

Expansive Accessibility

Long Beach Alliance Church • January 26, 2014 • Pastor Chris Lankford

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 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.

-Acts 17:22-23 (ESV)

1) The Intoxicating City Of Athens

- A) Athens is one of the most famous cities of the ancient world. The culture achieved in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. still reverberates in today. Athens is considered the cradle of democracy, a foundation for the governmental system of the United States.
- B) The list of famous philosophers and prestigious people from Athens is staggering. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, Euripides, etc. Athens represented the height of philosophy, culture, literature, and the arts. It was like New York City, famous in the ancient world.
- C) Modernly, we marvel at the works of art still housed in Athens, Greece. But in Paul's day, many of the statues and art were idols to a staggering pantheon of gods.
- D) As Paul enters Athens (Acts 17:16), his spirit becomes increasingly agitated by the "forest of idols" which he encounters. For a former Pharisee (cf. 23:6) and follower of Jesus Christ, the culture of Athens was like the sound of scratching your nails down a chalkboard -- it was sobering and "provoked" his anger (17:16).

2) Paul Gets Invited To A Super Bowl Party!

- A) What would you do in a similar situation? Retreat and pray to God that "sin city" never touches you? Would you assimilate into the culture, "When in Rome...?" Would you go on the offensive, condemning Athenian morals and practices, fighting for the sake of Christ?
- B) Very few people could hate idolatry more than Paul (cf. I Corinthians 10:20), and few could stand with Paul in both his learning and Christian experience. So what Paul does next is one of the most provocative and interesting responses in the New Testament.
- C) Paul immerses himself in Athenian culture (Acts 17:17-18), engaging the Jews in the synagogue, people in the marketplace, and learned minds of Stoicism and Epicureanism. Simply, Paul asked questions. He listened. He learned. He piqued the interest of others.
- D) Paul's engagement with the locals is so effective, he gets "taken" to Mars Hill, the Areopagus (big rock) in Athens. Paul is going to the Super Bowl! People are intrigued and curious. So much so that PAUL GETS ASKED TO COME AND SPEAK (17:19-21).

3) The Gospel Is Out There, Celebrate It!

- A) As Paul speaks to the learned people of Athens, he brings the Gospel in an insightful, sensitive, and wise manner! His observations are spot-on, addressing the spiritual needs of the people, and introducing a highly religious but secular culture to Jesus Christ (17:22-27)
- B) Paul even quotes from Athenian philosophers and poets (17:28), and then brings the story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, calling for repentance (17:29-31).
- C) Note: The greatest missionary in history, and the second greatest evangelist ever to live, was largely rejected (17:32-33). But some believed... (17:34)!