

07.05.17

Is Despised and Rejected by Man's Religion and Reasonings

Acts Chapter 17

Chapter Seventeen is such a great chapter because it reveals to us the response of the world to the church. It is what Christ had warned His disciples about. If we think of John Chapter Fifteen and John Chapter Sixteen, Jesus' states to His disciples,

(John 15:18) "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you."

He warns them that it will not go well for them in the world.

(John 16:2) "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God."

That is an interesting point. We therefore realize that it is a hostile world that we live in. The world is angry at God, and more specifically, at Jesus Christ because He is the exact

representation of who God really is. Other than Him, all others are facades. There is no reason that the evil one would be against the facades. As we consider this passage, it is a good reminder that we are in a world that is against us. Let me show you some passages to deal with this in addition to John Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen.

(I John 4:4) “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He that is in you than he who is in the world.”

(I John 4:5) “They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.”

(I John 4:6) “We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this, we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

There is an “us” and a “them”; and clearly, there is a different kind of communication from one to the other. The world does not understand what we are saying. We do not understand what the world is talking about because the

things that the world loves and is endearing to them do not have any kind of allurements for us.

John has already stated in First John that the world is going to hate us the same as he stated in the Gospel of John. It is by the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error that you can discern the people who are seeking the truth. If they are seeking Christ and they begin to understand what you are talking about, they will come to understand the Gospel. They will begin to understand your love for Scripture. They will understand your love for the brethren. They will begin to think like Christ. If you are sitting around talking with somebody and the only things they seem to talk about are church programs, church organization, then there is something missing. It is the one chromosome that will get you into heaven. That is the issue. What John is saying is that this is one way that you can tell. You can tell which spirit you are hearing. When the Spirit of God, who loves those things as Christ does, fills your soul, you always want to do the will of the Father. His Spirit is going to be evident.

The Spirit of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with what we often see infiltrating our religion today. You will know the spirit of truth and spirit of error. In First Corinthians Chapter One, Paul talks to us about the world and how those in it perceive the Gospel. As you come towards the end, he tells us

(I Corinthians 1:27) “but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,”

(I Corinthians 1:28) “and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,”

The weak and the foolish will confound the strong and the wise. God is going to choose the things that are not to nullify the things that are. But before He gets there, He tells us specifically about the fact that the world perceives His Gospel as very foolish. You can hear the world’s foolishness permeating the hearts in the world. In fact, if

you were to go on TV and began talking about your love for Jesus Christ, it would not be long before you would be grossly ridiculed and laughed off the stage, so to speak. We know that the world does not perceive the Gospel with wisdom. Paul says in First Corinthians Chapter One that we know it is perceived as foolish. He refers to it as the foolishness of the message. He is not talking about the foolishness of preaching. He is talking about the message itself. He is talking about telling people that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins and that you can have eternal life through Him. In First Corinthians Chapter Two, Paul continues talking about “they” and “us” but using different terms.

(I Corinthians 2:14) “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are Spiritually appraised.”

The natural man cannot understand it. He cannot get it. It does not register with him. From the beginning, he says,

(I Corinthians 2:1) “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.”

(I Corinthians 2:2) “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

It seems so simple; even so, man does not get it. I formulated the title for this message as the church is despised and rejected by man's religion and reasonings because it parallels directly with Christ our Savior.

(Isaiah 53:3) “He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

It should not surprise us that the world will despise and reject the church because we are the body of Christ. Christ is still despised and rejected; and it is largely by man's religion. Paul talks about this

(Colossians 2:23) “These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and

self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”

He defines what he calls self-made religion. That is an interesting phrase, isn't it? Self-made religion. I have had people ask me from time to time, “Why are there so many religions?” I answer, “Because there are so many desires and so many different personalities. All of these desires and personalities are the basis for people to invent their own religion that fits in with their desires. It is one of the things we will look at tonight. There are two contrasting philosophical views within this passage; they are the Epicureans and the Stoics. We will see the hostility that comes from the Jewish synagogue. If you look with me in Acts Chapter Seventeen it begins, (Acts 17:1) “Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.”

Paul, Silas and Timothy travel quite a distance without finding anyone that God had them go see. They did not sense the Spirit of God. If we are thinking strategically and logistically, we would have to say, “Well, we do not want to

miss these cities that were passed by. We are going through them anyway, so let's hold a rally.” But as we saw earlier, God was moving them away from Galatia. He was moving them away from Cappadocia. He says, “I do not want you going there. I want you heading straight here.” Paul goes into a Greek town called Philippi in which there was no Jewish synagogue. There were women outside; and there was one Philippian jailer who was one who embraced the Scripture. We realize that he was the Macedonian in the vision that Paul had. This man was crying out for help. He did not even know it. There is a passage that I want to clarify that I did not touch upon last week.

(Acts 16:30) “and after he brought them out, he said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”

(Acts 16:31) “They said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”

It seems to convey that everybody is being saved by virtue of his one decision. I want to clarify that this is not the case. Sometimes we will read something that causes people to come up with conclusions based on a limited understanding of a passage. So let me clarify the text for

you. I have seen this misunderstood before. What you have in the phrase “both you and your household” is what is called a cumulative conjunction. What that means is basically that it is saying that salvation is for you and all who believe like you. It has a cumulative effect. In other words, when it says, “you and your household,” it is saying “if” you and your household will believe. If each of you believes in the Lord Jesus, those shall be saved. Probably the better way to understand it is, “If your household believes, they shall be saved”. I wanted to clarify that since we passed over it last week. Paul finally comes upon Thessalonica. This was one of the residences of the royal daughters and sisters. Is that the reason why the city was named Thessalonica? I am not really sure. I think it probably had its basis in a famous battle, and the city was named after that. The point is that they are in Thessalonica which is the church Paul writes to in the Book of Thessalonians. In the Book of Acts, we see the beginning of these churches. The letters are the epistles that are written to the churches which you see in the rest of the New Testament. If you ever read the Book of Thessalonians, you know where to find its beginning. This is a Greek town as well, with a lot of Roman garrisons. However, they do have

a Jewish synagogue. They came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews. You see that text? Read it carefully because it does not say synagogue of God. It says a synagogue of the Jews. Let me confirm this by giving you some additional Scriptures. If you were to read First Corinthians 20:28, First Corinthians 1:2, First Corinthians 10:32, First Corinthians 11:22, Second Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:13, or First Timothy 3:5, what you would notice is that when the church is mentioned, it is mentioned as the Church of God. If you are not looking for it, you will miss it. What Scripture is telling us, what God is saying is, "That is not My synagogue." What is also interesting is in Revelation 2:9-3:9, two times the synagogue of Satan is mentioned. It defines the synagogue as that which is being used by Satan. It is a very interesting parallel. Satan is an adversary of the Gospel. The word Satan means adversary. The Jewish synagogue is often adversarial to the preaching of the Gospel. It is a strange phenomenon. It is the religion of man. The message of the Gospel points to the Messiah. But instead of pointing to the Messiah, the Jews have fallen in love with the Law. They have fallen in love with their own self-righteousness. By virtue of that, they have become hostile towards the Gospel. If you look with me in Verse 2,

(Acts 17:2) “And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.’”

Why would Paul do that? It was his custom to go to the Jew first. What does that mean? It is like the Syrophoenician woman who comes to Jesus. He says, “Look. I cannot help you. First, I must take care of the family of Israel. What we are seeing is the establishment of going to one’s family first. In other words, you cannot take food out of the family's mouth and give it to somebody else. You have a responsibility first to the family. There is a responsibility always first to the Jews. Paul mentions this in Romans 2:9 and 10 where he says “to the Jew first and then to the Greeks.” His statement is that the family must be taken care of first. Paul goes to the Jews first and gives them every opportunity. In fact, he spoke to them for three weeks. Right? For three weeks, three Sabbaths, he reasons with them from the Scripture, and he explains and gives evidence that Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the

Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead. He is opening up the Torah. He is opening up the Old Testament. He is giving them proof from the Old Testament which they should recognize. He is giving them proof. If you look at the passage, he gives evidence that Christ has to what? Suffer. Isaiah Chapter Fifty-three says that Christ had to suffer. Zechariah Chapter Twelve says that Christ had to suffer, that he had to die on a cross. It says in Zecharia that they would look upon Him whom they have pierced. We know that Scripture is very clear. In fact, Psalm Chapter Twenty-two will give very clear evidence, not only to the crucifixion, but literally the words that come out of the mouth of Jesus when He is crucified.

(Psalm 22:1) “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?”

Then it talks about the fact that they are even gambling for His clothes while He is on the cross. There are many details in Scripture in the Old Testament. I do not know exactly what passages Paul was using, but I know these texts are there and that Paul was very familiar with them. He points out probably one of the most famous passages

dealing with the resurrection, which is found in Psalm Chapter Sixteen where God promised,

(Psalm 16: 10) “For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.”

He would not see decay in His death. That is the passage that was used, if you remember, at Pentecost. Peter uses this passage on more than one occasion in dealing with issues in the Book of Acts. Paul began to explain and give evidence that Christ had to suffer and to rise again from the dead. He concluded, “This is the Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you. He is the Christ.” Oddly enough,

(Acts 17:4) “And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.”

It seems as if he had to give much evidence. For three weeks, he reasoned with them. Along with some of the Jews, a great multitude of God-fearing who joined them? Greeks. Greeks. The last phrase is the monkey wrench in the whole thing. What is the next phrase? Women. Leading

women. This is a problem. The Jews were not too concerned about any riffraff who might want to follow Paul. But you take the money away, and there is a problem. This is one of the reasons that the Gospel of Christ is so hated by the world. If you preach the Gospel correctly, it will begin to hurt business. If people begin to have a life change, they will begin to think less of themselves. They will not have to pay for the sales of indulgences. They will not have to pay for the church to forgive them. I think a lot of money is given out of a sense of guilt. A lot of money is given out of a sense of fear. Business is taken away. If you have done any kind of study, religion is hostile towards anything that takes away their money and their power. We understand according to Luke 16 “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.” When you take away money, power, influence, and control, people are going to be upset. Rightly so. There are some interesting passages in the New Testament that make reference to exactly what they are upset about. Scripture will say that they became jealous.

(Acts 17:5) But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a

mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.”

They were jealous. Why were they jealous? Money, power-- they are losing all of this. Look with me in Second Corinthians. Paul made a statement that wraps around some of the thinking of religion.

(II Corinthians 11:19) “For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly.”

(II Corinthians 11:20) “For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face.”

Look at the phrases here. If anyone enslaves you, devours you, and takes advantage of you. What does religion do? What does man's religion do? It takes advantage of people. Jesus indicted the Pharisees in Matthew Chapter 23 of exploiting the widows. Right? Go with me to Matthew Chapter 23. It is no wonder that they crucified Him. He was really bad for business. And, of course, in Ephesus, this is the reason why they wanted to kill Paul. He was

messing up the sale of the god of Diana and the idols that they were making. In Matthew it says,
(Matthew 23:13) “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”

(Matthew 23:14) “(Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense, you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”

They look so religious, and people are buying it. “Send us your money, and we will pray even longer.” Jesus is wondering, “Why do you not tell the widow she can pray herself? Because that would be bad for business. Look with me in Galatians. We will not cover all the passages that deal with this. But Paul summarizes it.

(Galatians 4:17) “They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them.”

Look at the phrase “that you may seek them.” Does that sound like a power play to you? They vie for power. They vie

for money. They have a position of authority. It is all about that. The hostility that we see is what man's religion is all about. It is one of the reasons why man finds himself debating and becoming hostile over doctrine. Why are you fighting? If it is the Spirit of God who changes the heart, what are you fighting for? Tell the truth. The person can receive it or not. Why are you wrestling with them about it? In Acts Chapter 17, the Jews are becoming jealous. That is not a new thing. When you watch the TV news, you might see people who are singing hymns and marching in some protest or other. You might think that they are doing something good and wonderful. But I do not think so. One, I do not think they should be marching and protesting. I know that is our right, but that is not what the Gospel tells us we should do. Beyond that, the people who are behind them in some cases are riffraff. They begin by moving in the streets. Before long, they are tearing up homes and businesses and everything else along their path and doing it under the name of God. Maybe I am not correct; I do not know. But in Acts Chapter 17, it says that the Jews became jealous. In Verse 5, we read that they took along some wicked men. Where do you find wicked men, by the way? In the marketplace. With the men from the marketplace, they

form a mob and set the city in an uproar. Interestingly, they will blame Paul for creating the uproar, but they are the ones who started the city in an uproar. Do people who are in religious positions lie? Yes. I think so. They will lie. They set the city in an uproar, and they went to the house of Jason. From I understand, Jason is a word that is a Greek transliteration of Jesus. Jason seems to be directly tied to Judaism and seems to be one of their own. But he had opened up his home to Paul and Silas. The mob cannot find Paul, although he is the guy they really want. What do they do? They drag Jason out of his house and take him before the city authorities.

(Acts 17:6) “When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have upset the world have come here also;’”

These men have turned the world upside down. In a way, their accusations are correct because the Gospel turns everything right side up.

(Acts 17:7) “and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”

No. Actually, the Jews have been acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar. That is why, as we will read later in the Book of Acts, the Jews were kicked out of Rome. The Jews were always hostile to the Roman rulers. In AD 70, the Romans burned down Jerusalem because the Jews were so uncontrollable. Of course, they were not concerned about Caesar. I do not think so. The Jews accuse these men of doing things contrary to the decrees of Caesar and claiming that there is another king, Jesus.

(Acts 17:8) “They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.”

(Acts 17:9) “And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.”

There seems to be a promise and some money from Jason and the others. At least, they got some money. Then they release them.

(Acts 17:10) “The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.”

They traveled about thirty- to fifty-miles.

(Acts 17:11) “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”

They are more noble-minded because as he preaches, they begin to search the Scriptures. If somebody calls you a Berean, that is really a compliment. They are really saying, “Okay. You are one who searches the Scriptures. That is a good thing.” It is a good reminder too that questions are not bad if you are genuinely seeking. If you have questions, that is one thing that we, in this church, try to encourage. Ask the questions. There is nothing wrong with questions. However, as Paul will write to Timothy in First Timothy 6:4, we do not want people to ask controversial questions. These are questions intended to be argumentative and to cause a power struggle. If you are truly searching for the

truth, that is a wonderful thing. These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with great eagerness. They began to examine the Scripture daily to see if what Paul and Silas were saying was true. You can see that taking place. But here again, there is a problem.

(Acts 17:12) “Therefore, many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.”

What happens? Prominent people believe. Uh-oh. Prominent. Everything was okay until the prominent Greek women and men began to believe.

(Acts 17:13) “But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.”

(Acts 17:14) “Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there.”

I would say, if I was Paul, “You are the ones following me. I am not causing disorder.”

(Acts 17:16) “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.”

What the beginning of this chapter shows us is that there is a lot of hostility caused by religion. Religion is going to be hostile towards the Gospel. I want to add this observation. Religion is okay with other religions; it can pretty much coexist peacefully with them throughout the earth. We know that there are some that are quite cantankerous. It seems that they are looking for a fight with anybody and everybody. But on the whole, religion is okay next to another religion. However, if the Gospel is preached well, before long the church will in some way be attacked. The reason why is because they preach the message of truth. It is our brand, so to speak. It is our mark. It is that which identifies us. If the world hates us, we know that we are on the right track. Now here again, that does not mean that we should be cantankerous or argumentative or anything like that. But if you are preaching the truth the way you should

be, you will be hated by the world. All the other religions will find a way to fight with you. The Baha'i faith can almost bring all those other religions in, and they can all sing *Kumbaya* and be okay with each other. But Christianity says no. There is only one true God. Other religions do not like hearing that. They do not like hearing the truth about it. Agreed? Let's look at the pledge from Jason and the other people. What was that pledge? The word pledge has the connotation of money; regardless, they were charging him. We could say that he was fined by the authorities. It was the authorities' way of appeasing the mob. They could have locked him in jail, but they also were very much aware of the fact that the Jews were troublemakers. It was as though a troublemaker said that he found a troublemaker. The authorities were appeasing the Jews so that they would not make more trouble. They wanted them to calm down. They were using money as the answer. The city officials were getting Jason to pay up so that they could calm the crowd down as well as look like they were doing something about the problem.

That said, God is not using it as an example of the way to handle such problems. God is not encouraging you to do this. No. God is demonstrating the way the world handles

it. It is as though you went before the judge who demands a \$50 fine. You agree, you know? Jason is not admitting guilt, although he did harbor Paul, Silas, and Timothy in his home. The charges are trumped up, of course. All of this was stirred up by those in the synagogue of the Jews who were against the faith.

(Acts 17:16) “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.”

What happens in Athens is part of the same song, just a different verse. Christianity or the church will be despised and rejected by man's religion. It is going to be despised and rejected by man's reasonings. Man's logic and his philosophies will be diabolically opposed to the church's. Man does not think like God.

(II Thessalonians 2:7) “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.”

I am thoroughly convinced that Paul was talking about the “philosophy” (or style of thinking) that was started three to four hundred years before with the Greeks. It stirred up what was called “individual thinking.” What it basically means is that whatever you can imagine or whatever you can philosophize. Philosophy is a breakdown, if you want to break down the word, philosophy means a love for “*sophia*,” or a love for man's wisdom, specifically. What do you love? You love man's wisdom. Philosophy came into the picture and everybody from Socrates to Plato embraced the idea. The point of the matter is that man began to develop his own theories and his own ideas. If you could argue your case and you seemed intelligent enough, then maybe you could convince people of your ideas. Often people would do that. Athens was a place where there were many different gods on display. Athens and Greece also had all these different philosophers. You had the idols and the gods, and you had philosophers all over the place. They would go to the Areopagus, which seems to refer to Mars Hill. There was a place where the judges of that time as well as people who were the professors of their day would debate philosophy. They would debate law. They would stand on Mars Hill to do this. They were almost gods

themselves because they had strong personalities. Also, I am pretty sure some of them sold books. I do not know. Maybe not. If you look again at Verse 16, Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy at Athens. I have often thought this was a pretty interesting passage because of the fact that here you have one of the largest cities at that time. Yet Paul does not seem to be stirred to consider this as a mission outreach. It is a huge city, and he is waiting. While he is waiting, his heart is stirred because he sees all this and hears all the lies. God stirs his heart to speak.

(Acts 17:16) “So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be present.”

(Acts 17:18) “And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, ‘What would this idle babbler wish to say?’ Others, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.”

The Epicurean and Stoics are two, I would say, extremes. I think that is probably the reason why the two are mentioned. I am going to be overly simplistic because I do

not want to do a philosophical class on these philosophers. The Epicureans were probably started around 342 BC. I think they were started by a guy by the name of Zeno. It is a pretty cool name. But Zeno started this form of reasoning. His reasoning was that men need to let go of all their superstitions. His perception was that belief in the gods was superstition. In many respects, he is right. He said, "What you need to do is to be basically a master of your own destiny. It is your life. You can control things." I guess in some respects we agree with him in this day and age. He began to meet in gardens. Therefore, it was called the School of the Garden. This makes me think of going all the way back to Adam and Eve, the way it was meant to be. He has a School of the Garden where the Epicureans would meet together. His ultimate philosophy focused on this one point: We exist for our own pleasure. In some cases, that pleasure could be self-discipline. In other cases, it might be debauchery. But forget about the superstition of the gods. Forget about the superstition of being accountable to anybody. One of the Epicurean sayings is "Eat, drink and be merry, or we die." This is a fundamental good within us. The goal of our lives is to fulfill our pleasures. The flip side of that was to avoid pain. In many ways, this sounds pretty

American to me, but that is a brief description of the Epicureans.

The Stoics, on the other end of this extreme, were very disciplined. This is where we get the word stoic. If you think of Spock on [the television show] “Star Trek,” you have a pretty good idea of what a Stoic was all about. Their main goal was to be apathetic, that is to say, to not care about anything. They would detach themselves from all emotions and become emotionless. They believed that there was a force in the universe that put things in order. If you could align with the order of the force, then you could find peace. But you had to get your life in order, and it had to be very strict. The Gospel of John was largely written to the Stoics. Did you know that? What they called the “force” was the Greek word “*logos*.” By the way, it is where we get the word logic. What John is saying in the Gospel of John is that there is a logic in the universe. The cosmos means a well-ordered universe. In John 3:16, “For God so loved the world...” The word world is what? The cosmos, which is order. You can see this order out there that God created. John set out to prove that this force of order, who is God, is also personal. He is Jesus Christ. He came in the flesh. But

when you talk about love, you lose a Stoic. Do not talk about love. They are trying to divorce themselves from feelings and emotions. To them, sympathy was a bad thing. In Verse 18, we have the extreme of these pleasure seekers over here, and over there we have these strict individuals. You could see them debating with each other while they are there. Mister Lucy-Goosey and Mister Stiff-Neck are debating with each other while they are there. Here you have them together in the passage conversing with Paul. It is interesting that the leader of the Stoics would use the phrase, “idle babbler.” There are ancient quotes using the term. The best way to describe it would be bird brain chirper. Bird brain chirper. It describes a person who is loquacious which means that he puts out many words. They were talking, talking, talking, talking, talking. At the same time, there was no sense in their words. They called it chirping. It is like a chirping bird. That is what they say that Paul is. He was chirping a bunch of noise and talking about strange deities. Of course, he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. That is what it says in Verse 18.

(Acts 17:19) “And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?’”

They took him to Mars Hill where there were the judges and the philosophers. Apparently, he was out-debating them. So, they took him to the experts.

(Acts 17:20) “For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these strange things mean.”

Watch the parenthetical phrase in Verse Twenty-one.

(Acts 17:21) “(Now all Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)”

(Acts 17:22) “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.’”

He does not start with a cut down. He starts at a point of common ground. The way that the New American Standard

Bible has translated his introductory words is, “I observe that you are very religious.” I think another translation uses the word superstitious, but that really misses the point. The point of the text is, and probably more accurately translated would be, “I observe that you are very interested in divine stuff.” That is why the NAS uses the word religious. He says that they are religious in all respects. He is not trying to tear them down. He is trying to find common ground. You are looking for the divine, meaning God. You are looking for God. I can see you are looking for God, and you are interested in things related to God. Frankly, you could not be in Athens and not think that they were looking for things related to God.

(Acts 17:23) “For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.”

We believe that he was speaking to a group of people called Mithraic. They were similar to the Masons. The Mithraics had this place in which they called to an unknown God. What he states to them is, “You admitted

your ignorance. I did not say you are ignorant. I am saying that you admitted it because you said there is a God that you may have missed or you do not know. He is the one I am talking about. It is interesting in that he is essentially saying, “Maybe you do not know everything.” And he goes, “You even admit you do not know everything. It is a good place to start as he begins to talk. What he said is that the reason they do not know this God was because they made a willful decision to not believe the truth. By the way, this is what Romans Chapter One is about. You know the truth. It is evident within you. You not only know that there is a sense of right and wrong, but you know that people form a religion of gross immorality. We know there are religions of gross immorality. People everywhere, no matter what nation they are from, have a conscience. They know what right and wrong are without opening a law journal. A small baby will cringe when it takes something that it is not supposed to because it knows from birth. There is a conscience which Paul talks about in Romans that God has put in you. Also, can you look at the heavens above and tell me that the idol that you made yesterday made the heavens? If you do, you are not being truthful.

(Acts 17:24) “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;”

(Acts 17:25) “nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;”

(Acts 17:26) “and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and boundaries of their habitation,”

(Acts 17:27) “that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;”

(Acts 17:28) “for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’”

Who is he quoting? Their own poets. Their own poets. He says, “You are admitting that you know this, and yet you have decided to live in ignorance, saying that you do not know God. You are not being truthful with yourself.” He hits them, if I could put it this way, right between the eyes. They continued to listen to him up to a certain point. But then he

started talking about two different issues that raised controversy. One was that there would be a day of judgment, and the other was the resurrection of the dead. When he hit those two points, they did not want to hear any more. Even today, these are some of the reasons why the world is hostile toward the church. The church preaches that you will be held accountable for the things that you do against God. You need to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and stop doing what you are doing. You need to repent. How many times do we see the word repent in Scripture? Repent. Repent. Do you believe this? If you tell an Epicurean to repent, he asks you to stop because it intrudes on his pleasure. He says, “I would rather believe that there is no God. I would rather believe that there is nothing after this life. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow, there is nothing. We come out of nothingness; we will end in nothingness.” They are very happy with that belief because they love their pleasure and they love their sin. It is very difficult to convince them that there will be a day of judgment and that there will be a resurrection of the dead and that they will stand before God and be judged by the things that they are doing. They will not like that.

Neither will the Stoic like hearing that because it means that he is not in control of his own life.

The Stoic does not like the fact that he has to have somebody die for his sins because his whole religion is based on his ability to pick himself up by the bootstraps. By his sheer determination and resolve, he believes that he will become a better person. He will, through all of his self-discipline, become a better person than anybody else. He will feel that you are taking all the competition away. It is not going to be any fun anymore. Judaism is much the same way. It is all about competition. It is all about looking better than others. They feel like you have pulled the rug out from underneath them. In their minds, you said that everything they are doing is a waste of time.

(Acts 17:29) “Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.”

They think, “What in the world makes any man think that he can define God? I think that is the most ludicrous thing! You have to be one arrogant person to think that you could

define God. You must be pretty arrogant.” What would make you think that God is a thought of man?

(Acts 17:30) “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,”

(Acts 17:31) “because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

In the context of Paul’s word, God is now declaring to man that everywhere they should what? Repent! Man does not like that. When is the last time you heard preaching, besides here, where the emphasis was on repentance? I remember Billy Graham would say, “Repent, repent, repent.” I remember him doing that all the time. It has been a long time since I have heard that message. I know there are good pastors out there who are doing it, but it is not a popular message. Let's put it another way. Nobody is thinking rightly. Nobody is on the right page. They also do not like it when Paul says that God has fixed a day on which He will judge the world. They do not like this either. When Paul says that God will judge in righteousness, it means

that there is a standard to live by. If you are dealing with these philosophies, there are no standards. Why? Because to them, it is whatever you philosophize. How do you know that Jesus is the guy? How do you know He is the guy? Because He is the only One who has been raised from the dead. He is the guy. It is not that confusing. Whom do I worship? Who is the guy who did not die? That is kind of like a no brainer to me. That is the guy. Paul declared it. God has furnished proof to all men by raising Christ from the dead.

(Acts 17:32) “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, ‘ We shall hear you again concerning this.’”

They began to what? Sneer at him, throw out the lip, ridicule. They said, “This is ridiculous!” Others said that they would like to hear more.

(Acts 17:33) “So Paul went out from their midst.”

(Acts 17:34) “But some men joined him and believed, among whom also was Dionysus the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.”

It is interesting that these people have these great names. They were probably named after some of their gods. These folks joined with Paul and left with him. Once again, we know of no church in this huge city of Athens. What do we have in the passage? What we have is hostility against the Gospel, against the church, and against the establishment even of a church in Athens. Earlier in the chapter, Paul and Silas had returned to Thessalonica. Who were the ones who were hateful as they went against God's message? As they despise and reject God's message? That would be the religious and philosophical reasonings of man. It should not surprise us, I guess, at this point. It should not surprise us that, if in fact the church is doing what it is supposed to be doing, it is despised and rejected. If you proclaim the truth, you will be despised and rejected. It will often be by the wise, the powerful people who reject the message. Could you imagine being little Paul and standing in Athens on Mars Hill? You are standing before all these dignitaries. This is the place where the judges would sit discussing their cases right before you. At this time, the people were hearing him out. If he is on Mars Hill, he is looking at this humongous, huge, bronze statue of the goddess of Athena.

There is a plethora of other gods surrounding him all over the place. Yet he is talking about the God of the universe. You can imagine what an interesting scene it would have been. Amidst all of this, he boldly proclaims the message of repentance and judgment without any apology. Nor was this one of the most popular moments of Paul's life and his ministry. You would have to say, if you were looking at it solely on a logistical level, that Paul failed miserably in his ministry. If we look at what we shall call a mission outreach in Athens, would you call it a failure? Does it not look like he failed? So how is God going to judge Paul? Is God going to judge Paul according to how many people were saved that day? No. So why is it that we feel so miserable when people do not respond to our words about Jesus? “Oh, I did. Nothing happened.” Did you proclaim the name? Yes. Then it was a successful day. You did exactly what God wanted you to do. All those who have been appointed to salvation will come. Is that not what it says earlier in the Book of Acts? God is calling upon you to shine that light. Jesus said,

(Matthew 5:14) “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;”

The only thing that city has to do is shine. You are not responsible for the results. Jesus says, “My sheep hear My voice, and they come.” They will come. The only thing you are responsible for is making sure the voice is clear.

Therefore, proclaim with your voice. You thank God that there will times when you have to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. That is a wonderful thing. You will have ministry, and there may not be anyone who is saved. That does not matter. You proclaim the Gospel. That is what the church does. It stands firm in that faith. It does not bend. It does not yield. It remains a true and unpopular thing in the world.

Prayer

Father, we give You thanks for this wonderful chapter, Chapter 17. We realize like our Savior, His church will be despised and rejected by men. We identify with You. We follow You. We imitate You. We are Your body. It is not a surprise to us. Lord, help us to remain true, to continue to go to the cross as You did, and to proclaim Your message with no apology. Lord, thank You for the opportunities that You give us, and thank You, as Paul and Peter even earlier

cried out, that we were counted worthy to suffer for Your name. We give You thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.