

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

"'In him we live and move and have our being';

as even some of your own poets have said,

"'For we are indeed his offspring.'"

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Acts 17:16–34

The Missionary Heart
The Missionary Mind
The Missionary Will

Intro: The world around is is God-haunted

-summarized in the line: "I don't believe in God, but I miss him."¹-Julian Barnes

-we want to discover today how to have a missionary heart, mind, and will for those around us who are groping in the dark for God.

¹ Barnes, Julian, *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, 1 as quoted in Jamie Smith's *How (Not) To Be Secular*

The Missionary Heart

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. Acts 17:16

Paul is biding his time in Athens, maybe enjoying a gyro and some souvlaki (what I did) -and you'd imagine Paul would be tripping out on Athens with all of its sights and great philosophies.

But instead, Paul's spirit is provoked within him as he sees the city is full of idols.

-now to understand this, we need to understand what an idol is

-“an image or representation of a god used as an object of worship”

-I'd say an idol is whatever you look to to fulfill you. Whatever you say at your heart of hearts, if I have that, I'll be okay. If I lose that, I don't know what I'd do.

Paul has a missionary heart and so his spirit is provoked within him at seeing the idols around him. It was said that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man.

Let's talk about that word provoked. It's interesting it only appears one other time in the NT, but it is used over and over again in the LXX to describe God's reaction to Israel's idolatry²

-the golden calf

-idolatry and immorality in worshipping Baal

Paul sees there are people searching and seeking after, longing and lusting for false gods that will never be able to deliver on their promises and so it makes him jealous like a spouse is righteously jealous when a threatening third-party enters their marriage.

Athens was full of gods: goddesses of sex, gods of war and power, gods of pleasure, gods of success and prosperity. Paul, knowing the one true God had his spirit provoked within him at this.

Is your spirit provoked within you at the idolatry in our city

-wealth, image, community

false gospel of wealth: if I had more money, life wouldn't be such a struggle or I'd be able to buy a house, or there'd be an elimination of stress

image: I need to be fit, on top of trends, and healthy in order to feel okay about myself and presentable to others

community: as long as I have people around me who care about me (Christian) I will be okay

An idol takes a good thing and puts it in the place of God.

-is your spirit provoked within you?

The Missionary Mind and Will

So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean

² Stott, Acts, 278.

and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Acts 17:17-18a

- Look at Paul's response to seeing idolatry: he goes to the marketplace and starts to have conversations and gets to know people.
- He doesn't launch missiles at them in a comment section behind a computer screen. How refreshing!

very quickly: he's talking with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

Epicureanism was a form of hedonism (the pursuit of pleasure)

- god made this world but he's dipped out, 10,000 miles away
- everything is chance, so "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die."

Stoicism believed in a created God, first among many

- deterministic fatalism
- we need to just not be so attached to our longings

Paul is actually going to understand his audience and in his "gossiping the gospel", he will affirm what is good in them.

The salient point I want to make though, is idolatry is always accompanied by a philosophy.

What you believe about what the good life is, God, and what it is to be a good person (philosophy) utterly affects the way you worship and the dominant philosophy of a region will affect the way everyone

*So I believe the dominant philosophy is a pluralistic melding of pantheism and a spiritually vague secularism where it's hard to believe in something

- so consider a typical Carpinterian or Santa Barbarian
- they feel fulfilled and whole when they go to yoga or a workout class, an almost spiritual experience, yet racked by doubt and only sure that they can trust in what their five senses can tell them about life*

Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. Acts 17:18b-21

-the gospel rightly preached will always feel foreign. If everything in the gospel feels completely at home and naturally you are either in your last few weeks of life and have lived a phenomenal Spirit-filled life, or you may not be understanding the gospel.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

“In him we live and move and have our being’;

as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we are indeed his offspring.’

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. Acts 17:22-28

What Paul is doing is he's moved by his missional heart to use his mind and his will to contextualize the gospel for the Athenians.

“It means to resonate with yet defy the culture around you. It means to antagonize a society's idols while showing respect for its people and many of its hopes and aspirations. It means expressing the gospel in a way that is not only comprehensible but also convincing.” -Tim Keller, *Preaching*, 99.

Notice first of all, Paul's goodwill toward the men of Athens

-I perceive that in every way you are religious

-driven by his understanding that everyone is made in the image of God, Paul finds something excellent and praiseworthy in his pagan neighbors. Because he loves them. Because God loves them.

Paul also finds a point of contact

-a statue that is to an unknown god.

He affirms what he can agree with

-there is a Creator God. He doesn't live in temples (a common Stoic assertion)

-he even quotes from their own poets.

-verse 28 isn't originally Scripture- it's Epimenides of Crete and Aratus' poem

what does this have to teach us?

-there are things we just absolutely affirm and speak life into in our neighbors who do not yet believe.

-if you have a neighbor who loves his kids and would do anything for them, praise that. affirm it

-people around us have a sense that there's something of God in creation. they're right. it has his fingerprints all over it.

-engage with people on their terms. This is a basic form of love. To have a heart that loves will lead to a mind that asks how can I engage and goodwill toward the other.

-this means we can also affirm what is good in culture and art. There are pieces of art that are “God-haunted” that your coworkers watch and listen to that could be entry points to gospel conversations.

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:29-31

While affirming what is good, Paul also uses the culture's belief to show them that they don't pass they're own litmus test.

-if we are God's offspring, if he is our Creator, then how can God be a little statue?
-he does what one author calls, "Yes, but no, but yes." (profound I know)

In our culture, what this might look like is affirming that God's presence is all-around us. Not mocking the vague spirituality that is everywhere, but saying, "you know you're really onto something."

-but if God's presence is all around us and he wants to be near, why would you think he doesn't care how you live your life?

Now, I have a bit of hope for you if talk of the age of secularity and having a missionary mind is feeling wearying to you: Paul did it all to get to this-old fashioned gospel presentation.

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:30-31

-he wasn't trying to be cool.
-this is the end, the telos, of our missional heart, mind, and will.

The world around is is God-haunted

-summarized in the line: "I don't believe in God, but I miss him."

-people have to know about the God who loves them

-but the full story is not that humanity just has not known about God, but we have put things God has created in the place of god. They could never satisfy or fulfill us and it is great sin against him.

-he now calls ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE to repent.

-he has fixed a day and appointed a person by whom he'll judge everyone who has ever lived.

Now is this brimstone preaching? No!

-Paul has great love and has shown goodwill

-he can summarize the Stoics and Epicureans in a way they'd agree with him

-he praises and affirms what is good

-but he loves them so much he's willing to trust God to do what only God can do: regenerate hearts by the hearing of the gospel.

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. Acts 17:32-34

Some will hear and believe. Others will mock.

Now, how this is all too much for me. We need to ask the question where are we going to find the strength to love like this, to think like this?

-a willingness to be mocked

-a desire to love the outsider

-to put ourselves in the shoes of another?

-how are we ever going to find the resources to be these kinds of missionary hearted-minded-and-willed people?

Well, there's actually a fourth part. You don't just need a missionary heart, mind, and will, you need to know that you were saved by the greatest missionary who ever lived.

The Greatest Missionary Who Ever Lived

- He left the comfort of his home
- Gave up the most amazing lifestyle you could ever think of
- He came to tell you what God was like and not only that, he died for you
- Jesus Christ is the world's greatest missionary ever.
- God came for you.

Once you grasp that, it'll change everything
It moves from general to personal

I don't know what it is for you, but I was a relationship-worshipping, as long as this girl loves me I'm ok, man-pleasing, I need to be smarter than other people idolater.

And God rescued me from that idolatry. His heart was so provoked in him that he died for me and he was even willing to wound me for my good to detach my hands from the things of this world in order to attach those hands to himself.

That's the True God we worship.