

- SERIES: ACTS - The Knowable God
- READING: Acts 17
- LOCATION: St Bart's Toowoomba 7.30AM; 9.30AM, 6PM
- BIG IDEA: God is alive, knowable, near us, and is going to come again and judge the world
- APPLICATION: We must have a heart for those that don't know him and share his good news in ways that they can understand.
- STRUCTURE:
  - o The Unknown gods
  - o The True, Living Lord
  
- Over the summer period I gave myself a new role in the staff team at my previous workplace - the cricket advocate.
- So I kept people up to date with the scores in the normal way.
- But there was a bit of a problem - not everyone knew the rules of cricket or what the score meant.
- So the idea that a batsman was out LBW or that Head had scored a 6 just didn't make sense to some people because they didn't know what they meant!
- There was no passion for it, because people just didn't know or have any concept about cricket!
- Likewise, if we try and share with the modern, unchurched Australian that "Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for your sins"...well I would never say that this won't work -
  - o but the modern Australian probably doesn't know much about Jesus,
  - o has no concept of atonement,
  - o only knows about sacrifice from a military perspective from movies;
  - o And probably relates the word 'sin' to a really rich 'sinful' chocolate cake!
- So then - what are we to do?
- Well, we can take a leaf out of Paul's book here in Athens:
  - o He preaches widely to different people;
  - o He acts compassionately and graciously.
  - o He observes and analyses the culture of the day;
  - o He offers a critique on why the culture isn't correct;
  - o And then boldly proclaims the truth about God in words that they could understand.
  
- Throughout this Chapter - Paul firstly preaches in Thessalonica - but is kicked out.
- He goes onto Berea - but was chased out by jealous Thessalonian Jews,
- And then now, he finds himself in Athens.

### **The Unknown gods**

- Athens is a city with a real rich history.
- Its heyday was about 500 years BC. people such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle came from there

- In terms of population when Paul gets there, it's estimated to be around 10,000 people.
  - o BUT it's also been estimated that there were potentially 30,000 different gods.
  - o There was a saying going around at that time - that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man or woman.
  - o This place was teeming and overflowing with different gods.
- Paul isn't happy when he sees it.
- V16 "While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols"
- He was greatly distressed; there was a bit of a stomach churn; a jealousy for them; a passionate indignation that they would mistreat God in this way...
  - o *My sister, who was born in NSW married a bloke who was born and raised in QLD. And so when it came to state of origin after she got married; I was greatly distressed to find out that she was going to start supporting the QLD maroons!*
  - o *She swapped allegiances! I was jealous for her support of the Blues after growing up supporting them together! (you'll be pleased to know that I have in fact gotten over this matter)*
- Now ramp that up - and Paul was greatly distressed not because of a football team - but because they were devoting their whole lives to dead idols and unknown gods instead of the alive & knowable God!
- This word for "Greatly distressed" is the same word to describe how God felt when his people Israel rejected him for other gods.
  - o Distressed as they rejected him;
  - o Distressed as they rejected his love and favour;
- That same jealousy for them filled Paul's heart as he saw Athenians worshipping their gods. Their misplacing of their worship
- Not seeing the true God for who he is, but instead worshipping false gods.
- And this jealousy drove him to try and do something about it and address the situation.
- V17 "So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there."
- He went to the synagogue, where people would have known about the concepts of the Law and messiah. And, he went into the marketplace, called the Agora, where people had no idea!
- He faithfully told people about Jesus and answered their questions.
- But the people of Athens aren't really all that impressed with Paul - in fact they bag him out!
- Essentially, they think that Paul is a bit of a lightweight.
- So they take Paul into the Areopagus - the place where ideas could be hashed out and debated - particularly about religion and philosophy.
- It is the world stage of ideas and high thought and logic.
- So then let's just take a look at what Paul is doing here.

- Paul isn't just proclaiming to the **easy** or familiar people, but he is proclaiming to unreached people, to people who have no idea.
  - He's proclaiming the good news to people like the modern Australian -
    - o who are becoming more and more spiritual but not religious;
    - o who have little to no biblical literacy
    - o who generally dislikes the belief that there is only one God and only one way to him;
    - o but are also becoming more and more open to ideas and concepts of faith and belief if only we would tell them or invite them to hear!
  - Our world isn't too far away from the Athenians...it's not all that different!
  - We may look at the Australian culture in dismay and think that there is no hope, that it's becoming more and more unfamiliar, that the ground is too hard, and as a result we may have no motivation or appetite to share about Jesus
  - And in fact, we may be making assumptions about people that just aren't true! So why should we limit the potential spread of the gospel?
  - So we should take our lead from Paul - having a compassion for the lost and then proclaiming Jesus to all different kinds of people and let him change hearts.
  
  - So here is Paul in the Areopagus, with the members asking him questions and asking him to speak.
  - And what is recorded here is a brilliant way to share about Jesus.
  - Firstly - he does some cultural analysis. He makes observations about their world in order to figure out how to relate to their world. He walks through the streets, he listened to people, he observes what their world is like!
  - This then gives him the data to Secondly - offer a critique of how they live so that they can question their own beliefs.
  - Lastly, this then gives him a basis and platform to preach the gospel from. Analysis, Critique, Proclaim.
- If we want to be effective in sharing the gospel, then we've got to know who we are sharing it to. Start with where they are! Engage with the culture, critiquing it!
- And then, we get the opportunity and platform to tell them the better story, the bigger story - the news of Jesus.
  - V22 - "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 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. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you."
  
  - In his walks around town, he has observed, and offers the critique that they may be very religious, BUT they actually don't know the thing that they worship!
- This altar to an unknown God is probably their 'Just in case' altar. Just in case their 30,000 gods didn't cover everything, here is an altar to cover the rest...
- They claim to be high and enlightened, but they are actually not as enlightened as they thought.

- And this is Paul's platform. This is Paul's 'IN' with them...
- He's soon going to say
- "Let me tell you who is the real God, who created all things, who is actually alive. You worship an unknown god, let me show you something a million times better than that..."

## **The True, Living Lord**

- V24 "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 human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else."
  - You can't domesticate God; you can't contain God; you can't add anything to God; and he doesn't need us.
  - Athenians - God is so much bigger and better than you can ever dare to imagine!
  - This is really radical! He's speaking these words in a town where there are tens of thousands of statues, and multiple different temples, and people serving them, just down the road!
  - But Paul says that they've got it all wrong!
    - o God isn't like a King needing to be fed or a bronze god needing polishing
    - o He isn't just the god of a certain area, like a god of the weather, or a god of agriculture; or a god of fertility;
    - o No, he is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and everything and everyone in it.
  - But there's more - God has made himself knowable
  - It's not that God is really big and so he's just not understandable, no!
  - He has actually revealed himself to humanity...
  - This is what Paul says about this
  - V27 "God did this [God made an ordered creation] so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' 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 human design and skill."
  - Paul quotes the poetry of the day to further his argument.
- Originally, the quotes referred to the god Zeus. So the poets were close-ish to the truth - but Paul points the Areopagus to the one who is really the father of all.
- "Athenians, you worship many gods, statues idols; in human made temples...worship even an unknown god, But here's the bigger and better story..."
  - God isn't containable; God isn't unknowable;
  - God isn't just a god amongst other so-called 'gods' - no YHW is THE God - the maker of all things!
  - There isn't such a thing as multiple gods - because there is only one God. The Lord. The Almighty.
  - AND HE is the only one who is worthy of our devotion.

- Which means for the Athenians, that their gods are useless.
- And one day, God is going to put an end to the ignorance of him
- One day, God is going to come back and put an end to it.
- The clock is ticking and the time is set. The judge is going to come back. The command is to turn away from worshipping dead objects but instead live for the true God.
- V31 “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 everyone by raising him from the dead.”
- And this isn’t just the reality for the Athenians, this is the reality for us and for the whole world.
- When we die, we aren’t destined to be reborn, or to be absorbed by the universe, or to be destroyed, but to be judged by the Lord Jesus.
- Jesus is supreme over sin and death, he is the one who holds the keys, he is the one who has lived the righteous and sinless life - but died and rose again for us; so he is the one who is able to judge everyone who ever lived.
  - Including us and our workmates; our neighbours; our contractors; our family; everyone in the world.
  - And the command for them and us is to turn away from living for ourselves, or our comfort, or our social image, or our social standing amongst peers, but turn to the living Lord.
  - And if anyone turns to the Lord, he promises full forgiveness of the rejection of him, and promises eternal life...//
- As Paul looked out over the absolute forest of gods - he may have been tempted to think ‘nope - that’s just too hard’ But no, his passion for God led him to faithfully proclaim.
- As we think about the week ahead and people who we come across - it may be tempting to think ‘nope - that’s just too hard - probably won’t happen’. I’m tempted to think this too!
- But no ground is too hard.
  - There is a world that is misplacing its worship, people mistreating God, and buying into lies.
  - But this is a world that God loves; a creation that he came to save and redeem;
- And those of us who already know him have this simple task - to share the good news in ways that people can understand. Helping people see the goodness of God and the beauty of what he has done for us.