

Men Should Seek the Lord

Sunday, January 15th, 1989

Acts 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. (23) For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. (24) God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; (25) Neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; (26) And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; (27) That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: (28) For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (29) Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. (30) And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: (31) Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

I'm going to be speaking to you today, from the Book of Acts. If you have your Bible, I would like very much for you to take the Word of God and turn to the 17th Chapter of the Book of Acts. I'm going to begin reading at verse 22 and read through verse 31. I'm going to be speaking to you on this subject: "MEN OUGHT TO SEEK THE LORD." This is the title of the message.

I want to point out several things in regard to this particular sermon. It is a very important sermon. The first thing is this: By whom was this sermon preached? It was preached by the apostle Paul. This was the glorious God-ordained, God-sent apostle to the Gentiles. Paul preached this particular sermon.

Secondly: Where was this sermon preached that you are looking at in Acts Chapter 17? Where was it preached? Well, it wasn't preached in some small town or backwoods community. This particular sermon was preached in Athens, the city of learning.

Athens was the city of philosophers and the city of leadership. It was one of the world's greatest cities. This particular place where it was preached is called "Mars Hill." This was a very important place where men met from everywhere to discuss all the new ideas,

philosophies, education and things of this nature. It was a well-known place and a well-known city.

Thirdly: To whom was the sermon preached? It was preached first to the judges of the court. It was preached to the wise and learned philosophers. It was preached to the different sects, Athens was the city of philosophers and the city of leadership. It was one of the world's greatest cities. This particular place where it was preached is called "Mars Hill." This was a very important place where men met from everywhere to discuss all the new ideas, philosophies, education and things of this nature. It was a well-known place and a well-known city.

I also ask this question, why do I preach it to you today? Why am I insisting that you follow in the Bible and that you listen as I preach? Why do I want you to consider this sermon that I am going to bring to you from Acts 17?

Well, I will tell you why I am preaching this sermon; this sermon is so applicable to this particular day. In fact, to me, it is as if this sermon had never been preached. It is as if this sermon had been saved by God, written in the Scriptures and never preached or read. This particular day in which we read of in Acts 17 is so applicable to our day, and you will see this as I read these verses and statements that Paul made to these people on Mars Hill in Athens.

Let's begin at verse 21 of Acts 17. Paul says here, "*Ye men of Athens.*" He is standing before this great crowd of people on Mars Hill. He says, "*Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious.*"

Now, anyone who knows anything about the Bible knows that the word "superstitious" means religious. Look it up in your Greek lexicon (dictionary). Paul is saying, "I perceive in every way on every hand, at every turn I make, walking through your city, I perceive that you are most religious."

Your religion is everywhere. Your religion is so evident. In fact, they had more gods and more altars, temples, shrines and religious holy days than most any other nation. It was a most religious nation.

Is this not true of our day? Is this not true of this country, in the USA, in our state, your state, my city and your city? Religion is everywhere. I'm not talking about godliness and I'm not talking about a true knowledge of the living God. I am talking about religion. Religion is everywhere.

Religion affects and influences almost everyone from the White House all the way down to the jails. We have hundreds of denominations. We have hundreds of religious organizations. We have 24-hour religious radio and 24-hour religious television.

We have churches on every corner. We have religious schools and holidays. We have 24 hours a day of religion in this country. We have it through the night and through the day. We have religion of all types, forms, ceremonies, shrines, altars, tabernacles and temples. Religion is everywhere.

The apostle Paul, if he was speaking to you today and walking through Huntington or Ashland, Barboursville, Parkersburg or Beckley, would say; "I'll tell you one thing is evident; you folks are religious." That is what he is saying here, "You folks sure are religious."

In verse 22, listen to him; "And I passed along through the streets of your city, as I walked through the streets of your city, I observed all of your shrines and your religious altars and your religious buildings. I came upon an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.'"

Now, I ask you; why do you suppose these religious people of Athens would erect an altar with such an inscription, "To the unknown god?" Why would they do that? They all had their various types of religion. All had their various beliefs. They all had their own gods. Here they were erecting an altar to the "unknown god." Why would they do that?

I'll tell you why; it was erected out of fear. This altar to the unknown god was erected out of uncertainty and fear. They were not sure of their gods. They were not sure of their ways of worship. So, they just raised an altar.

They erected an altar to whatever god or gods there may be. They did it out of doubt, fear and uncertainty. They weren't satisfied with their religion so they erected an altar to whatever god there may be or to an unknown god to keep from offending anyone.

This is the reason today. Now, you listen to me and you listen carefully; this is the reason today why men and women tolerate all manner of religious foolishness and religious emotionalism, tradition, form and ceremony. Today, in America, men and women accept all manner of religion no matter how ridiculous it is.

They condemn none. Why do they do this? I will tell you why, It is because of fear and uncertainty. They are uncertain of what they believe, they are uncertain of their

knowledge of God and they are fearful whatever religious exercise is going on around them, just could be right.

They say, “Don’t talk about anybody; they could be right. Don’t condemn any kind of religious activity no matter how foolish it is or how far-out it is; they could be right.” So, I am saying this; religious tolerance in this day and religious permissiveness is not out of love. That’s not it. Some say, “Well, let everybody do what they want to.” It is not born out of love, but out of fear. It is born of uncertainty. It is born of ignorance of God.

If a man really knows God and really knows God’s character and really knows God’s attributes and God’s Word, he will not tolerate a false worship. If he really knows God and he is sure of it and confident of it and is certain that God is who He is, in His divine attributes and character, he will not tolerate a false worship. If a man knows who Jesus Christ is and what He did and why he did it and where He is now, he will not tolerate a false gospel. He will not permit a false gospel. He will certainly not support a false gospel.

If a man knows that salvation is by grace alone by the grace of God through the mercy of Christ alone, he will not tolerate salvation by works. He will not put up with it! He will certainly not give any agreement with it. He certainly won’t support it.

If a man knows that God is Spirit and God’s worship in Spirit; he will not tolerate idols. He will not tolerate forms and religious relics. Do you know what toleration is in this regard? This toleration is fear.

That is what Paul said to these people, “You are very religious folks, very religious. I walk down your street and I saw all your shrines, altars, temples and cathedrals. He said, “I found one to the unknown god.”

I’ll tell you why people do that. It is out of uncertainty and fear and doubt of their faith or their own position. I will tell you this; only uncertainty and doubt will make room for religious confusion and religious pandemonium like we have today. There is only uncertainty, doubt and fear.

Now, look at verse 23: Paul says here in verses 22 and 23, “This unknown god that you ignorantly acknowledge; I am going to declare Him to you. I am going to tell you who He is. I am going to tell you who the living God is. I’m going to tell you who the unknown God is. He is the God of heaven and earth. I am going to tell you about Him, this God you do not know.”

Here is what Paul suggested, he is saying; “Back off from where you are. Back off from all of your religious traditions and all of the old wives fables that you learned through the years. Back off from all the junk that has accumulated through the years. Just back off from it.”

Let’s back off from this form and ceremony that we have followed and all the emotionalisms, the superstitions, the organizations and institutions that we have created. Let’s back off from these things and let’s find out who God is.

God is not who we think He is. God is not even who we say He is. God is who He is. Almighty God is who He says He is. Let’s find out who He is. Let’s find out who we are. Let’s find out how the God of heaven can be worshipped and how He can be known.

Why not just back away from all this mad snowball that is rolling down the hill and gaining momentum and picking up folks as it goes. Let’s back away from all of this scatter-brained, emotional excitement called religion and let’s find out who God is and how the Living God is to be worshipped. Do you dare do that?

Listen to Paul in verse 24; he is speaking to these religious people with all their altars. He says, *“I’ll tell you who God is; God made the world and all things therein and He is the Lord of heaven and earth.”* God made the world and this God is the Lord, the Sovereign, Supreme, Almighty Lord of heaven and earth.

He is Sovereign and He is All-Wise. *“He created all things by the Word of His power, all things in heaven and all things on earth.”* They said to David, *“Where is your God?”* David said, *“Our God is in the heavens and He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased. Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, earth and the seas and in all deep places. None can stay His hand or say unto Him, what doest Thou?”*

Nebuchadnezzar said, *“When my senses returned to me, I realized that the most High God ruleth in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of this earth and giveth it to whomsoever He will.”* God is Sovereign.

He is Sovereign in creation, He is Sovereign in Providence and He is Sovereign in salvation. God is God and that is what I am saying. This is what Paul is saying, “Men, I am telling you something. God made the worlds and the Living God is Lord, the Sovereign King of heaven and earth. He rules supremely over all creation and creatures.”

He says in the next line, *“He doesn’t dwell in temples made with hands.”* We erect some building and call it God’s house. God has no house. God doesn’t dwell in a house or in a temple or a church made with human hands.

Solomon said, when he built that temple, *“How can I build a house for God when the heaven of heavens won’t contain Him?”* Oh how small and ignorant must be our thoughts of God when we try to confine Him to a building, a church building or to a denomination.

God is not a Catholic. God is not a Baptist. You are, but God is not. God is not a Pentecostal. God is not a Church of Christ, Church of God or Nazarene. God is the Living God.

“Whither shall I flee from Thy presence,” David said. *“If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Thou art there.”* God does not dwell in temples made with hands.

Where did this start? Who concocted this mess that we are in today? *“God is not worshipped with men’s hands.”* It doesn’t matter if they are working or waving. Look at it in verse 25, *“God is not worshipped with men’s hands as though He needed anything.”*

Almighty God is independent and sufficient. He said to Job, *“Where were you when I created the world? Where were you when I set the bounds of the seas? Where were you when I established the seasons? If you know, answer Me,”* God said.

Some will say, “God has no hands but your hands.” Have you ever heard that? Are you joking? I hear preachers say that all the time, “God has no hands but your hands; God has no feet but your feet.” Are you kidding?

I heard one say one day, “God wants to bless you but you won’t let Him.” Now, are you serious about that? You mean that you have the power to stop Almighty God from doing what He pleases when He spoke and the world came into being?

They will say, “God stands outside your door knocking and you won’t let Him in.” Which god are you talking about? Are you talking about your god or the Living God? Do you know what the hand of God would do to the door of your heart if He touched it?

He touched eyes and they saw. He touched limbs and they walked. He touched a dead man and he lived. You talk about Him rapping on your heart's door; the God of heaven doesn't need you, me or help from anybody.

He said, *"If I was hungry, I wouldn't ask you."* He needs no assistance. He needs nothing from the creature. That is what Paul is saying here, he is saying; "Let's find out who God is, the unknown God."

Why, He made the worlds. He is Lord of heaven and earth. *"He dwells not in temples made with hands."* Watch the next verse, *"Seeing He gives to all life, breath and all things."* All things are from God, not from you and me to God, but from God to us.

My friends, true worship is not external it is internal. True worship is not with the hand, but is with the heart. True worship is not a fleshly form but a spiritual knowledge. God dwells not in buildings; God dwells not in organizations; God is not worshipped in flesh, form and with men's hands; God is worshipped from the heart. *"He is Spirit."*

Look at verse 26: *"And He made from one blood all nations and all men."* He made from one source, one origin, and one blood. You may divide people into nations, classes, colors, circles, cults and all of these things. I will tell you this; God says that they all come from Adam.

We all have the same root and that is Adam. *"Wherefore by one man Adam, sin entered this world and death by sin so death passed upon all men." By one man's offense death reigned. By one man's offence, judgment came upon all. For, in Adam all die."* God Almighty created one man and all the rest of us came from him. We were in Adam.

"God set forth the nations." God determined the times appointed for each one. God divided men into nations. God gave them their different languages to speak. *"God set the bounds of their habitation."* God established their lands and their lives. This is the true God.

This is the True God. Don't apologize for Him. This is the Sovereign God, the Sufficient God, and the God who is Spirit. This is the Fountain of Life. This is the Giver of every Gift. This is the Lord of heaven and earth who gives it to whom He will. This is God!

That doesn't sound a whole lot like the God I hear preached today. No, it is not the God you hear preached today. It is the Unknown God; it is the God of the Bible. He is the

only One who can claim the name “God.” God is Almighty. God is All-Powerful, God is All-Present, and God is All Knowing. God is God!

In verse 27, Paul says, “*And men should seek this God.*” They shouldn’t be going about their activities of self-imposed religion, but seek God. They need to turn from their idols, turn from their religious ways and turn to God.

I wish I could get this across to my generation. Eternal life is not in religion, it is in knowing God. Jesus Christ said that in John 17:3, “*This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. The Son of God hath come and given us an understanding in that we may know the true God. This is eternal life and this is the true God.*”

Men ought to seek the Lord, this God, the God who is revealed in His Word, and the God who is revealed in Christ. Don’t seek the right doctrine; seek the Lord. If you have Him, you will have the truth.

Don’t seek the right church. Somebody will say, “I’m looking for the perfect church.” You won’t find it. But if you find Him, you will be in His church.

Don’t seek the right form and right ceremony. To love Him is to worship Him. To know Him is to walk with Him. Seek the Lord; don’t seek heaven. Seek Him. He is life and heaven.

To have Him is to be with Him. Don’t seek the gifts. I know a lot of people who are seeking the gifts. Seek the Giver. If you have the Giver, you have the Lord who gives. Men ought to seek the Lord. He said, “*That they might feel after Him, experience Him and find Him.*”

Where do I find God, preacher? Look at verses 27 and 28. Men ought to seek the Lord; He is not far from any one of us. “*For in Him we live and move and have our being.*” Do you see that? You don’t have to go to a place to find God or to a priest to find God, or to a preacher to find God or to an altar to find God. God is! He is not far from you.

He is not far from every one of us. “*In Him we live.*” He gave us life. In Him, we move with all motion. I just moved my hand. All motion is of God. All motion internal and external is of God. “*In Him we live, move and have our being.*” He said, “*He giveth life, breath and all things.*”

“We are His offspring.” Did you hear that? *“We are His offspring.”* Will you listen to me a moment? Don’t get mad at me now, just listen to me and read right here. If *“We are His offspring,* created in His image, in verses 27 and 28, why do you think God is like gold, silver or stone or connected with man’s art and devices? We are His creation. *“He created us in His own image.”* God made men. God made man in His own image. *“We are His offspring.”*

Why do you think that God is a stone or a piece of sculpture, picture or a building? You are a person. You are a spirit. You have a heart and a will and feelings. God made you. What do you have to do with statues, stones, gold, silver and houses and altars? You say, “Nothing.”

What do you respond to, love, kindness, faith, loyalty or truth? Why do you think that God dwells in buildings, stones or idols? Why do you think that God is pleased when you kiss a stone’s toe or rub the top of a head of a stone statue? Why do you think that it appeals to God? It doesn’t appeal to you. You are His offspring. You are created in His image.

I will tell you this; all of our religious tradition ought to be considered in the light of God. God is a Person. God is Spirit. You look at this religious emotionalism and tell me that it appeals to you. It does not appeal to anyone with any intelligence. It doesn’t appeal to God who is far superior and is higher than the heaven is above the earth in intelligence and in glory from you and me.

I hear people calling it prayer and they scream and yell. You don’t talk to me that way. I don’t want you walking into my study or in my home and yelling at the top of your voice and calling my name ten or twelve times in every sentence and shaking your fists in the air.

I am a person. Sit down and talk to me intelligently. Sit down and talk to me with some common sense. Sit down and talk to me in the quietness of your spirit of love and kindness. I will listen to you.

Well, we are His offspring. Why do you think God is like you think He is? Why do you think these things appeal to Almighty God when they don’t touch you and they don’t appeal to you? It is ignorance.

Stop and think about that a moment. What impresses you? What are you drawn to? You are His offspring. Well, just consider He is so much greater and is so infinitely above you then what would appeal to God? What would reach the heart of God?

Notice this verse, the time of this ignorance God has suffered and overlooked but He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in true righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, Jesus Christ.