

THE GOSPEL FOR A DEAD CITY
February 26, 2017 morning service
Acts 17:22-34

Well as you are seated take your Bible and go to the 17th chapter of the book of Acts. We are in this sixth message from Acts. I find ten printed sermons in the book of Acts. Peter, then Stephen, and of course mostly from the Apostle Paul. His name was Saul. That was his Hebrew name, like King Saul. Paul was his Greek name and as he turned from the Jews to go to the Gentiles he used that name that we know him best, as the Apostle Paul.

We find him preaching in the city of Athens this morning in Acts 17. He has been to Thessalonica. They're mean to him in Thessalonica. He goes to the synagogue and they run him out of town. He goes from Thessalonica over to Berea. There Timothy and Silas went with him. As he went to Berea he found some people that really love God and love the scriptures. You'll find today in churches the Berean Sunday School class, those that love the word of God. Sometimes you'll find a church named the Berean Methodist, Baptist, whatever church. Bereans. They love the word of God but when the Thessalonians heard the Bereans were being good to Paul they made the trek over to Berea and ran him out of there. They sent him down to the seacoast and he came to Athens.

When he got to Athens you know that he was in one of the oldest cities in the world. Today it's over 5,000 years old. It's named for Athena, the goddess of wisdom. It's a place of philosophy, of art, education, finance, maritime finance, maritime business with the seacoast. Of course we know it from its sports background. Socrates was there and was brought before the same place Paul's going to be brought. Plato was there. Four hundred years before Paul he started Plato's Academy. His student was Aristotle. After Plato, Aristotle had Aristotle's Lyceum. It was his school that was there. Athens is often called the cradle of western civilization and the birthplace of democracy. That's the kind of city that Paul walked into all by himself. A few helpers came but his apostles, the disciples, they stayed back in Berea and Thessalonica and were going to come later and Paul and is just walking in town looking around.

Our newest staff member is Shaun Pillay. Yesterday Shaun and one of our Sunday School groups went to downtown Pensacola, put up a tent during the Mardi Gras Parade as a diaper changing station, gave out over a thousand true life cards, having gospel conversations and meeting the needs of young families that needed a private place to change a diaper. I asked Shaun last night. I called him. I said, "How did it go?" He said, "Well, pastor, I've never been to Mardi Gras before." He said, "I can tell you one thing. They need Jesus down there on Palafox." Well that's what Paul was doing. He was walking around Palafox Street, downtown Athens. He saw all kinds of stuff.

When you get to verse 16 he said in his spirit he was provoked and he saw a city that was full of idols. In verse 21 he says: *(Now all the Athenians and the strangers*

visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) These people like to talk about new things, about what the independents and the democrats and the republicans are doing. They like to talk about this. They like to talk about that. They like to talk about whatever was in the news. Paul just walked through town listening. Then he ran into two groups of people. You find them in verse 18, the epicureans and the stoics. Now the epicureans are the people that love life. They're full of passions and indulgence. They love to eat and party and have fun and indulge in everything going on. The epicureans would have been on top of the float at Mardi Gras but their brothers were the stoics. These were the people not with indulgence but with indifference. They were not passionate. They lived without passion. They were stoic. They didn't go to Mardi Gras. They went to Olive. You couldn't move them with dynamite. These are the wooden Indians in church. "Bless me if you can." Paul found the epicureans and the stoics. They were two sides of the same coin and as he engaged them the Bible says in verse 22:

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus [They brought him down to the place where Mars Hill was, that place where they worship the god called Mars. Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus] and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 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.' [That word unknown is where we get our word agnostic. Not an atheist saying there is no God, just, "We're not sure. We don't know for sure if there is a God." Paul said, "I saw this whole place full of idols but I saw one that said, "Just in case we missed one, to the unknown God.] Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 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; 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; 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 the boundaries of their habitation, 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; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' 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. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should [everybody say that word me out loud] repent [God is saying it is time to repent], 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."

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." So Paul went out of 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.¹

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Paul's hanging out in Athens. They take him down to the Areopagus. It's in the middle of the city. If you've ever been there you know the Parthenon is there. What a wild structure that is. If you've ever been to Athens you've got to see the Parthenon. The Parthenon is there. They've come down in the city to the Areopagus, to the stone. It was like a platform where they would bring people and in the middle of seeing all of these gods around they would stand someone. They were not in jail. They were just there to defend what they wanted to speak about. Paul comes down to this hill called Mars Hill to the Areopagus and they stand him up on the stone, the same place Socrates had stood 500 years before to defend his thought patterns. They said, "We want to hear you on this." They said, "Paul, tell us more of what you're talking about." So here is Paul right in the middle of the most intellectually, financially blessed art, religion. This is the center of wisdom. Athena, the goddess of wisdom.

This is like going on a college campus and preaching the gospel. Everybody who thinks artistically, philosophically, religiously, it's all poured in there together. They said, "Now you said you know this God we don't know. Tell us about Him." God, through Paul, gives five thoughts. If we're going to reach a dead city and that's what Athens was, if we're going to reach a dead city and that's what Pensacola is, if we're going to reach Chicago or Los Angeles or Atlanta or Miami, if we're going to walk into these hubs – have you been through the Atlanta Airport lately? When you go from station to station, from A to B to C to D, you go through and you ride the little train and there's art everywhere. There's all kinds of art. They're always telling a story. I'll be through there tomorrow. It's black history month and they'll be all lined with black history month. That'll come down and there'll be other things that they'll put up according to what season of the year that's going on. It's an artsy place. What do we say to smart lost people? That's what Athens is all about. Now the gospel is the gospel is the gospel but how did Paul attack Athens? Five thoughts. Here's what he said.

Number one. He said, "Let me tell you that God is your Creator." In verse 24 he said the God who made the world and all things in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth and He does not dwell in temples made with hands. Ya'll look around you. God doesn't live in any of these temples that you've built. God lives in heaven and when you get saved He'll live in you. He made you. Hear me, friend. The most important verse in all the Bible is the first one. If you don't get the first verse right none of the rest of this book makes sense. In the beginning God. If there is no God to create the rest of this doesn't make sense and so Paul goes right to the heart of it. You did not evolve. You came from the craft of God.

That agnostic in verse 23, this unknown word. Here's what the atheist and the agnostic says. Nothing plus no one equals creation. Nothing plus no one equals creation. The Christian says nothing plus someone equals creation. Somebody started all of this. He's the unmoved mover if you will. He's the creator God. In the beginning God created. Let me tell you, friend, if you say you've got nothing and you give it to nobody and you get something, your elevator doesn't go all the way to the top. It doesn't just happen. Something is behind everything that's here. You can choose to go

down several roads but you've got to come to something eternal that was here before everything else was. Paul runs right to it and he says, "God is your creator."

Secondly he says that God not only is your creator, in verse 25 he says God is your sovereign. Look at it in verse 25. He. He used the word "He" in verse 24. Then again in verse 25. He, that is God, served by human hands as though He needed anything since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things. God is no impersonal abstraction but He's with us. He loves us. He sustains us and you can know Him. Friend, God loves you is what Paul is saying. He is sovereign and He cares for you. That's why God became flesh and He dwelt. He lived among us. That's why Jesus came. He didn't just make us and stay way off out there somewhere. That's what Barbara Streisand sings about is that God from afar. Friend, He is a God that's afar but let me tell you, He's a God that comes close, dwells among us. He comes after you. He loves you. He cares for you. He's your creator and He's your sovereign.

Thirdly Paul said not only is He creator. Not only is He sovereign. He's the governor. It's found in verse 26. Look at it. The word "He" again. And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. Paul believed in Adam. *Having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.* He's the governor. Three things he says about being the governor. Not only is He creator. He started it. Not only is He the sovereign. He sustains it. He is the governor and He organizes it. He says from one man. If you trace yourself back far enough, everyone in this room goes back to Adam.

I talked to Dr. Paige Patterson at Southwestern Seminary. I was with him in a conference a few weeks ago and he quoted an article. I was then in his office about three weeks ago and I said, "Doc, have you still got that article?" He said, "I surely do." He said, "It's 1987 *Nature Magazine*." He said, "It's the most secular, pagan magazine you'll ever read." I said, "Well can I get a copy of that?" He had somebody run the copy off and in that article in *Nature Magazine* of 1987 mitochondrion DNA, the study of it, these scientists have been tracing gene pools and they keep narrowing down. The more DNA they get and the more information – they started out with like 20 and they got down to 18 and now they have traced down in 1987, they have every human group back to five groups. They're almost there. Science is getting close. If they keep drilling, I'm telling you, Adam's going to pop up and say, "Good morning, ya'll. I've been here all the time."

It just gets more narrow and more narrow and more narrow. Because God, he says He's the governor. Not only did He appoint our beginning, He appointed our times. You're going to be on earth for a given period of time. It's appointed every man in this room once to die and after that the judgment. You have a time. You have a season. I have people all the time that say, "Boy, you know, I'm glad I wasn't born back in the 1800's." Well you didn't have any choice in that. Some people say, "Boy, I was just kind of born out of season. You know, I belong in the 20s rather than here in 2017." Well sorry, you don't get a vote in that. God appointed your time. You were birthed under God's watchful, governing eye.

He is our beginning. Then he says – now I'm just a Bible preacher. I just preach it when I come to it. In verse 26 he says regarding the nations, He has appointed the boundaries of their habitation. Evidently there are borders to nations. Evidently. Even in the Bible times. There was a river that marked and said, "We're over here and you're over there." There was a mountain range that said, "We're over here and you're over there." There are borders. God appoints those. They change from time to time. America's had different borders. We've moved them around. You look at those old maps when, you know, we came and we bought Texas. Sometimes Texas wants to get out. A bunch of arrogant cusses. They always say, "We'll just leave." Well take off. Both of my kids are Texans. They were born in Texas. They got some of that dirt in their shoes.

Boundaries change but there are borders. We don't just live in a hodgepodge, everybody running where they want to run. God appoints those boundaries and he said He set up nations. He's the governor. Yes He is. He's not trying to make America great again. He's trying to make His glory great again. That's what He's about.

He's the creator. He's the sovereign. He's the governor. Number four. Get this. Paul, He's out there on that rock. He's standing on that stone and he said, "Let me tell you, He created you, He's the sovereign watching over you, He's the governor. He puts everything together for you." Number four. God is judge. Notice what He said down in verse 31 of his sermon. *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 [what?] raising Him from the dead.* Yes indeed. He's the judge and Paul is preaching Jesus in this text and God's fixed today. He's the judge.

Hear the word of the Lord. Matthew 10:15 says: *Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.* The day of judgment. It's coming. You think, was anybody worse than Sodom and Gomorrah? America. Be more tolerable. I'm telling you, friend. That day's coming. The day of judgment. I John 4:17, he said it this way: *By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.* Friend, don't let judgment scare you. Get right with God and get saved and you'll have confidence in the day of judgment. Friend, if you don't know Christ today, you're not living for Christ or you're not sure heaven's your home, I'm telling you, you ought to be frightened to the bottom of your shoes because judgment's coming.

II Peter 3:7 says it this way: *But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for [what?] the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.* Let me tell you, if you're not on the Lord's side and you're living on godlessness, there's a day of judgment reserved for you. He has fixed a day. I don't know when that day is. I'm not in management. I'm in sales. That's what I tell everybody all the time. I don't know when it is. I can't tell you the time or the season or the day. We see some signs of the times but I'm telling you, I'm not in charge of that. Nor are you. I'm in

sales. I'm supposed to be telling boys and girls, men and women, people at Olive day by day. Get ready, get ready, get ready. He's the judge. That's what Paul was saying.

He's the creator. He's the sovereign. He's the governor. He's the judge. Then the last thing that Paul said while he's standing in the midst of these Athenians." He said, "God is your Savior. He's your Savior." Notice in verse 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."* And then verse 34 says: *But some men joined him and believed.* Hallelujah, they believed. In verse 31 he preached the gospel about Jesus being raised. In verse 18 just before he came to this sermon he was having a dialogue and he said in verse 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 has been what?] preaching Jesus and the resurrection.* That's where Paul was. He was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. He was preaching the Savior of the world. He was saying God is your creator, He's your sovereign, He's your governor. He's your judge. Get good news today. He's your Savior.

Now listen to me. We're going to go over to Warrington and we're going to replant that church. I'm kind of excited about that. I don't know what I'm doing but I'm excited about it. I'm telling you, we're going to touch the military families in a brand new way. We do some of it here but we're going to do better over there than we've done here. We're touching people that are flying these multimillion dollar aircraft, people that are packing parachutes and fixing wheels, making sure that planes can get off of those aircraft carriers. I fly a good bit. I come into Pensacola and sometimes you'll come in and you'll just glide in. Sometimes you'll come in and, bam! I look at the guy next to me and I'll say, "Navy pilot." He's on that short runway. He's setting that puppy down. I go up to the front and I'll just say, "You fly in the Navy?" "Yes, sir." I'd say, "I knew. Amen." That's not right every time but it's at least worth a conversation. We're going to touch those folks.

Hear me. We are not taking our eye off of the corner of Olive and Davis because Athens is just two miles up the road. It's called the University of West Florida. That's our Athens. Lord, there are smart people out there. There's Ph.D.'s that are out there. There's young men and women that want to be Ph.D.'s. There are folks out there that know science and the arts and you know what you've got to tell them. You've got to tell them God is your creator. He's your sovereign. He's your judge. He wants to save you. Every lost student at the University of West Florida needs Jesus and we're going to take the gospel on that campus in a new and a better way than we've ever done. We've already started. We're doing better out there than we've ever done.

Football's come to West Florida. They had a year last year. That's why we spend money. You've got to get the team from the campus down to the park. So we volunteered and many of you volunteered. You drive those big guys. Some of them were one to a seat on a bench seat. Some you put two and then you get the kickers and you put three or four of them on there, alright? You drive them down there, spend

the day with them, and drive them back. Why do we do that? So we can know them and have a conversation with a football player. One day we're going to lead them to the Lord. One day we're going to help him when his daddy gets sick. He's going to say, "Can anybody help me? I remember that guy driving that bus. He talked to me. He knew God." He's going to look us up.

Mark it down. It'll probably be after I'm dead and gone but this will happen. This will happen. We will win a boy to Jesus 6'6", 305, plays offensive left tackle and he will sign with the New England Patriots and he will make a gazillion dollars and he will write a check to this church to help us do what we need to do. It'll happen. He'll say, "I remember those old boys who used to drive that bus. Somebody paid for that gas." For that one there'll be hundreds and hundreds and hundreds that'll never make it to the next level but they'll go sell product for some pharmaceutical company. They'll go teach in a school and some of them will come right back here and coach football in our high schools and on the college campus out there and we will be here to be for them family that we need to be.

Every lost student at the University of West Florida needs and deserves the honor and opportunity to hear the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every student that's a member of Olive or any other church in Pensacola should be trained with apologetic power. I don't mean making an apology. I'm talking about defending the faith with the apologetics of the truth of the word of God to walk on their college campus and be able to stand and say a great word for Christ no matter where they are. In the classroom, in the cafeteria, in the dorm room. They're building dorms everywhere out there. Apartments. We've got to put kids in those apartments that love God and get small group Bible studies going. They just come in here for two, three, sometimes four years. A few of them pack four years into seven but most of them are just here for a short while. Then they're gone back somewhere else and they're never going to be a part of our church except for a short stint while they're here.

My son's up at Lynchburg. Bennett's been in this church all his life. One of the hardest things he does it get up and go on Sunday. He's a preacher's kid. He can talk the language. He knows people on the staff. He can walk up to three or four people, drop my name, and get a free lunch but it's hard to go to a new place for a college kid or for a law student because they know they're not going to be there for a long time. At least they hope they're not there for a long time. We've got to reach out and put our arms around kids that we won't get anything out of because it's the right thing to do and make disciples of them so they can go stand for the glorious gospel of Christ. Just like Paul stood in Athens they need to stand at the campus of the University of West Florida.

Law students need it. Saved kids need training. Let me tell you, for those of you that are faculty or administration at the University of West Florida, you need a family. We need to be family to that faculty family there. In yesterday's paper the new president at the University of West Florida wrote the editorial in the *Pensacola News Journal*. I read that. I pray for her. I don't know, I've been to her office two times to say

congratulations. I've met her a couple or three times. I don't know her but we'll have a gospel conversation.

I walked in at Southwestern Seminary to the dean's office. I was about to get my terminal degree. He said, "Why do you want doctor in front of your name?" I said, "Well, I don't know. I want to study." He said, "Let me tell you why you ought to do it. You ought to do it so you can walk in anybody's office anywhere and say, 'I've been where you've been and I want to share with you' and you can demand an audience when you've been where they've been because some of them will never hear you except as an ignorant man." I said, "I won't have any trouble proving I'm ignorant." He said, "Yeah, but you've just got to kind of put a little garnish around the meal sometimes."

I've often thought of that. Does that get me? Sometimes it does. Sometimes it gets me kicked out but let me tell you, that professor was right but he was wrong. You know what you need in order to walk in any man's office, any lady's office and tell them about the gospel? Whether you do it at a federal attorney's place or whether you go to some attorney's office or whether you go to a doctor's office, if you have the anointing of the Holy Ghost of God on you, I'm here to tell you, Jesus the creator and the God of the universe, He will give you entree where you need go. When people smell sovereignty on you they'll give you ears to hear. That's when you've got to quit trying to be smart and say, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him would not perish but have everlasting life."

That's what our world needs. That's what Athens needed. It's what Pensacola needs. It's what the military at Warrington needs. It's what the University of West Florida needs. But now let me say, it's what somebody in this room today needs. It's what you need. You say, "Pastor, I'm not sure." You can get sure before you leave here today. Yes, God made you and God's watched over you and He's brought you right here on this particular February morning for you to understand that you are a sinner, that Jesus Christ died for you, that God raised Him from the dead after He died, and that He will save your soul and forgive your sin if you will do what those people did in verse 34 when they believed on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You say, "How do I do that?" The Bible says whosoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. To believe is to call. It is to say, "Lord, I need you. I need you." We find it right here in this text where those people down in verse 34 – some joined Him and believed. Dionysius was one of them, and Areopagite. He was a guy that hung out at the stone of meditation and a woman named Damaris and some others. Didn't know their name but they knew God's name.

You're in this room today and you need Jesus. Somebody's in here and you think you're somebody. You need to get over yourself and get saved. We're following everything under the sun. I'm amazed. Movie stars, they come on television and tell me what I ought to be thinking. My Lord. They've got a face like an angel and morals like an alley cat and I'm supposed to be listening to them? Friend, you better get your

eyes off of a movie star and a rock star and a sports star and you better get it on the Bright Morning Star. His name is Jesus. He'll save you. He'll keep you. He'll take you to heaven when you die. He'll sustain you on the road to get there. Everybody needs Jesus. That is our message and we're to take it to the world.

Jon's going to sing and somebody's here in this service that's going to get saved today. Hallelujah. In that balcony, just get up and come right now. You don't even have to wait until we start singing. You can just walk down here. You're across this ground floor. Just come and say, "Pastor, I need that today. I've been highly educated or not educated at all." I'm the first guy in my family that ever went off to college. My daddy will die one day, I think. He's 91 and still kicking. He got a G.E.D. but he's got Jesus. Amen. My mother, a high school education. She's got Jesus. If you don't believe that you just ask her. Son, she'll look you right in the eye and bless you up, tie you in a sack, and throw you in the river. I'm telling you, she'll tell you the truth.

I've talked to people with higher education, lower education. Friend, the bottom line is have you ever gotten on your face and cried out, "O God, save me, save me"? Kings and queens and presidents and congress people. God, save me. People that are living on the street or middle income or blue collar workers, God save me. That's the great thing about Jesus. He died for all of us. He created all of us and He will save any of us.

I finally understood I'm just nobody telling everybody about somebody that'll save anybody that'll believe. Amen. That's you. That's you.

Jon's going to sing. Wouldn't you come? Come today. Come. Just say, "I need that Jesus, preacher. I need Olive church. I'm going to come be a part." Good. Amen. You come. Boy, we'll receive you on this good morning. We're on our feet all over this room, crying out unto the Lord with a song, singing. God's calling. Come on. Come on unto Him.