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## HAPPY BIRTHDAY MARS HILL: SPECIAL 13TH ANNIVERSARY

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### Special

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Acts 17:16-34 | October 11, 2009

*Acts 17:16-34*

<sup>16</sup> Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup> So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup> Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbling wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. <sup>19</sup> And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?” <sup>20</sup> For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” <sup>21</sup> Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

<sup>22</sup> So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, <sup>28</sup> 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.”

<sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> 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.”

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

### WELCOME AND PRAYER

Alright. How’s everybody doing tonight? Doing good? *[Applause and Cheers]*

Thank you all for joining us and your patience. It’s a great honor to teach tonight from Mars Hill right here in Athens, Greece. I’m gonna go ahead and pray. We’ll read Acts 17 and then walk through it briefly. We’ll start with prayer.

Father God, I thank you for an opportunity to be in this amazing place. I thank you that the sun is out, that we could be together in the very place where Paul preached at Mars Hill, where the Gospel went forth into and from Athens to the ends of the earth. I pray, Lord God, that our time together would be enjoyable, that we would learn, that Jesus would be honored, and that we would follow in Paul’s footsteps not just literally but also spiritually, that we would have his faith for Jesus, his love for Jesus, his devotion to Jesus. And we ask for the grace to do so in Jesus’ good name. Amen.

### PAUL IN ATHENS (ACTS 17:16-34)

Read from Acts 17 beginning in verse 16: “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens,” — So I’ll set this up. Paul had already started a few uprisings and riots in a few previous cities, Berea, Thessaloniki. They thought they would send him to Athens so that he could stay out of trouble, take a bit of a holiday, get a break, but Paul, as you know, is not good at getting a break — “his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, 'What does this babbling wish to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus," — Mars Hill, where we are at presently — "saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some new strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.' Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

"So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus," — where we are presently, — "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. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 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, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, 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." 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. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 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.' Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius of the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."

## MISSIONARIES GO, SEE, FEEL, AND DO

Here's the story of Paul. He was on a missionary furlough in Athens and he follows a missional paradigm that he learned from the Lord Jesus, that is: *go, see, feel, do*. Jesus' ministry is often marked by *go, see, feel, do*. He'll go somewhere. He'll see the result of idolatry, people suffering and hurting. He'll feel grief, anger, remorse, sadness, sorrow, concern. He'll go, see, feel, and then do. He'll preach, teach, and the like. And so Paul here is following this *go, see, feel, do* paradigm established by the Lord Jesus. So he has previously gone to Berea and Thessaloniki, he has seen the need, he has felt compassion and frustration, he has preached the Gospel, he has kicked each of the cities into an uproar, into an uprising, the equivalent of a riot, and so some of his co-workers send him to Athens, telling him to go on furlough, take a bit of a break, just catch his breath, calm down, and what happens is, as Paul is making his way into Athens, as he is going, he starts to see, he starts to feel, and he is compelled to do. All ministry comes out of seeing and feeling, that's what compels our doing.

And so in going into Athens, Paul is following the instruction of the Lord Jesus at the Great Commission, where before he ascended back into heaven, Jesus said, "As you go, make disciples; as you go, baptize, preach, make disciples." And so as Paul is going into Athens, he has this mentality as a missionary, as a disciple of Jesus, and he knows that everywhere that he finds himself is under the providential hand of God.

The same is true for you and me. Wherever we happen to be, that is where God has providentially set us. He says it in Acts 17, that God has determined where and when we live; the places we go are determined by God. So, from the human perspective, it looks like Paul has gotten into trouble a few times, and he is told to vacation, as it were, in Athens. The truth is, in God providence, God is moving him into Athens for a very important strategic ministry opportunity.

## THE CITY OF ATHENS

Now, the city of Athens is very unique in the history of the world. It is the home of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Epimenides, Sophocles; the list is unparalleled in the history of the Western world.

Additionally, being a major city, it's a strategic place of importance. What we see in Paul's work is that he tended to go from city to city. As you trace his journeys in Acts, he would go from one city to the next, preaching, teaching. That's very important because cities are upstream, where culture is made. Cities are marked by two variables of density and diversity. There are more people per square mile, more kinds of people, languages, nations, tribes, tongues, religions, histories. If you want to reach the world, you must touch the city. The city has the capacity to touch the world.

In the days of *Pax Romana* or "Roman Peace," there was, through roads, the ability to send commerce and ideas from the city centers to the ends of the earth. So Paul knew that Athens was very strategic as a city for the cause of Christ and the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in our place, for our sins. And so he knows he's on a providential mission. He is going into Athens, a city with density and diversity, and he is compelled by what he sees. He is absolutely disturbed. The language in the Greek text is that he was agitated; he was compelled; he was mortified. He was in every way in anguish seeing the condition of the city. It was a city that had never had a Christian visit it. So Paul, in the history of Athens, was the first Christian to bring the news of Jesus to the city.

## GRIEVED BY RAMPANT IDOLATRY

And so he goes into the city and what he sees is rampant idolatry, widespread idolatry. Just behind us is the Acropolis, filled with nothing but idols, statues thirty to seventy feet high, some made out of gold. Nike is just off to our right. There are innumerable idols that were present in that place. Acropolis literally means "the high place," and so it was the place of prominence and preeminence. It was the place of dignity and honor. It's supposed to be the place that Jesus has in our life, and instead, it was devoted to idolatry.

And Paul was absolutely disturbed. As he walked into town, he would have seen temples to Zeus. He would have seen temples to Athena, the goddess after which the city of Athens is named. He would have seen actually no less than perhaps thirty thousand gods. In the days of Paul, thirty thousand gods were registered in the city of Athens alone. The ancient satirist Petronius, he had a clever statement. He said, "It is easier to find a god in Athens than a man."

At the time that Paul arrived, there were between thirty and forty thousand citizens and it had primarily become a university town for education. It was down from its high water mark of perhaps a few hundred thousand residents and there was essentially one god for every person in the city. A pantheon of gods and goddesses worshiped by the multitudes, temples built to them, land purchased, feasts, festivals, holidays, worship of every sort and kind.

Paul, in arriving, is disturbed. He is troubled. And let me say this. When it comes to idolatry, it is oftentimes easier to recognize idolatry in another culture rather than our own. In their day, they just considered these works of art, places of entertainment. They considered them places for feasting and celebration and holidays. We would call them restaurants. We would call them sports stadiums. We would call them shopping malls. And the reason that idols were worshiped in their day and our own was for the sake of blessing. In that day, the Greek mythology did not widely consider the gods to be loving, gracious, merciful, and kind. In fact, most views of antiquity all the way up through the present about gods and goddesses and religion and spirituality are not that they're loving, benevolent, merciful, and kind, but rather capricious and mean. And so the gods need to be manipulated through idols, which are sort of their intercessors, through feasts, festivals, through prayers, incantations, and manipulations. And so the whole point of idolatry was to get the mean gods to bless you, to get the distant gods to be involved in your life.

And so as Paul goes into the city, he sees this rampant idolatry, that the whole city is absolutely taken by idolatry. And I assure you of this, if we have the eyes of Paul, if we have the eyes of Jesus, when we walk into our own cities, we would see no less than the same degree of idolatry. Sex and money and food and power and fame and glory are worshiped and ultimately it's mankind that's worshiped.

What I find curious about all of the statues and idolatry that still remain and have been unearthed through archaeological digs in Athens as I've spent time here, is that the gods and goddesses are portrayed as human beings, almost as if they have supernatural powers as we would consider superheroes. So their view of a god is just a little bit beyond us but very much like us. That was as big as their concept of God could get because they in fact worshiped humanity as we do, our ideas, our experiences, our name, our reputation, our desires.

So he goes into Athens and he sees this condition of idolatry and he is tremendously grieved. That's what he feels, is grief. And what he does is respond. He cannot contain himself; he has to talk about Jesus. The only way out of idolatry is Jesus. You can get someone to stop eating and they'll start drinking, or they'll stop drinking and start smoking, or stop smoking, eating, and drinking, and start being proud of their morality and their idol is just hubris. So you can get from one idol to another, but you can't get from idolatry to worship unless you meet Jesus. Jesus gets us out of the cycle of idolatry and gets us back into the worship of Creator God rather than created things.

And so Paul, knowing this, he starts preaching and teaching about Jesus. He has to proclaim Jesus to the city. And if you think about how intimidating this might have been, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Sophocles the great playwright, you're surrounded with idols. All of the commerce of the city is for the patrons and for the tourists to come and to give homage to the deities and to give gifts and to sacrifice finances and wealth and affluence for the well being of this civilization. And he was attacking the very heart, not just of the religion, but of the commerce, of the ideology, of the philosophy, of the history, and he started in a place called the marketplace. It's just off to my right. It's on the bottom of this hill. There is currently an archeological excavation that is digging it up. It was the shopping center of that day. It was where, as Paul says, the Athenians would gather to debate philosophy, to consider ideas, to discuss. Next to it is a large lengthy building that would have housed the indoor shopping and the mall. To the left would have been a temple, the remains of which are still there. It housed Vulcan, the god of fire, and Athena, the goddess of the city, the goddess of peace through war.

## **PREACHING JESUS ON MARS HILL**

And he began preaching and teaching about Jesus. And immediately crowds gathered. They'd not heard about this god. They'd heard about the thirty thousand gods in Athens, but they'd not heard about this god, Jesus Christ. And so a crowd gathered, and eventually, Paul got enough of an audience that he was considered an important man. And so it says that they then took him up the hill to this place called Mars Hill.

Now, let me explain to you historically why they would do this. Because any man who is showing up to present a new god and a new religion and a new ideology, he likely would have been a very affluent man. And to present a new religion meant you would buy a huge piece of land, you would build an enormous temple, you would employ the citizens, you would have feasts and festivals, that you are willing to invest a great amount of money in the city. And so when Paul shows up to preach, they recognized that there's a business opportunity here; and so he needs to come before the Athenian court of some thirty men and he needs to have this god approved so that he can have permission to buy a piece of land, so that he can build a temple, so that Jesus can be one of the thirty thousand gods in Athens.

And so they bring him up to Mars Hill and he literally came up the steps to our left. These are the actual steps that Paul ascended when he was brought up to the Areopagus. *Ares* was the god of war, *pagos* is rock or stone, and so the Greek mythology said that this was the place where the god of war was judged for war crimes, so this was the historic place of justice. And so Paul was literally brought up these steps. Thanks to God, they're marble and still intact. And it's amazing that we can actually walk the same steps that Paul did, actually the same steps that Socrates did. Socrates previously was brought to the Athenian court of the Areopagus, or Mars Hill depending upon if you're working out of the Latin, and also Socrates was in this place prior to Paul.

And he was brought up here, some believe right actually in this part of the rock, and he was overlooking the idolatry of the city. He was overlooking the temple to Vulcan. He was overlooking the temple to Athena. He may have been able in the distance to see the temple to Zeus. He definitely would have seen all of the idols up at the Acropolis, the high point. And he also, off to the left, would have seen the Parthenon, the birthplace of democracy where ten thousand at a time could sit. And those who were Greek citizens would come and they would vote on legal matters. It would take six thousand to pass some sort of law that would go into effect. So this is the birthplace of democracy. This is an epic place on the world's history and on its map.

## CONTEXTUALIZING ON MARS HILL

And Paul was standing here before the court of Athenian philosophers and he does two things that are described in Jude 3 and 1 Corinthians 9. Jude 3 says, "to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." So he's gonna contend. He's gonna contend against the idolatry and the Greek mythology, and contextualize, 1 Corinthians 9, all things to all men so that by all means we might introduce as many people as possible to the resurrected, living, Creator God, the Lord Jesus Christ. He starts by contextualizing.

First, by being here, he's acting as a good missionary. He's bringing the Gospel to the Athenian culture. He is speaking their native tongue of Greek. He also starts by saying, "Men of Athens," which is exactly what Aristotle would say when he would begin his public addresses. So that was a recognized way for him to graciously, respectfully speak to the Athenian court. The Athenian court oversaw the gods and the goddesses and the worship and the legal matters of the city. So this is a very strategic opportunity for the Gospel.

He also, in his contextualization, he quotes some of their own poets. He quotes Epimenides and Aratus, one wrote about 600 B.C., before Christ, one about 300 or so before Christ. And he says, "In him we live and move and have our being." He's quoting a poem that was written to Zeus. He's going to apply it to Jesus. He's going to say good idea, bad god. He also says, "We are his offspring." And in so doing, he is quoting Athenian culture, he's quoting those who would have been well-known philosophers and ideologues, and so he is showing a measure of respect. He also says, "I see in every way you're very religious," some of the translations will say, "You're very spiritual." So he acknowledges that they, like our own day, are a very spiritual day. Now, they're very confused about who God is, but they're very spiritual nonetheless and he acknowledges that and uses that as a beginning place for discussion.

## CONTENDING ON MARS HILL

He then moves on to contend, to argue persuasively for the truthfulness of the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ. And it says in the text of Acts 17 that there were philosophers there, Stoics and Epicureans, they disagreed on a few things but there were three things that they held in common.

One, they were polytheistic. They believed in a pantheon, a multitude of gods, whereas Christianity has always been monotheistic, there's only one God. Secondly, they were also pantheistic. They believed that we as human beings and the gods and the goddesses were all part of the created order, that there was no clearly separated, superior, sovereign, providential, ruling, and reigning god who made the heavens and the earth as the Bible teaches. They were pantheistic. They believed that all was one. They eliminated that distinction between Creator and creation. And thirdly, they were pluralistic. They believed that whatever path worked for you, whatever god or goddess worked for you, whatever made you a better person, whatever blessed your business or your family or gave you affluence or sexuality or health or wealth or prosperity, essentially, if it worked for you, then the worship of that god and the practice of that spirituality was acceptable.

And so it's amazing that culturally, the distance is not so great from our own day: pantheistic, pluralistic, polytheistic. That's why when I went to plant Mars Hill Church in Seattle, I grabbed this text and I grabbed the name Mars Hill. When Paul would go to certain towns that were well established with a number of Jews in synagogues, he would go to the synagogue and he would reason with them from the Scriptures about Jesus, showing that he fulfilled all the Messianic prophecy. But when you show up in a town like Athens, and you're up against things like the Acropolis, and you're standing before places like the Areopagus, then you can't just argue from the Old Testament Scriptures because the vast majority of the citizens don't accept them. So you start on common ground: you're very spiritual, you're religious, you believe in God, you want to know who this God is, you want this God to be involved in your life, and then you move toward contending, toward arguing for the truthfulness of Jesus.

And he actually does six points where he contends with them and argues with them, reasoning for the exclusivity of Jesus. Number one, he says that they are ignorant. Imagine standing here, with the Acropolis in the background and the thirty leading governors over the Areopagus, the Mars Hill, judging you. You're on trial and you start with, "You're all very ignorant." By ignorant he means, "You worship but you don't know what god you worship." He says, "As I came into town, I saw tomb to an unknown god. You don't even know what God you're worshipping," he says. And the story behind that was that the people were very superstitious. At one point in antiquity, a plague broke out in Athens and people were dying, and their assumption was, "One of the gods must be angry with us, we need to appease that god." So a man named Epimenides made the decision to allow a number of sheep to just go forth and wherever a sheep lie down, they would sacrifice that animal to that god to pacify that deity. And some of the sheep lay down in places they didn't know who the god was, so they made altars to unknown gods to cover their bets. It's like some people who will say, "I'm Muslim, Jewish, and Christian." What that means is you're confused and hedging your bets. That's kind of what happened. They're trying to place bets on all religions, hoping that all the gods will be okay and that eventually they'll get the right god. Paul says, "You're actually very ignorant." That's a very ignorant thing to be spiritual without a knowledge of god.

Number two, he goes on to say that God does not need a temple, that his God will not be contained by a temple. That he won't be purchasing a piece of land, they were very disappointed to hear this, that he won't be erecting an enormous temple because the God that he worships made the heavens and the earth, and he doesn't need us to make him a home.

Thirdly, he says that there will be no feasts and sacrifices because our God, Jesus Christ, he gives all men everywhere life, breath, and everything else. Jesus doesn't need us to feed him. Jesus doesn't need us to house him. In fact, he is Creator, we're created, we need him. He gives us the earth. He gives us food. He gives us breath. The God of Christianity is a giver, and the false gods, and the demon gods, and the goddesses of Athens, they were takers. They would take the food and the money and the well being of the people, and Paul says, "You're very ignorant, that's not who God is. He does not need you to build him a home. He made the earth. He doesn't need you to feed him. He's not hungry. He doesn't need you to serve him. He doesn't need your paltry human hands to do anything." And he was striking at the heart of their idolatry. He says in Romans 1:25 that the opposite of worship, which is paying homage to the real God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is idolatry. That they worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator God who is forever praised, amen. And so though they looked at this and they thought, "This is amazing! These are incredible tributes to our gods, and our culture, and our greatness, and the capacity of man," Paul said, "That's nothing compared to Jesus. Jesus doesn't need a home like that. Jesus doesn't need you to go to him. He comes to you. Jesus doesn't need you to feed him. He feeds you. Jesus doesn't need you to house him. He houses you." Paul says, "You're very ignorant if you're impressed with this. You've obviously not heard about Jesus. He's the one who's most impressive."

Number four, he goes on to say that he establishes all the nations. That Jesus doesn't just love the Greeks. He's not just the God of a tribe or a clan or a kin or a region. He doesn't just rule over a hill or a part of a city or a high place. He rose over all the nations. He loves all peoples, all races.

Number five, he says that unlike an idol, Jesus is actually near. An idol would be the representative of the god who was very far away and so you would build an idol to try to draw that God near. He says Jesus is very near; in fact, he's not far from us.

And number six, he said that Jesus was not to be judged. That Jesus was not to be judged.

## **JESUS IS THE LIVING JUDGE**

I'll come back to that in a moment. He explained Jesus in a few ways. Number one, he said that Jesus was Creator. Number two, that Jesus was sovereign over the nations. Number three, that Jesus was personal and we should seek him for a relationship. He also said, number four, that Jesus was unique. He's not like the idols and the other gods. You can't put him in the pantheon of religion and spirituality. And number five, he says that Jesus is the judge.

Now let me camp on this as my closing thought. In saying that Jesus is the judge, he was overturning the entire Areopagus, all of the Mars Hill. The whole point of this place was that, on behalf of the gods and goddesses, roughly thirty ruling men would make decisions about legal and religious matters for the city. And what he says is this, "Jesus rose from death and you do not judge him, he will judge you."

Now in saying that, he told them that they had no authority. He told them that he was coming in the authority of Jesus, which was superior to theirs. Here is one man, as far as we know the first Christian in the history of one of the greatest cities on the earth, one of the most epic, transforming, world-dominating, ideologically influential places on the earth, and Paul says, "Compared to Jesus, you are no one and your city is nothing." He says, Jesus will in fact judge you. You have no right to take a vote to see whether or not Jesus is God. He is God and he will judge you. If you do not repent, acknowledge your sin, confess it to him, that God became a man, that unlike the idols that we need to go find, he came to find us. Unlike the idols, who are capricious, he is loving and good. That he has come to be with us, that God has taken on human form, and that God has suffered and died in our place for our sins, and he has risen. And Paul says, in his address to the Athenians, that through the resurrection of Jesus, that is how the Father has stamped on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity, his approval as the judge of all mankind, all humanity, all gods, all goddesses, all men, all women, all nations, commanding everyone everywhere to repent and trust in Jesus alone for salvation.

And here's what interesting. Paul said that Jesus had that authority because he rose from death. And I always wondered, why was there such a strong reaction? I got to meet with a man named Bruce Winter. He was the head of the Tyndale House at Cambridge, looking at antiquity and history and archeological digs. I got to meet with him in Perth, Australia, about a year ago. And he told me something that I'd never read in any commentary and I've never heard in all my life, and I've read everything I could find on Mars Hill. And he said this, that when Mars Hill was founded, when the Areopagus was established, the statement on which it was founded was this: when a man dies, the earth drinks up his blood, "There is no resurrection." So the whole point of the court where we sit was this, they did not believe that there was a Creator God who is just, who would judge the living and the dead following our own death. They believed that justice had to come in this life because there was no final judgment in the end. And so this court was established on the assumption that there was no resurrection from the dead. And Jesus rose from the dead, and Jesus was the judge. And Paul came here saying, "You're very spiritual but very ignorant. You have no right to judge Jesus. In fact, he has risen from death." The whole point of Mars Hill is that Jesus Christ is greater than any religion, any idolatry, any court, any man, any woman, any collection of men or women, greater than any city, greater than any monument, that he has conquered death. He has done the one thing that no one and no thing has ever done. He's conquered death. He's conquered the wage of sin and he alone is victorious, he alone is judge. And he calls the Athenian court to repentance of sin, to faith in Jesus.

## **RESPONDING TO JESUS**

What happens is there are three responses: Contempt; some call him a "seed-picker," a hack philosopher. They scorn him. They thought they were gonna get a nice land deal, maybe a construction deal, maybe a few more tourists. They're not happy with this Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Others are curious. Luke records on Paul's behalf that they wanted to meet with him, they had more questions, so he followed up with them, answering questions about Jesus.

And there were a few conversions, the Bible records. There was a woman named Damaris, she probably was poor. And there was a man named Dionysius. So you have men and women, you have rich and poor. Dionysius, as far as we could tell from church history, he was actually one of the

roughly thirty men who sat on the Athenian court of Mars Hill. He became a convert. History records that he was the first Bishop of Athens. He oversaw the church planting. He followed the pattern of Jesus and Paul: *go, see, feel, do*. And he went out into the areas, and he saw the idolatry, and he felt compassion, and he preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The result is that Christianity spread throughout Athens and spread from Athens through Greece. It became one of the primary influential places in the world, in part because of the *Pax Romana*, "Roman Peace," in part because of the widespread knowledge of the Greek language and it becoming very prevalent and predominant.

What's very interesting, I'll close with this, having been in Athens for some time now, everywhere I go, everyone finds out that I'm a pastor and they call me "Father." [Laughter] It's very interesting. "\_Patre\_" I had a bite to eat recently in a restaurant and we have our five children with us, and the waitress, she spoke very little English, she said, "Oh, you have five children." I said, "Yes." She said, "That's wonderful. What do you do?" I said, "I'm a pastor." She said, "Oh, you're a father." I said, "Yeah, I guess I'm a father two times. I guess that's what I am." And she said, "That is the best thing in the world, to be a pastor with children." I've never heard that anywhere else on the earth.

And as I've explored, today 97 percent of Greeks are baptized Orthodox Christian. One percent are Anglican, Catholic, or Protestant. Ninety-eight percent of Greeks will claim to be Christian. Ninety-eight percent of Greeks will claim to be Christian. Whether or not they all possess the faith that they profess, I do not know. Again, Jesus is the judge; he'll sort that out in the end. Two percent are Muslim because of the invasion on various occasions of the Turks.

## THE TRUE ACROPOLIS

And what literally is "the high place," the Acropolis (that's what it means)? Technically, this is not the highest point in Athens. There's another point just behind us and they built at the top of it a church. And so the Acropolis of Athens today is the cross of Jesus Christ. And the good news is this, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true, that Jesus Christ is alive, and all it takes is one man filled with the Holy Spirit and the courage to speak about Jesus, and a city, a nation, a civilization as powerful, influential, and dominant as ancient Greece, bows its head, bends its knee, raises its hands, and serves Jesus.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Father God, we thank you for the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We thank you that Paul came here, not with an army, not with an entourage, he came here alone. He came here to see the idolatry. He came here to feel the heart of Jesus. He came here to do the work of Jesus. God, this place is not sacred. May we not turn these kinds of places into shrines, into idols, into holy places. God, may we always remember that places are not holy, that Jesus is, and that wherever we go, Jesus is not far from us. As Paul says, he is always near, that we should reach out for him, that we should seek him, that we will find him. Jesus, I thank you that we don't come here to worship idols. I thank you that we don't come here to build temples. I thank you that we don't come here to worship a capricious mean god that we must manipulate to love us and be good. That we come here to honor you, Lord Jesus, a living God, a loving God, a gracious God who has come to be near us and who has sent us wherever we go, where we work, where we eat, where we play, where we live, where we drink, where we shop, where we sleep, where we die, on sacred mission, as Paul said, you have determined the times and the places in which we live. As we go there, may we see the idolatry, may we feel the heart of Jesus, and may we do the work of ministry. May we contend. May we not let Jesus just be another god among the pantheon, just another religion among the menu of options. May he be Lord, King, Savior, God, and Christ. And God, we thank you for this amazing place, that we get to remember the work of a humble servant and we get to thank you for the Gospel ringing out two thousand years later. And so Jesus, we thank you that you are alive and we thank you for your goodness and we thank you in your good name. Amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.