upon the gospel as clearly shared here. So we've got to decide who are you going to tell people God is? A great counselor. Stop there? Your ticket to heaven. Stop there? A way out of your problems and stop there? And, again, there's nothing wrong with any of these. But I'm saying we can't stop there. He wants a personal relationship with us where He walks with us every single day. Then I just challenge you to ask yourself, "What is your honest view of who God is and how you live your life?" Is your honest view of God in your own personal life is that you live and you breath and you move and you exist only because of Him? That every single thing you have is because of Him. And therefore my life, my breath, my words, my things, everything are at His disposal to use as He sees fit to build His kingdom. That's where He wants us. He wants us to share the total truth of who He is and then trust God to draw people to Him and let them make decisions.

Will you pray with me.

Heavenly Father, again, we just thank You for who You are. You are not an impersonal God who doesn't care. But, God, I am so thankful that You walk with us each day. I'm thankful that, that wherever I am, whatever I'm doing, I know you're there. Father, I'm so thankful that You put

Your Holy Spirit to live within me to walk with me. Father, I'm so thankful that You're my Heavenly Daddy. That those days I just need to crawl up in your lap and hold You that You're a personal God who allows me to climb up in Your lap to be held and to be comforted. But Father I also thank You for being a righteous God. And Father I just pray that You through Your Holy Spirit will let us see within ourselves are we provoked by lostness or have we come just to accept it. Father, help us to see the picture of You that we give as we share the gospel in our community here. And Father, help us to see if we tried to make You into something manmade, into a little box that I can understand instead of allowing You to be God who's Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Father, I pray this in Jesus name.