

Easter

The Decision of a Lifetime

Acts 17:22-34

Grace Fellowship Church / March 31, 2024 / Pastor Brad Bigney

In **Acts 17:22-34**, the Apostle Paul was in Athens, which was a hub for intellectual conversations and cutting-edge ideas. Paul tells those listening about Christianity.

I. Paul Focused On What Sets Christianity Apart From Every Other Religion

The city wasn't full of atheists. They had all kinds of gods, including an altar to the unknown God. Paul uses that altar as a connecting point and launch pad to do some basic theology 101 on who God really is.

A. He's Big Enough To Be Worthy Of Your Worship

Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man."

He's giving them a big God who's bigger than they'd ever imagined because their gods were all intertwined with creation and caught up in it, instead of sovereignly reigning over it.

B. He's Close Enough To Know What You're Going Through

Paul lifts up the transcendence of the one, true, living God who sustains our universe and exists apart from it while at the same time still caring deeply about it.

No other religion has a god who took on flesh and stepped down into our world to experience everything that we experience yet was without sin. That is unique to Christianity!

Paul goes on to tell them about a God who is near to each one of us and is personally involved in all of our ways.

Acts 17:27-28 "... He is actually not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being..."

C. He's Radically Different Than Any Other God

Acts 17:25 "Nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

Unlike their petty gods, He doesn't need anything from them. Instead He gives, which was unlike any god they knew and it's unlike anyone else we know in this world because everybody wants something from us, needs something from us, and expects something of us!

Paul pushed this because they suffered with the same problem we still do today, in that they thought God wanted them to do something for Him so that He could be pleased with them!

That's why the most well-known verse in all the Bible focuses on what God has already done.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

That's what makes Christianity distinct from every other religion because the Gospel tells us we're in no position to do anything for God, but our greatest need is for Him to do something for us that we could never do for ourselves. He's done it for us in His Son!

We needed someone to die in our place and to free us from the penalty and power of sin.

That's what God did by sending His Son into this world to live the only perfect life and die the only sufficient death that could ever turn back the wrath of God that we rightly deserve.

We have a Savior, not a system. We have the only religion whose leader ever conquered death! Nobody else even claims to have done that!

D. God Has Already Proven That Jesus Is The Only Way

Acts 17:30-31 "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ 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."

Paul steps right in it because he's using the word "repent." He's talking about judgment and about the exclusivity of Jesus being "the Man" by whom God will judge this world!

He says the ultimate proof that Jesus is the way is that God has raised Him from the dead!

Paul makes no room for any other god being equal to Jesus Christ.

II. Paul Got The Same Response That We Still See Today

A. Some Mocked (v. 32)

Some thought that Paul was way out of his league there in Athens because their city was home to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum which were two of the greatest philosophical academies the world had ever known, so they sneered and mocked.

B. Some Said I Need To Think About This More

Acts 17:32 "... We will hear you again on this matter."

Which is fine, as long as that's what you really do. So many people that say they are searching actually mean, "I just want to stay in a search 'mode' so that I can stay where I am, thinking what I think, wanting what I want, and doing what I do!"

C. Some Believed

Acts 17:34 "But some men joined him and believed..."

If you haven't put your faith in Jesus, read the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John slowly and carefully with the sole purpose of answering the most important question: "Who is Jesus and what did He come to do?"