

## **“The City Was Full of Idols” (Acts 17:16-21)**

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*Acts 17:16–21 (ESV)*

*<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? <sup>20</sup> For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” <sup>21</sup> Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.<sup>1</sup>*

For the last five months, we have been studying the book of Acts, and I’m very excited that we have reached this point in the book. Paul’s experience in Athens will help us Christians learn how to communicate the message of Christianity to those who don’t know it and who believe other things. If you’re here today and you’re not a Christian, it will help you to think through your own beliefs and compare them to what Christianity says is true.

Acts is the story of how Christianity spread from Jerusalem throughout the Roman Empire, all the way to Rome. We have seen followers of Jesus proclaim the message of Christianity in different places and to different audiences. Most of the time, these audiences were very familiar with the Old Testament, which tells the story of God relating to his people. That story begins with the creation of the world and the creation of human beings, who were made to relate to God rightly and represent him rightly. That story includes the tragic fall of human beings into sin, because they rejected God and have not related to him rightly and represented him rightly. The story includes the calling of Abraham, the father of the Israelites and the father of all who have faith in the one true God. That story includes the rescue of the Israelites out of Egypt, where they were slaves. That story includes God bringing the Israelites through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. That story includes God giving the Israelites his law to

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

teach them how to live, human kings to lead them, and a temple where they would worship. And that story includes the Israelites' turning away from God to worship false gods, or idols.

The people who first heard the message of Christianity knew that story well. They were Jewish people and Gentile "God fearers" who believed in the God of Israel. They knew about 75 to 80 percent of the Bible that we have today. They just needed to hear the rest of the story. They needed to hear about how God sent his Son to enter into his own creation, to rescue his people from their sin, and to bring his people back to himself. In other words, they needed to know about Jesus.

Today, we live in a society where people really don't know that story. For all the churches we have in America, for all the millions or perhaps billions of Bibles we have in this country, people don't know this story. So when we Christians try to tell others about Jesus, it's as if we're speaking in a foreign language. If you're here today and you're not a Christian, you may feel like we're speaking in very strange ways about things that aren't familiar to you.

All of this makes it very hard to communicate the gospel, the good news of what Jesus has done for us, to people around us. And it makes it very difficult to persuade people that this message is the truth.

Today, and next week, we're going to see how the apostle Paul talked to non-Christians in the city of Athens. We're going to see how he communicated the story of Christianity to people who didn't know the Bible. My goal is to show Christians how we can learn from Paul to communicate the gospel to non-Christians. My goal is also to show non-Christians what the message of Christianity is and why it makes better sense of our world than any other philosophy, religion, or worldview. This is so important that I might take a third week to address some of these issues.

So, with that in mind, let's begin. I'll spend the first half of this message explaining today's passage and then I'll spend the second half exploring a couple of important ideas.

At this point in the story of Acts, the apostle Paul is the main spokesperson for Jesus. He is a Jewish man who was born in Tarsus, a city in the Roman Empire that is now located in Turkey. Tarsus was a significant center of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> But when Paul was young his family

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<sup>2</sup> The Greek geographer Strabo (54 B.C. – A.D. 24) claimed that Tarsus surpassed Athens and Alexandria in its love for philosophy. The city had been led by a Stoic philosopher named Athenodorus (c. 75 B.C. – A.D. 7), who was sent by the emperor at the time, Augustus, to reform the government. John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1999), 8.

moved to Jerusalem, where he was educated and where he lived there until his life was transformed by Jesus. Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish world, where the temple was, and also where Jesus was crucified and where he rose from the grave. What that means is that Paul had experience with both the Greco-Roman world and Judeo-Christian world. That made him an ideal person to take the message of Christianity to Jews and Gentiles in the Roman Empire.

At this point in the story, Paul was on the second missionary journey described in Acts. Right before he came to Athens, he had been run out of two cities: first Thessalonica, and then Berea. We get the sense that he didn't plan on coming to Athens, but when he arrived there, he waited for two of his colleagues, Silas and Timothy, to come to him.

Just a brief word on Athens: This was not the largest city in the area and it wasn't the most important city in terms of politics or economics. Corinth was a much more important city. There may have been only about 25,000 people in Athens at the time. But it was an intellectual center. It was the city of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. You might think of it as something like Oxford, England, a famous university town.

But there's something else that's important about Athens: it was a city full of idols. While Paul was there, he might have seen a bronze statue of the goddess Athena. He surely saw the Parthenon, which was a temple dedicated to Athena. He would have seen a temple dedicated to Zeus. He would have seen many other pagan temples and deities. One scholar writes of Athens, "It contained such a repository of altars, statues and temples that Petronius, the Roman satirist, remarked 'it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens.'"<sup>3</sup> If you visit Athens today, you can see the remains of these statues and temples and admire them as works of art. But when Paul visited Athens, these were idols and places of worship.<sup>4</sup> One group of people that Paul was concerned about in Athens were polytheists, people who believed in many gods.

In verse 16, we read, "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." When you read this verse, you get the sense that Paul wasn't going to preach at first. He was simply going to wait for Timothy and Silas. But then seeing all of these idols provoked his spirit. The verb that is translated as

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<sup>3</sup> John R. McRay, "Athens," in Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 139-40. The quote is from Petronius's *Satyricon* 17.

<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 329.

“provoked” means “to stir to anger” or “to be irritated or incensed.”<sup>5</sup> It’s the same verb used of God in the Old Testament when he is angry about the idolatry of his people (Deut. 9:18; Ps. 106:29; Isa. 65:3).

Paul’s initial plan might not have involved preaching, but because he was so bothered by the idolatry he saw, he started telling people about Jesus. Why was he bothered? Paul wanted God to be glorified, to be worshiped. He wanted people to see that God is greater than anything or anyone else. So he was bothered that God was being denied the worship he alone is due. But Paul surely was concerned about the souls of the people in Athens. He knew they were worshiping false gods that wouldn’t save them from death and judgment. He wanted people to know the truth.

So in verse 17, we read, “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.” When Paul visited a city that had a synagogue, he went there first. Synagogues were the places where Jewish people worshiped. We’re not told much about the synagogue in Athens. It seems that Paul’s focus was more on the marketplace. The marketplace wasn’t just a place where people bought and sold things. It was also a place where ideas were exchanged. Zeno (335-263 B.C.), the founder of the school of philosophy known as Stoicism, taught in this very marketplace about three hundred years earlier.

Luke tells us that while Paul was in the marketplace, he talked to two different groups of philosophers. We see that in verse 18:

<sup>18</sup> Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

The two groups of philosophers were known as Epicureans and Stoics. Luke wants us to understand who Paul’s audience was, and this is the key for us to understand his speech in the verses that we’ll look at next week.<sup>6</sup> Surely Luke’s first readers would have known who they were.

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<sup>5</sup> The Greek verb is *παροξύνω*, from which we get the English word “paroxysm.”

<sup>6</sup> The first sermon I preached here was on Luke 15, and at the beginning of that chapter, Luke tells us that Jesus was speaking to “tax collectors and sinners,” on the one hand, and to “Pharisees and scribes,” on the other hand (Luke 15:1-2). That’s the key to understanding the parable of the prodigal son. If we’re going to understand what’s happening here in Acts 17, we need to know these two groups of people.

Epicurean philosophy was established by a man named Epicurus (341-270 B.C), who lived over three hundred years earlier. You may have heard the word “Epicurean” before. It might call to mind people who are into gourmet food and luxurious experiences. Epicurus did teach that the goal of life was pleasure, but he didn’t mean that kind of pleasure. In fact, Epicurus thought that strong desires for the things of this world were not good because these desires brought with them a certain pain, and these desires would constantly have to be met. Epicurus thought that the great pleasure was freedom from disturbances. The great disturbances were the fear of death and the fear of judgment. This is what a philosopher named Anthony Kenny writes about Epicurus:

The aim of Epicurus’ philosophy is to make happiness possible by removing the fear of death, which is the greatest obstacle to tranquility. Men struggle for wealth and power so as to postpone death; they throw themselves into frenzied activity so that they can forget its inevitability. It is religion that causes us to fear death, by holding out the prospect of suffering after death. But this is an illusion. The terrors held out by religion are fairy tales, which we must give up in favour of a scientific account of the world.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that Epicurus searched for a worldview that would free him from such fears. So he decided that there was no Creator God. In his view, the world was eternal, and the only thing that existed was matter. He was therefore a materialist. (He wasn’t a materialist in the sense that he loved buying material goods; again, he believed the only thing that truly existed was matter.) He believed that everything was made up of atoms, though, of course, he knew nothing about atoms the way that we do today.

Though Epicurus allowed the existence of gods (he believed they existed), they weren’t gods who interfered with the world. After all, the gods had to be free of disturbances, too, and being involved in the world would disturb them. So, his view, there was no god in control of the world, and no god who judged people. When a person died, there was no judgment, and no afterlife. Instead, the person simply ceased to exist. Epicurus apparently said, “Death is nothing to us since, while we exist, death is not present, and when death arrives, we do not exist.”<sup>8</sup> One of his followers, the poet Lucretius (c. 99 – c. 55 B.C.), wrote:

... thou shalt sleep, and never wake again,

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 78.

<sup>8</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vita* 10.125, quoted in N. Clayton Croy, “Epicureanism,” in Stanley A. Porter and Craig A. Evans, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 326.

And, quitting life, shalt quit thy living pain. . . .  
The worst that can befall thee, measured right,  
Is a sound slumber, and a long goodnight.<sup>9</sup>

If any of this sounds familiar, it should. Atheists view life this way. They don't believe in a God who made the universe. They don't believe in an afterlife. They may have different views of pleasure and pain and what the purpose of life is, but their basic views are very similar to the ones Epicurus held.

The founder of Stoicism was Zeno of Citium (334-262 B.C.). The name "stoic" comes from the fact that Zeno taught in the Stoa Poikile, along the north side of the marketplace in Athens. (A stoa is simply a portico or a covered walkway.) Stoics identified God with nature. In their view, God is not separate from the universe or nature, but is a part of it. So Stoics were pantheists. They believed that there was a divine principle of life called the *logos*, which was found in all of nature, including human beings. They believed that there was a spark of divinity inside everyone. When humans live by their inner reason, they realize their fullest potential. When they died, that divine spark returned to the *logos*. (If you saw the movie *Avatar*, think of what happened to Sigourney Weaver's character.) They believed they could find absolute truth through reason and they often had high ethical standards. Stoics also had a cyclical view of history. They thought the world would continue to be destroyed by fire and then regenerated, again and again. They also happened to be determinists, believing that there was no free will of any kind. What's interesting is that since Epicurus believed that the only reality was matter, and that everything was caused by the movement of atoms, you would think he would be a determinist, too. After all, if everything is matter, our thoughts are really just atoms moving in our brains. But Epicurus escaped the idea that there is no free will by saying that atoms could suddenly and without cause swerve in random ways.

All of this is important to keep in mind when we look at Paul's speech next week. But I'll come back to some of these ideas in just a moment. For now, let's continue to think about this passage.

In verse 18 Paul is called a "babbling" by these philosophers. These Greek philosophers didn't understand what Paul was telling them. The word translated as "babbling" literally means a "seed-picker." They thought that he was like a bird that picked up random bits of seed on the

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<sup>9</sup> *On the Nature of Things*, quoted in Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, 84.

ground and tried to make them into one meal. They thought he was someone who heard little bits of philosophy here and there and who combined them into a confused, amateur bit of philosophy. They didn't understand Paul's message.

We know they didn't understand Paul's message because they thought he was “‘a preacher of foreign divinities’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.” Notice the plural in divinities. They thought Paul was preaching about multiple gods. They assumed Jesus was one and the other was called ἀνάστασις, which is Greek for “resurrection.” They didn't think Paul could be talking about an actual resurrection from the dead because they didn't believe that was possible. Dead people stayed dead, in their view.

So these philosophers bring Paul to a council called the Areopagus, which means “Mars Hill.” We see this in verses 19-20:

<sup>19</sup> And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? <sup>20</sup> For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.”

There is an actual hill in Athens with the name “Mars Hill,” which is the place where an important council used to meet. The council therefore took the name of its meeting place, though it now met in the northwest corner of the marketplace. The council played “a very substantial role in the civic and religious affairs of Athens.”<sup>10</sup> If someone wanted to teach about a new god in Athens, that person needed to get the approval of the Areopagus. So it seems that they have asked Paul to explain his beliefs. Paul is not on trial in a formal way, but it's worth noting that when Socrates was put on trial, he was charged with being “a doer of evil, who corrupts the youth; and who does not believe in the gods of the state, but has other new divinities of his own.”<sup>11</sup> Socrates was given the punishment of drinking hemlock, a poison. Perhaps Paul could have been in trouble if he were found guilty.

In the last verse we'll consider today, Luke gives us a bit of an editorial regarding the people of Athens. In verse 21, he writes, “Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.”

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<sup>10</sup> Bruce W. Winter, “Introducing the Athenians to God: Paul's Failed Apologetic in Acts 17?,” *Themelios* 31, no. 1 (2005): 43.

<sup>11</sup> Plato, “Apologia” 24, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett, Third Edition, vol. 2 (New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1892), 116.

Next week, we'll see how Paul speaks to the men of Mars Hill. We'll see how he describes the God of the Bible and how he calls people to turn to the one true God. We'll also talk about how Christianity compares to the beliefs of the people in Athens and the people of today.

But now, I want us to consider two important points based on these few verses.

One, when Paul was in Athens, he was bothered by all the idols there. The fact is that we were made to worship. That's a fact of life. Each one of us will worship someone or something. Some people worship the God of the Bible. Other people worship false gods.

Now, I don't find that to be a very provocative or controversial statement, but I realize that some people might be offended. An atheist might say, "I don't worship anything. I don't even believe that God exists!" I understand what an atheist claims to believe. But the atheist still has an idol. Let me explain.

I think there are two types of idols or gods. One is whatever is considered ultimate and not dependent on anything else. The other is the object of our greatest desires. We might say there are philosophical or religious idols, and then there are idols of the heart. For example, in Christianity, we say that God is the ultimate being. His existence is not dependent on anyone or anything else. God simply exists. He is eternal. He has always existed. He doesn't need an explanation. Therefore, he is a necessary being. The universe, however, is not God. It isn't eternal. It can't sustain itself. It's possible that it might not have been created. So the universe is contingent. The universe and everything in it is continually dependent on God. He is the reason anything exists. He is the ultimate reality. The world exists because he made it. Human beings are important and valuable because they are made in God's image and likeness, which means were made to represent God, to reflect who he is, and to relate to him as obedient, loving children. We can actually know the truth because God has given us minds that can know the world around us and he has revealed what is true in his world and in his word, the Bible. Some things are right because they square with God's character and his commandments, while other things are wrong because they are contrary to God's character and commandments. All of this is possible because God first exists.

And God should be the object of our greatest desires. We should love God with everything we have. As Jesus said, the greatest commandment is "you shall love the Lord your



God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

Now, if an atheist heard all of that, he or she might say, “That’s fine. I realize that’s what you believe. But I don’t worship an idol. I don’t have a religion.” I would argue that the person does have a religious belief. One philosopher, Roy Clouser, says that a religious belief is a belief in something divine. He says that something is considered divine if its reality doesn’t depend on anything else.<sup>12</sup> Again, Christians believe that God is that someone divine who doesn’t depend on anything else for his existence. Some atheists believe that matter is the only reality, just like the Epicureans used to believe. Epicurus believed the world was eternal—with no beginning and no end—because that story ruled out the existence of a God who created the world (and therefore owns it) and who will bring history as we know it to a fitting conclusion (and therefore will have a final day of judgment).

Atheists today would like to believe the world is eternal. Again, that idea seems to rule out a Creator God. And that’s what many thought right up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet the best scientific theories of the twentieth century—which have yet to be overturned—suggest that the universe has a beginning.<sup>13</sup> Still, many atheists don’t believe that any god can be credited with the creation of the universe. For them, it’s just matter, all the way down. Those people are materialists, just like Epicurus. Some believe that we don’t even have conscience thought. Our thoughts are just the results of our neurons firing in our brain. Francis Crick, who discovered the structure of the DNA molecule and won a Nobel Prize, asserts the following: “‘You,’ your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. . . . You’re nothing but a pack of neurons.”<sup>14</sup> I guess Crick had no choice to write those words, and we have no idea of knowing whether they are true or not. They’re just the product of “a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”

My point is that all of us believe that something is absolute, something that ultimately requires no other explanation. That something is either God, who stands outside the universe he

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<sup>12</sup> Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief In Theories*, rev. ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 23.

<sup>13</sup> Read more about that story, and the argument for God based on the existence of the universe, here: <http://wbcommunity.org/cosmological-argument>.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 3, quoted in Nancy Pearcey, *Finding Truth: Five Principles for Unmasking Atheism, Secularism, and Other God Substitutes* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2015), 107.

made, sustains it, and interacts with people in it, or it will be something within the universe. If we believe that something in the universe is ultimate, we'll rule out very important realities. If you believe matter is the only thing that exists, you'll rule out important things like thoughts, consciousness, God, objective moral laws, and more. Assuming these things don't exist doesn't remove them from the world because they are part of reality. So life becomes impoverished and we say things like, "You're just a pack of neurons." Then we start to treat each other as if that's true. We treat each other not as if we're made by God, but as if we're just a bunch of cells. If you want to know more about this idea, I highly recommend you read Nancy Pearcey's recent book called *Finding Truth*.

Whatever your philosophy is, all of us have heart idols. We all want something more than anything else. All of us find comfort in someone, some idea, some ability, some possession . . . something. Whatever we want the most tends to define us. Our reasons for desiring that someone or something are often highly irrational. Yet what we want the most is really what we worship, and what we worship shapes us and defines us.

What do you worship? What is ultimate and absolute in your life? What makes life worth living? It's so important to think about these things. Socrates, when he was on trial, said, "[T]he unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>15</sup> Examine your life. What do you want the most? What gets you most excited? What do you find yourself daydreaming about?

Dare to ask the deep philosophical questions. What is the cause and source of the universe, if anything? What is the universe? Is it equal to God, as the Stoics believed? Or is it created by God? Who are we? Are we created by God to reflect his image, or are we animals who have evolved over millions of years from lesser species? How do we know the truth? *Can* we know the truth? Are there real moral laws that we must obey? If so, how do we know what they are? What accounts for "rights" and "wrongs"? What accounts for human rights? Is there a meaning to life? Where is history going? What happens to us after we die? What is wrong with the world? Who or what will fix it? Why does evil and death occur? Is there any hope?

There are other questions that we could ask ourselves. The point is to ask those questions and to have answers. If you don't have answers to those questions, perhaps you need to do some more searching. I can assure you that Christianity does provide answers. God has not revealed everything to us. The Bible does tell us that "[t]he secret things belong to the LORD our God"

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<sup>15</sup> Plato, "Apology" 38, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Jowett, 131.

(Deut. 29:29). But God has given us answers to the big questions, and these answers are deep and satisfying, even if we still struggle to live in a difficult world.

All of us must search out the truth. We can't keep being distracted from thinking about these issues. A lot of people don't like thinking about death, so they focus on something else. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), a Christian mathematician and philosopher, once wrote, "As men are not able to fight against death, misery, ignorance, they have taken it into their heads, in order to be happy, not to think of them at all."<sup>16</sup> But we can't keep ignoring these questions. If we do, we'll never come to know the truth. And, as the Bible says, "the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

And that brings me to my second point. We must come to know the truth. We can't keep avoiding the big questions of life forever. We can't keep asking the big questions of life forever. We have a limited amount of time. We must arrive at the knowledge of truth.

Notice that in Athens, the people "would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new." They just wanted to entertain the latest ideas, the latest theories. Sadly, they didn't spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something true. Many people today only want to hear what is new. We're constantly distracted by following the news, whether on TV or in print or online. And that's true of universities. I love higher education, but often professors are not seeking out what is true. Instead, they make a name for themselves by coming up with new ideas, no matter how rooted they are in reality. In fact, it seems that the more novel the theory, the better. That's how the higher education system works. Doctoral students are encouraged to write a dissertation on a new, groundbreaking topic. That's how they get their degrees. And professors secure tenure by publishing articles and books, which usually means they have to come up with some new ideas. No one seems to be devoted to the truth. Often, what is true is old. And I think our pride causes us to think that what is old can't be true. We are the generation that has finally figured it all out. So we think what is new is better. C. S. Lewis called this "chronological snobbery."<sup>17</sup> Some of the greatest wisdom is centuries old. After all, I doubt that anything on TV or in the movies is wiser or truer than Shakespeare.

Christianity teaches us that, in the end, truth is a person. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus is the

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<sup>16</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 168, *The Harvard Classics 48: Blaise Pascal: Thoughts, Letters, and Minor Works*, ed. Charles W. Eliot, trans. W. F. Trotter, M. L. Booth, and O. W. Wight (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910), 63.

<sup>17</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1955), 207.

truth because he shows us most clearly who God is and what God is like. And Jesus does not change. He is as true now as he was two thousand years ago. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). He’s unchanging because he’s God. His character doesn’t change. His ideas don’t change. And what he did almost two thousand years ago has eternal consequences. When the Son of God became man, he lived a perfect life. He was the only one who never did anything wrong. He was the only one who represented God perfectly, who did what God the Father wanted without fail. He was always just and wise and loving. Yet though he did nothing wrong, he laid down his life for us, so that the punishment we deserve could be paid for. He was exiled, he experienced hell on earth, and he was cut off from the land of the living, all when he died on the cross. He did this so that his people don’t have to experience ultimate exile from God’s presence. He died so we can live. His moral perfection—his righteousness—is credited to those who trust him, and their sins were paid for when he died on the cross. When he rose from the grave, he showed that he defeated death. His resurrection is the down payment on the promise that God will recreate the world so it will be perfect. There will be no more pain, no more hurt, no more death. All who are united to Jesus, who have a relationship with him that is marked by trust, love, and obedience, will live with him in that world forever.

That is the truth. That is what Paul preached in Athens. That is what we preach here. Let us all trust that this message is true while we still have time.