

# Warnings against a multiplicity of religions

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Preacher: Collier, Gilbert (1900-1984)

[ 0 : 00 ] I will very briefly this evening draw your thoughts to a word found in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 17, and words that are found in the 23rd verse, 17th chapter of the Acts, verse 23.

For as I passed on and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God, whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

These are the words, of course, of that great man, the Apostle Paul. And the circumstances in which they were uttered are singularly striking and important.

It shows to us how God's providence takes a hand in all our affairs and in all our ways.

You see, Paul had forced upon him a few days, we do not know quite how many, but a few days at least, in which he was not particularly occupied with any duty or service.

[ 1 : 54 ] He was waiting for two of his friends to come to him from Thessalonica, and to join him in further service in the name of the Lord.

And those few days, they seem to be wasted days, perhaps, to the Apostle. Some would say these are things that cannot be accounted for.

But we may well see, as we consider this portion of the Word of God, how vital those few days were.

Paul was never an idle man. If he had any time to spare, and my word, he had but very little, because he was a man that was employed in the service of his God from the beginning of the day to the end of it.

And we read on one occasion how he preached well into the night. So full of zeal was this great man of God that he hardly had a moment that he could call his own.

[ 3 : 19 ] And therefore, it must have been a strange experience for him to be walking the streets of Assis with nothing particular to do.

What he was doing, he was observing. And what he observed in this city, this metropolis of the Internet, one might say it was the very center of the intellectual world of his day, where philosophy was rife in all its very varieties, and where religion of all kinds was practiced.

Paul was going about this great city of Athens with all its architectural beauty and wonder. and he was observing.

And he was looking at one thing and at another. And here in the very center of this great city, there were altars and shrines to all kinds of deities.

And no doubt in a very remote part of the multiplicity of shrines and altars, there was one that was hardly recognized.

[ 4 : 53 ] And Paul noticed the inscription that was on this one. I doubt not for a moment that it was pretty well hidden because it was hardly used or recognized.

It was only brought in in order that the consciences of the Athenian people might be cleared of leaving out any god. They did not want to leave out any god from their worship.

But no doubt they would hardly think that there was any great significance or importance in this altar that was there for Paul to behold.

And on it were these words to the unknown god. There was one thing that was prevalent in the time of Paul.

And this is why I'm taking this subject tonight because I can see such a close affinity with the times prevailing in the days of Paul and our own present time.

[ 6 : 17 ] There was one thing that was prevailing here at Athens and that was the multiplicity of religion. There were religions of every kind.

Deities and all these deities had to have a temple. And that is why Athens is such a renowned place for the architecture that is existent there.

And you can go you young people can go into the British Museum today and you can see relics fragments of the architecture that existed in the days of Paul.

Here he was going around about and he was looking his own eyes were looking upon those things that are now in the British Museum. And why were they there?

Because the Athenian people had a possession and they had a persuasion in their minds that every deity dwelt in a temple and they had to erect a temple for every god.

[ 7 : 29 ] And those temples had to be in accordance with the greatness in their view of the god that they worshipped. Now I say this what Paul was confronted with at Athens as he spent these few days observing the things that were present there is a prevailing condition in the present day in which you and I live.

because if we've got anything today we've got the multiplicity of religion. You take for instance the word evangelical today there's no standard whatsoever by which you can analyze such a word as that.

There are conservative and evangelicals there are liberal evangelicals there are Arminian evangelicals and other kinds of all sorts and no one can really say which is which or what is what even in that one section alone.

There's multiplicity of notions ideas and beliefs and creeds and all kinds of things today and that is why I am taking this subject specially for those who are young and monstrous here this afternoon because the same application of truth that was administered by Paul the servant of the Lord in these days in Athens is the same message that needs to be delivered today.

He says I beheld by your devotion an altar with this inscription upon it to the unknown God him whom he therefore ignorantly worshiped he will declare I unto you.

[ 9 : 54 ] I received this morning a copy of the Bible leave quarterly and this is what I was struck with the word that the editor speaks in the editorial.

He says there are Christians speaking of the conditions prevailing today there are Christians and Christians some are true to their Lord and Master and walk in the light as he is in the light some while confessing the name above every name are barely distinguishable from the unbelieving world around them.

Not a few embrace soul-destroying error and walk in darkness rather than in light. Sacerdotalism and liberalism masquerade as true Christianity.

Outward magnificence and show present to the world a captivating character of the kingdom of God Satan himself as the word reminds us can appear as an angel of light.

My friends we are living in most solemn times and what a confused state there is for our young people with this multiplicity of notions and ideas and sanctimals how can they find the way of truth?

[ 11 : 25 ] How can they lay hold upon the substance that is undoubted unquestionable and sure and ever blessed?

Now it's the same thing that Paul was led to apply to the people of Athens that we need today. It's the same message and also the same method is needed today.

Now he says to them the God ye ignorantly worship. Now don't let us think for a moment that Paul was sanctioning their worship although it was ignorant worship.

There is no such thing as ignorant worship. Let us be quite clear about that. They went worshipping God by accident.

There's no worship of the living God that is accidental. the Lord Jesus Christ very clearly teaches that in the passage that we read just now.

[ 12 : 43 ] When he was speaking to the woman of Samaria he said ye know not ye worship ye know not what we know what we worship for salvation is of the jewels.

What Christ was teaching there there can be no such thing from any being in the whole world as ignorant worship of God.

Worship is something that is the work of the divine spirit and those who are quickened by the same blessed spirit whom God seeks out and calls by his grace they and they only are worshippers of God.

Now Paul didn't mean to say that accidentally you people of Athens you hit upon the right thing although you've done it in England.

Really that altar with that inscription on it was a very outstanding feature of an affront to the almighty holy God the eternal God who is not worshipped with names hands but is worshipped by the heart.

[ 14 : 10 ] Now you see then there is a great deal of similarity between the time of Paul and Athens as in our own day.

Now let us look how Paul dealt with it. What his message was in this occasion. It's a very important one. Now first of all he comes to this great foundation truth.

He says God that made the world. Why did Paul begin with creation? Well because it's the great foundation of course.

but there was something more than that. The Epicurean people that were so numerous in Athens in fact they comprised the greater part of the Athenian people.

The Epicureans were what we should call today evolutionists because they openly declared that the world was never made by God.

[ 15 : 24 ] It came somehow into existence by a process of vast inconceivable material development.

We should call them of course the evolutionists. and so Paul strikes at the very root of the error the foundation error that was held by a great majority of the people at this Athenian city.

He says God made the world and all things that are in it. Seeing he is Lord of heaven and earth he dwelleth not in temples made with hands.

See how he brings this forceful truth this opening word that he declares to the people. There were two things that overturned the very foundation of their teaching and also revealed to them the emptiness and folly of all their works.

The building of these great magnificent buildings these temples for the deities that they worshipped they were all empty all vain. There was no object no clothes because God who made the world and all things that are in dwelleth not in temples made of hands.

[ 17 : 01 ] There's a great deal in what Paul said that we might follow in our own meditation because this which reveals to us so blessedly that God dwells in those temples in the human heart that he has prepared for his own dwelling and where he abides and where he says I love I dwell in my love the place where God finds a resting place is in the bosom of his believing people to those to him such hearts are the glorious temples that he occupies and beautifies and glorifies by his presence and his grace.

Now that's the first thing then again we see he comes secondly to the all-important teaching of the grace of God.

He says neither is worship with men's hands as though he needed anything seeing he giveth to all life and breath and all things.

You see here he is declaring truly and really the sovereign grace of God. He giveth to all life and breath and all things.

And again he says he needed nothing to be given to them. Now what is this my friends brother? Teaching of the grace of God.

[ 18 : 43 ] God's grace will teach a sinner that there can be nothing in their hands that can be rendered to God and be acceptable in his sight.

We have to come under that sentence which we often sing and many of us repeat nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I claim.

You see grace will bring people to see this and to recognize this. If there was anything that was totally unrecognized among all these Athenian people it was the need and the reality of God's grace.

They thought that they could build their way to heaven by the architecture. They thought they could by their philosophy and there was Aristotle one who was a great philosopher before many centuries before this who had taught people that the world was an eternal thing.

It never had a beginning. Never would have an end. You see all these philosophers they were totally in ignorance of the greatness and the need of God's grace.

[ 20 : 05 ] Now that is what Paul addressed how he addressed himself. You see first of all God made everything. He was the founder and maker of all things.

And then secondly God must give all things. There can be no life without his giving of it. There can be no salvation whatsoever without the grace of God.

And then thirdly he comes to a very important point and this again is a direct confrontation to the sentiments the ideas held among the people of Athens.

And that was this that the Athenian people were different from any other part people in all the whole world of mankind.

They had come from the earth that was what they taught. These philosophers taught that. And there was something about the Athenians that was different from any other creature on the face of the earth.

[ 21 : 25 ] They exalted their own race. They magnified their birth, their being. they elevated themselves as Athenian people far above all their fellow creatures.

They placed themselves on a plane that was above their fellow man. There was no racial equality with those Athenians in the days of the Apostle Paul.

Paul. This is what Paul says. He hath God, this is, God hath made of one blood all nations for to dwell on the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed.

He hath made of one blood. Here we see in very simple terms, Paul acknowledges and declares the truth that from our first parent all mankind has proceeded.

We all imbibe the same sin that Adam incurred. We're all of one race, of all of one blood, but God hath appointed the times for all others.

[ 22 : 57 ] What a wonderful truth that is, we sometimes see it. My times are in his hand. All events are of his command.

There are times to be born again. These are appointed by God. Times when there shall be a call of grace. Times when a sinner shall be awakened and quickened and brought and turned to the Lord.

There were times, and this is all embraced in this word of Paul's from the Athenians, there was a time in the fullness of that time when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the eternal ever glorious Son of God the Father, should come and be made man in now likeness.

That time was appointed before ever the world was made and in the fullness of time it was fulfilled and the dear Redeemer was revealed to bear the sins and sorrows of his people and to redeem their souls from death and destruction by his shedding of blood and his wonderful grace.

All these times were appointed. We've been thinking in this afternoon of the times that have passed over this little sanctuary to over 355 years and we believe that many of things have been appointed in respect to this little place.

[ 24 : 47 ] We cannot tell, we cannot measure, we cannot conceive all the greatness of God's provision but we verily believe that here has been some wonderful transactions between heaven and earth.

Here in this little chapel there have been sinners brought to see the light in God's life. There have been souls that have been made acquainted with the greatest of all things, Christ Jesus their Lord and their Saviour.

Here in this little chapel, heaven has been begun. The world and the things of it have been put away from the heart and the mind of many a soul in this little house of prayer.

prayer, because God's appointed times have come when such souls shall be blessed with everlasting grace. Then again, he comes to the great point which Paul loved to come to, always came to in all his preaching, and what is the gospel without this?

he comes to the great matter of seeking after God. He says that they should seek the Lord if happily they may find him, if happily they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from everyone else.

[ 26 : 24 ] You know, my friends, it's the all-important first thing that should be ever considered and held in our hearts and minds, seeking after God.

But here were a people in Athens, they were seeking after all kinds of gods, except the one true living God, whom they knew not.

And so it is today, there are all manner of things, sentiments, cults, creeds. I think we live in a day when the Lord Jesus Christ described when he was here, people are saying, it's the great trend of today, people are saying this, low here, low there.

You know what I mean. They call people's attention to this thing and to that thing, anything whatsoever that may seem to be plausible from certain points of view, but which are definitely and clearly totally apart from the truth.

There was something about Paul's preaching that was so decisive, preaching of the gospel.

[ 27 : 52 ] We do not wish to be restricted by the tenets and the inhibitions of men.

What we do need today, we need it in our churches, we need it in our land and our nation, we need the decisive preaching of the gospel, such as Paul preached, here at Athens.

Then he comes, this is my last point, he comes to the great, great need for all who hear the gospel, and that is repentance.

He says, God hath commanded everywhere to repent. That is God's command. And why is it what people say then if it's God's command everybody can repent?

While it is God's command, it needs God's grace to give us true repentance. repentance. Let us remember that.

[ 29 : 03 ] But he does not exonerate anyone from the need of repentance. We're all sinners. And therefore the only hope for us to get to heaven is by the way of repentance.

That's the great teaching of the scriptures. That's the great declaration, the decisive declaration of the gospel. It's no use people saying going to people and saying, now you can repent.

You can say you ought to. But it's only God that can give them the grace. And what a wonderful thing it is, abounding in mercy, in the greatness and loving kindness, where we can find in our own bosom a real repenting spirit, something that hangs down in godly sorrow and contrition, that feels the reality of our guilt, and the need of the clean, cleansing, healing virtue of the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

To have repentance left out is to, as Mr. Hart says, is to leave religion totally deficient, hold of all its vitality in reality.

Now Paul comes then, finally, after bringing the people of Athens through these various steps and stages, he comes to this great thing, God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world by that man, whom he hath appointed, and whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the pain.

[ 30 : 55 ] So he comes to the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so, my friends, you see, in these outstanding features, God the Creator, God the Giver, of all grace, God the life and power of all salvation, who must give and will give repentance to his people, and the forgiveness of their sins, that God is the God of Jesus Christ, he's the God of salvation, and it's through that God and through the word of his grace, we may find life and peace and salvation.

Amen. you Frein God the Lord, He