

No longer the great power of Greece & the ancient world but still, c. 2000 years ago, its capital of ideas with greatest university in the world & great buildings. Paul did not visit Athens in order to see the Parthenon & other tourist sites or enjoy the sun through the smog of traffic fumes & forest fires. Paul had gone there by himself from cities further North, aware that some dozen years before, God had called him, the risen Christ has spoken to Him personally & had turned his life around to know God's loving forgiveness; & had commissioned him, despite much opposition, to share the good news of God's love offered to all through Jesus, well beyond Israel & the Jewish religious community.

The account of Paul's visit challenges us

1. **He saw, He felt, he spoke. It all began with his eyes: v. 16** *He was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols*, statues & shrines devoted to "gods", so he talked wherever he went with whoever would listen, to share the good news of Jesus. Am I / are we are part of His Church today, as upset/angry /distressed that people do not recognise & give God the allegiance which is His right? Are we not often deaf, blind & tongue-tied? What opportunities do we have to share reality of God's love? We constantly pray "*Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come....*"but do nothing about it! **& idols?**
Idols are not just in primitive societies. Any person or thing that occupies the place which God should occupy is an idol. Desperately wanting what someone else may have can be an idol. So can fame, career, wealth & power, sex, food, alcohol & other drugs, spouse or partner, children & friends, work, social media, even church & religion. Who or what comes first in my life?
2. **The urgency & vital importance of Paul's message: God is not a private God, just concerned for you & me, or some few select religious people, but for all people**, whatever their background or situation. This is the God who is Creator & Sustainer of the Universe. The true God not remote & unconcerned but who has come in Jesus – to show us that love & by His rising from the dead proves that He is God. The God who wants us human beings to recognise God's goodness & to respond to the love & friendship & life, He offers. We are all accountable to God for our lives & for how we respond to what we can know of God. The good news of Jesus is that although each of us fall short of God's goodness, all who trust in God's grace & love through Jesus will not be judged but have life. (John 3:15-17; 5:24; Romans 3:23)

3. **Was Paul's short ministry in Athens a success?** At the phrase, "raising him from the dead", the listeners split: some laughed at him & walked off making jokes; others said "Let do this again. We want to hear more." But that was it for the day & Paul left. There were still others, it turned out, who were convinced then & there, & stuck with Paul, among them Dionysius a member of the Areopagus Council & a woman named Damaris, (possibly a prostitute who had hung about Mars Hill.) That's all we know for at start of next chapter moved onto port of Corinth. But each person, who comes to know & trust God's Grace in Christ matters to God!
4. v. 21- ***Most of the people in Athens liked nothing more than to stand around & talk about and listening to the latest ideas.*** They were talking but that was it – cynically finding comfort in their own cleverness & new ideas – that leads to despair rather than the life that Christ offers. & they were "very religious" (v. 22) too. Being religious or superstitious does not bring life. Only Christ can! Let none of us put off & delay responding to Christ's call. Amen.

Sing ***In Christ alone, my hope is found***

Notes:

2 main philosophies or ways of things about life in ancient Athens:

Epicureans: They believed that everything happened by chance; that death was the end for all; that the "gods" were remote & did not care; that pleasure was our chief purpose although do not hurt others.

Stoics: They believed that everything was god; that god was fiery spirit but there was a fading spark in each person; that everything that happened was the will of god so should be accepted; that every now & again, the world would be burnt up & start all over again.

Areopagus (the Greek for Mars' Hill): the name of both of the hill & of the court that met on it. That court was very select, perhaps just 30 members. It dealt with cases of homicide and had the oversight of public morals.