

“The Proof of the Resurrection”
(Acts 17:16-34)

I. Introduction.

- A. This morning, we’re looking at Paul the apostle’s efforts to bring the message of the resurrection – the Gospel – to those in Athens, Greece, who had never heard it.
1. Athens was the home of a very mixed group:
 - a. There were those there who worshipped false gods: the city was full of idols (v. 16).
 - (i) If you’ve ever read ancient Greek mythology, then you’re already familiar with some of their names: Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Poseidon, and others.
 - (ii) The fact that the Athenians were giving any thanks or honor to these images provoked Paul, because he knew God deserved the credit for all the good things they received.
 - (iii) He also knew that the true God alone is to be worshipped.
 - b. But there were others: there were Jews who lived there (v. 17).
 - (i) The Jews, as we’ve seen, were the OT people of God.
 - (ii) But they worshipped God through the Temple and sacrificial system.
 - (iii) The God-fearing Gentiles (Gentiles who converted to Judaism, but weren’t circumcised) did the same.
 - (iv) That was the right way to worship God before Jesus came; but His coming fulfilled those things and now to worship God through them was to reject God.
 - c. And there were Greek philosophers (v. 18): The Epicureans and Stoics.
 - (i) They were the atheists of their day: both denied the existence of God.
 - (ii) And both found something to replace Him:
 - (a) The Epicureans saw pleasure as the highest end in life – especially indulging in food and drink.
 - (b) The Stoics, on the other hand, sought to live a virtuous life, according to reason and natural law, disregarding sensual pleasures and detaching themselves from their emotions. They were the ascetics of their day.
 - d. Together, they make up a good sampling of the different ways people deal with this life and the life to come. We have similar groups today:
 - (i) We have those who worship false gods: JWs, Mormons, Muslims.
 - (ii) Those who hold to their customs and traditions, but leave God out of the picture: nominal Christians, coming from mainline churches (Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, even Presbyterians), and, of course, Roman Catholics.
 - (iii) We have our Epicureans: most of our population, who grab for all the gusto they can since they only go around once in life (hedonism), believing that there’s no One they must answer to for their sins.
 - (iv) And we have our Stoics: those who believe they’re living a virtuous life, the intellectuals who think that reason can explain everything, even where we came from apart from God.

2. These were the ones Paul was trying to reach with the Gospel. Why?
 - a. Because they had all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
 - b. Because the wages of sin is death, eternal death.
 - c. Because apart from what Jesus Christ has done to save sinners, they would all end up suffering forever for their sins in a place that burns with fire: hell.
 - d. Paul knew that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – His once for all sacrifice for sinners, and the life He brings through His resurrection – was the only thing that could save them.
 - e. And so he reasoned with them, trying to convince them, trying to show them the truth, because he cared what happened to them, and because he loved Jesus Christ, who told him to tell others.

B. As Paul was reasoning with them, he received an invitation to come and speak to them.

1. Apparently, to pass the time, since they didn't have television – even educational TV – they would get together and talk, especially with strangers, so that they could learn new things.
2. They had never heard the things Paul was saying before – especially about Jesus and the resurrection – and so they invited Paul to the Areopagus, or Mars Hill – a natural amphitheater, with a flat area from which to speak and a very large rock that could be used for the audience to sit.
3. It was here Paul made his appeal to them, to instruct them in the basics of the Gospel, that they might find Jesus Christ and be saved.
4. What he told them were basically two things:
 - a. First, He explained who God is: you really can't understand who Jesus is and why you need Him unless you understand who the true God is.
 - b. Second, He warned them about the judgment of all men that was coming, that the resurrection is the proof that it will take place, and that they needed to turn to Jesus to be saved from it.
 - c. Let's consider these two areas now for a few moments.

II. Sermon.

A. First, He explained who God is.

1. Before he did, he first found a point of contact better to relate to them: the fact that they were religious (v. 22).
 - a. This is true of all men.
 - (i) We all recognize that we're dependent on something for our existence and/or our well being.
 - (ii) For some, it's some idea of God; for others, it's evolution, which, of course, can't help us.
 - b. The Athenians were religious.
 - (i) Paul had seen their objects of worship – their idols.
 - (ii) He didn't commend them for it, but recognized it was true.
 - (iii) But he used to his advantage: especially their altar to an unknown god.
 - (a) The Athenians were so afraid of offending the gods, they wanted to make sure they worshipped all of them.
 - (b) And so they erected an altar to the unknown god, just in case they missed one.

- (c) This God they didn't know, was the One Paul wanted to introduce them to.
- (d) Their gods couldn't save them – because they really didn't exist – but the unknown God could through Jesus Christ.

2. So who is this God?

- a. First, Paul told them He is the One who made heaven and earth (v. 24).
 - (i) This means they owe their existence to Him.
 - (ii) He not only made them, but all the things they need to live: they were indebted to Him.
- b. Second, He is the Lord of heaven and earth.
 - (i) Since He made everything, He has sovereign right over them.
 - (ii) This means that they must obey and worship Him: they weren't doing this and therefore committing a very serious sin.
 - (iii) The Lord, who has the right to tell us what to do, said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3).
- c. But third, this God is not to be worshipped as they worshipped their gods.
 - (i) The Jews built a Temple to worship Him in, and His presence was once in the Temple, but not any longer.
 - (ii) Even when He was, God is infinite – He is everywhere at once, "in Him we live and move and exist" (v. 28), the universe cannot contain Him, certainly not a temple made with hands.
 - (iii) Now He dwells in human hearts through faith in His Son.
 - (iv) The Athenians thought they needed to build a house for their gods because they were limited.
- d. And of course, they thought He needed their sacrifices:
 - (i) But He is not served by man, as though He needed anything from us (v. 25): on the contrary, we need Him – He is the one who gives to everyone life, breath, and everything they need to survive.
 - (ii) He is the one who made the nations, who gave them their territories, who determined how long they would exist as a nation (v. 26).
- e. Through the things He provides us, as well as the many other things in this world by which He reveals Himself, He wanted the nations to search for Him, that they might find Him and worship Him (v. 27).
 - (i) The greatest proof of His existence is always with us: the fact that we're made in His image, that we are His children (vv. 28-29).
 - (ii) That we are aware of our existence, that we can think and reason, that we have purpose, that we can make morally significant decisions.
 - (iii) This is no accident; we didn't rise from the dirt; dirt can't think, can't make choices, doesn't have morals: something greater can't come from something less than itself.
 - (iv) Paul tells them they shouldn't think that God is like gold or silver or stone: even though you make it look like a man or a god, it is still just metal and stone (v. 29).

- (v) God is the Creator and Lord of all that is; He is personal, intelligent, purposeful, and moral: we are the greatest proof that He is.
- (vi) This is important, because a false god can't save you.
- (vii) But there is one more thing that is true of God that Paul now draws their attention to: God is also Judge and one day He will judge all men.

B. Second, Paul warns them about the coming judgment and tells them that the proof it will take place is the resurrection: "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should 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" (vv. 30-31).

1. First of all, God is Judge who will judge all men for their sins.
 - a. The One who is Creator and Lord has the right to tell us what to do.
 - (i) He has told us what to do through our conscience.
 - (ii) And through the Ten Commandments.
 - b. He also has the right to judge us if we disobey Him: more than that, He has the moral obligation because He is just.
 - (i) The fact is we have all disobeyed Him.
 - (ii) Paul writes, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).
 - (iii) And, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), not just physical death, but eternal death and damnation in hell and the lake of fire, because the sins we have committed are against an infinitely holy God.
 - (iv) Paul tells them that God has appointed a day when He will judge everyone by His righteous standard.
2. Second, the proof that He will judge us is the resurrection of Christ.
 - a. This is the evidence.
 - (i) Jesus is the One who taught us about the resurrection: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29).
 - (ii) And when Jesus was crucified and raised again from the dead, the Father not only declared to us that Jesus is His Son, verifying everything He said is true, but it also proved to us that the resurrection is not only possible, it is real, and we too will be raised.
 - b. The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead means there is life after death.
 - (i) Death is not the end, but the beginning.
 - (ii) Even after we die, before the resurrection, our souls continue to live:
 - (a) In heaven, if we're trusting in Jesus to save us.
 - (b) In hell, if we not trusting Him.
 - (iii) But the Bible also tells us that one day our bodies will be raised; we will be judged:
 - (a) If we've trusted in Christ, we will live with Him forever in the new heavens and earth.

- (b) But if we haven't trusted Him, we will then suffer forever in the Lake of Fire.
- (c) Our final destination depends on one thing: whether or not we are willing to turn from our sins and trust in Jesus Christ alone to save us.

3. And so Paul makes this offer on behalf of God: He is willing to forgive us, cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and count us as righteous, if we are willing to repent and turn to Christ. "God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent" (v. 30).

a. To repent means:

- (i) To admit to God that we've broken His Law.
- (ii) To be sorry in our hearts that we have, because we have offended God, not just because we're in trouble for them.
- (iii) And to turn from those sins, intending never to return to them, but to do the right thing from now on.

b. And to trust in Christ means:

- (i) That we not only understand who Jesus is and what He's done.
- (ii) And that we not only believe that these things are true.
- (iii) But that we actually rely on Jesus and His work alone for our entrance into heaven, and not our own works at all.
- (iv) If we will repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be saved.
- (v) The resurrection is God's guarantee, or proof, that this is true as well.

C. Finally, we see three results to Paul's message:

1. There were those who rejected what he had to say: "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer" (v. 32).
2. There were those who procrastinated, who said they wanted to look into it further, but put it off to a future date: "But others said, 'We shall hear you again concerning this.'"
3. But there were others who believed, who trusted Jesus and were saved: "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" (vv. 33-34).
4. How will you respond to the Gospel this morning?
 - a. The first two groups were lost: they heard but what they heard didn't help them because they didn't act on what they heard.
 - b. But the last group was saved: they believed and began to follow Christ.
 - c. Don't let another day go by without Christ. As long as you do, you are in danger of everlasting destruction.
 - d. Turn from your sins; trust in Christ and be saved by His death and resurrection. Amen.