



Sermon Series Notes

"Intellectual Fools" (Acts 17)

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THE TEXT

vv.1-3 Paul “reasoned” with them (1256. dialegomai, dee-al-eg'-om-ahee; mid. from G1223 and G3004; to say thoroughly, i.e. discuss (in argument or exhortation):--dispute, preach (unto), reason (with), speak. From this Greek word get our English word “dialogue.”

The Scriptures were the key here. The Word of God does not need to be defended. It can defend itself!

“In sharing our faith we must give others room to move and think. The gospel dialogued, opened, and placed before others will always stand on its own.”

vv.5-9 We must never forget that we are in a spiritual battle. Whenever there is human opposition, the root of that opposition is spiritual (Eph.6:12).

vv.10-11 It is amazing to me how many people reject the Bible but have never read the Bible. There is no other book like this book!

v.12 Good fruit in Thessalonica, and even greater fruit in Berea.
And when there is fruit, what comes with it?

vv.13-15 Opposition

v.16 Pausanius, a Greek geographer, visited Athens 50 years after Paul & said it was easier to meet a god or goddess on the main street of Athens than to meet a human. There were some 30,000 statues of various gods throughout the city.

vv.17-34 The least fruit of the three places in our text was in Athens. Good fruit in Thessalonica, greater fruit in Berea, but little fruit in Athens. And I believe the main reasons are in the text. Read again vv.18a & 21.

Who were these Epicurean and Stoic philosophers?

Epicurus was an ancient Greek philosopher who believed in attaining a happy, tranquil life, characterized by *aponia*, the absence of pain and fear. He taught that pleasure and pain are the measures of what is good and bad, that death is the end of the body and the soul and should therefore not be feared, that the gods do not reward or punish humans, that the universe is infinite and eternal, and that events in the world are ultimately based on the motions and interactions of atoms moving in empty space. Epicureans believed in the gods, but that these gods had nothing to do with the world. They were practical agnostics who believed pleasure is the chief end of man and that a simple lifestyle is the most pleasurable (avoiding extremes, yet still pursuing pleasure).

The Stoics were pantheists, believing that everything is god. They taught that virtue is sufficient for happiness, that self-control and fortitude were the means of overcoming destructive emotions. A primary aspect of Stoicism involved improving an individual's moral and ethical well-being. "Virtue consists in a will that is in agreement with nature." Stoicism became the foremost popular philosophy among the educated elite in the Hellenistic (ancient Greek) world and the Roman Empire.

When we think of ancient Athens, we think of very educated people. When we think of Athens, we think of names like Aristotle, Plato, & Socrates. Athens attracted intellectuals from all over the world.

Aristotle was a Greek philosopher, a student of [Plato](#) and teacher of [Alexander the Great](#). He wrote on many subjects, including physics, [metaphysics](#), [poetry](#), theater, music, logic, rhetoric, politics, government, ethics, biology and zoology. Together with Plato and [Socrates](#) (Plato's teacher), Aristotle is one of the most important founding figures in [Western philosophy](#). He was the first to create a comprehensive system of Western philosophy, encompassing morality and aesthetics, logic and science, politics and metaphysics.

Socrates was also a [Greek philosopher](#). He is also credited as one of the founders of [Western philosophy](#). Socrates has become renowned for his contribution to the field of ethics. "The only true wisdom is knowing you know nothing." "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance." "To find yourself is to think for yourself." "Strong minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, weak minds discuss people." "By all means marry; if you get a good wife, you'll become happy; if you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher." "We cannot live better than in seeking to become better."

Plato was a mathematician, writer of philosophical dialogues, and founder of the first institution of higher learning in the western world, The Academy in Athens. Along with his mentor, Socrates, and his student, Aristotle, Plato also helped to lay the foundations of Western philosophy.

There is a verse in the Bible that describes the people of Athens.

II Tim.3:7 Always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

I Cor.3: 18-19 Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.

Rom.1: 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools...

LESSONS FROM THE TEXT

- Smart People Are Not Always Wise People

- * Illus: Show clip from "Expelled"
- * Psalm 14:1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."
- * Psalm 53:1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

- People Are Not Saved By "Smart" or Intellectual Messages

- * Rom.1:16; I Cor.1:18-25; 2:1-5 (Note Acts 18:1)

- * Paul's experience in Athens drove home an important point to him that he would never forget, and that is the power in the simple gospel message.

- Never Mix Worldly Wisdom With The Gospel

- * My oldest son Tanner had to write an essay for a college scholarship application through the Pinellas Education Foundation (goes to organizations that offer Florida scholarships). I'd like to read you a portion of his essay:

- For the past few years there's been something inside of me that has just wanted to debate the facts, and not even the facts, but merely intellectual ideas. Some egomaniacal part of me has fought for dominance over intangible thoughts and theories, while all along my soul has shied away from the truth of the matter. It's as though I were in a garden hacking away at the leaves of a monstrous weed and taking exceedingly great care not to attack its root. Tonight I realized a profound truth has already, within the past hour, made an equally profound impact upon my outlook on life: The truth of Jesus Christ outweighs any issues concerning "religion" of morality. Having grown up in Christian home where I was fed the Word of God as daily bread, I knew the truth of Jesus Christ. Having accepted Him as my Lord and Savior at a young age, I desired to offer something in return for the gift He bestowed upon me. But somewhere over the course of time I began to worry more about the issues of life than His truth. I became ignorant to the fact that there is absolutely nothing I can do to "return the favor," as it were. My earnest to please God morphed into a vulgar quest to point out the faults of everyone else rather than speak the truth of my Lord. It saddens me to think it hasn't been until my senior year of high school that I've realized my utter failure in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. The first three years I spent arguing the reality of a Supreme Being rather than shining a light upon that being, namely the God of Israel. I'd been hacking away at the leaves of a weed when I should've been attacking the root. I sought to strain out a gnat but swallowed a camel. This is the great challenge of my life: to know Christ and preach him uncompromisingly to those around me...All I need do is present the gospel of Jesus Christ, His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead for the sake of the world. Upon that truth, God will work what He may in the lives of those I encounter in my lifetime.

- The Simplicity of the Gospel Does Not Discount the Evidence for (Intelligence of) Truth.

- For example, some charge that the Bible is filled with mistakes as a result of the ancient manuscripts being copied and recopied by hand over many years. But a discovery at The Dead Sea in 1947 proves otherwise. They are called the Dead Sea Scrolls. Except for the book of Esther, they contain every book of the Hebrew

canon. Prior to their discovery, the earliest Old Testament texts were the Masoretic texts, and they are dated from about A.D. 90. One of the most preserved manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the scroll of Isaiah. The original copy of Isaiah was made about 1700 years before the Masoretic texts, so critics assumed that centuries of copying and recopying must have introduced scribal errors. The copy of Isaiah among the Dead Sea Scrolls was copied about 500 years after the original. When scholars compared the Masoretic text of Isaiah with that of the one found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, they were virtually the same! The only variations were minor slips of the pen and spelling alterations.

- And then there are the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible. Just the ones about Jesus alone, if examined with an open mind, should make anyone a believer.
- Finally, there is the Bible's confirmation of scientific discoveries.
 - Job 26:7a He spreads out the northern skies over empty space...
 - Just a few years ago astronomers discovered a huge hole in the northern universe. It's nearly a billion light years across, and no one knows why it's there.
 - Job 26:7b...he suspends the earth over nothing.
 - Just under 400 years ago man discovered that the earth is held in place by gravitational forces. Job 26:7 was written over 3,000 years ago!
 - Ecclesiastes 1:6 The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.
 - This verse describes the circulation of the atmosphere.
 - Job 28:25 To establish a weight for the wind
 - This was discovered in 1640.
 - Lev.17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood...
 - In 1616 William Harvey discovered that blood circulation is the key factor in physical life. Blood carries oxygen from the lungs, water and nourishment to every cell, maintains the body's temperature, & removes waste material.
 - Isaiah 40:22 He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth...
 - Discovered in 6th century, but debated until the third century when it was confirmed by Greek astronomers.
 - Rev.11:9 For three and a half days people from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their dead bodies and refuse them burial.
 - This prophecy describes modern television, which was only invented in the late 19th and early 20th century.

CONCLUSION

- It is utter foolishness to not believe the Bible and the truth it proclaims.
- Socrates: "All of the wisdom of this world is but a tiny raft upon which we must set sail when we leave this earth. If only there was a firmer foundation upon which to sail, perhaps some divine word."
- The greatest & most important truth that God has revealed through the Bible is the message of the gospel (John 3:16). Jesus is the red line that runs from Genesis to Revelation. The wisest thing you could ever do is believe the gospel & receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior.