

SERMON NOTES

To an Unknown God
Acts 17:16-34
February 26-27, 2011
Pastor Cathy Burkholder

I. Where did Paul go? The Agora

“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.” Acts 17:16-17

II. What did Paul see?

Paul saw the city was full of ideas:

¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.” ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

SERMON NOTES

Paul also saw the city was full of idols:

“he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.”

The Problem is Idolatry

Idols can be anything that we have given our heart to. So, what are some of these idols?

III. How did Paul feel?

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Deut. 6:4

He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ Luke 10:27

SERMON NOTES

IV. What did Paul do?

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: **TO AN UNKNOWN GOD**. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” 1 Pet. 3:15

²⁴ “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

SERMON NOTES

²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” ³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

The Gospel is the great idol destroyer
-Because it meets our needs
-for security
-for life
-for love
-for significance