

The Bishop of Sheffield's Annual Lecture

Tuesday 27 February 2018



'Commending Christ: Apologetics in a Sceptical Culture'

Acts 17.16-34: St Paul's sermon in Athens: A model for contemporary evangelistic preaching?

Or: a presentation of the Gospel which is not flat, lazy and defensive but contextual, attentive and adventurous...

Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey



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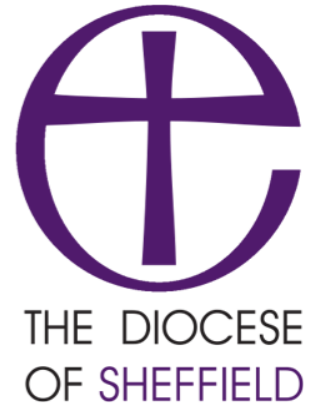


Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

1. vv 16-21: The context of Paul's sermon
2. vv 22-31: The content of Paul's sermon
3. vv 32-34: The response to Paul's sermon

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Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

1. vv 16-21: The context of Paul's sermon

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Acts 17.16-21:

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols.

¹⁷ So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

¹⁸ Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, 'What does this babbler want to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.' (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.)

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Acts 17.16-21:

¹⁹So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?' ²⁰It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.' ²¹Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

1. vv 16-21: The context of Paul's sermon

City of Plato, Socrates, Parthenon, Areopagus

Disturbed by idolatry

Synagogue and Marketplace

Stoics (immanent God, breath, soul)

Epicureans (transcendent Gods, pleasure)

Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

1. vv 16-21: The context of Paul's sermon

verse 18: *spermologos*, seed-picker (babbling)?

verse 18: foreign **divinities?**

(ton Iēsoun kai tēn anastasin:

Jesus and his +1?)

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Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athen

2. vv 22-31: The content of Paul's sermon

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Tuesday 27 February 2018 **Acts 17.22-31:**



²² Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him-though indeed he is not far from each one of us.

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Acts 17.22-31:

²⁸For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring." ²⁹Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged 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 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

2. vv 22-31: The content of Paul's sermon

vv 22-23: complimentary opening

vv 24-25a: Epicurean (*emph transcedant*)

vv 25b-28: Stoic (*emph life, breath, humanity*)

Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

2. vv 22-31: The content of Paul's sermon

'In him we live and move and have our being',

6th C BC poet, Epimenides of Cnossos in Crete

'We are God's offspring',

3rd C BC poet, Aratus from Cilicia

Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

2. vv 22-31: The content of Paul's sermon

vv 22-23: complimentary opening

vv 24-25a: Epicurean (*emph transcendant*)

vv 25b-28: Stoic (*emph life, breath, humanity*)

v 29: Epicurean (*impersonal name for God!*)

Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

2. vv 22-31: The content of Paul's sermon

Compare Jesus' use of the Scriptures: quoted almost entirely when his audience was made up of disciples or Jewish religious leaders.

Jesus almost never quotes Scripture to the crowd.

Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

2. vv 22-31: The content of Paul's sermon

vv 22-23: complimentary opening

vv 24-25a: Epicurean (*emph transcedant*)

vv 25b-28: Stoic (*emph life, breath, humanity*)

v 29: Epicurean (*impersonal name for God!*)

vv 30-31: Gospel: repentance, Jesus, resurrection

Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

2. vv 22-31: The content of Paul's sermon

'When the dust has soaked up a man's blood, once he is dead, there is no afterlife'.

5th C BC poet, Aeschylus

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Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

3. vv 32-34: The response to Paul's sermon

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Acts 17.32-34:

³² When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' ³³ At that point Paul left them. ³⁴ But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

3. vv 32-34: The response to Paul's sermon

Some sneered

Some said, 'We'll hear you again'

A few believed

Acts 17.16-34: Paul's sermon at Athens

3. vv 32-34: The response to Paul's sermon

How do we present the Gospel in ways that are:

contextually dynamic, not flat

culturally attentive, not lazy

conceptually adventurous, not defensive?

But thank God for the Holy Spirit!

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