

## Acts 17:22-31

### Preaching the Unimaginable

☞ Preaching reveals the God we are to worship like idols never could.

#### I. “This I proclaim to you”: Preaching Superior to Idolatry. (vv. 22, 23)

- a. Idolatry is man’s play at *earning spiritual favor* by rites of homage.
  - i. Idolatry is image-driven and man-centric.
    1. **Form:** Performing *elaborate rituals* with lifeless objects.
    2. **Function:** Inviting *demonic forces* to gratify the flesh.
  - ii. Idolatry’s results are spiritually deadly.
    1. Feeding a divine impulse but *veiling the Divine in dead images*.
    2. Maliciously enslaving us to *transactional* worship.
- b. Preaching is God’s way of *giving divine grace* by the hearing of faith.
  - i. Preaching is Gospel-driven and Christocentric.
    1. **Form:** Proclaiming a *plain message* to lifeless hearts.
    2. **Function:** Promoting *Christ worship* while humbling the flesh.
  - ii. Preaching’s results are spiritually vital.
    1. Unveiling the Divine by *feeding on the living Word*.
    2. Mercifully freeing us to *transformative* worship.

#### II. “Not far from each of us”: The Preaching of Nature. (vv. 24-29)

- a. Nature’s plain preaching *sufficient* for idolaters to *know* God.
  - i. In his creative act, God revealed as *infinite creator*. (v. 24)
    1. Gloriously infinite, God is everywhere. (Ps. 19:1; 50:6; Ek. 38:23)
    2. It is arrogant to assume we can *contain or cause God* to indwell or fit in a manmade object. (Dt. 10:14; 1 Ki. 8:27)
  - ii. In sustaining creation, God revealed as *independent provider*. (vv. 25, 26)
    1. Giving all things to everyone, God needs nothing. (Ps. 50:9, 12)
    2. It is blasphemous to assume we can *indebt God* by our deeds and offerings that he might repay us. (Jb. 22:2; Lk. 17:10)
  - iii. In ordering humanity, God revealed as *sovereign authority*. (vv. 27, 28)
    1. Determining all things, God is perfectly wise, mighty, good, and absolute. (Jb. 14:5; Ps. 139:16; Is. 46:8-10; Ro. 11:36)
    2. It is reckless to assume we can *escape God* to find happiness in a world he has designed explicitly for us to seek and find him. (Ac. 15:17, 18)
- b. Nature’s clear preaching *sufficient* to leave idolaters *inexcusable* before God.
  - i. By revealing himself in nature, God convicts us that he is the *only worshipful God* and we know it. (vv. 23, 27-29)
    1. *Thus*, we are guilty if we don’t worship God. (Ac. 14:17; Ro. 1:18-20)
    2. *Further*, worship of God through idolatrous rites is *sin*. (Is. 40:18, 19)
  - ii. **Nevertheless**, all continue to make idols by nature’s light. (vv. 24, 25)
    1. *Still*, we willfully try to confine God to our tiny imaginations—to make him something he’s not. (Ex. 32:8; Le. 26:1; Ps. 50:21)
    2. *Still*, we blasphemously try to indebt God with worthless offerings to worthless idols. (Ex. 20:4; 22:20; Ga. 4:8)
    3. *Still*, we recklessly run from God’s sovereignty, using his gifts to pursue our own pleasure. (Is. 40:17)

- c. Nature’s graceless preaching is *insufficient* for idolaters to be *saved*.
  - i. Because sin *distorts* all nature and *obscures* God.
    1. Enticed by beauty, sin twists nature into an object of worship. (Ek. 6:9)
    2. Made in his image, sinners create idols and call them gods. (Is. 2:8ff)
  - ii. **Therefore**, without the Gospel, idolaters are under God’s wrath.
    1. Nature’s light is exhausted and can do no more. (Ro. 3:11, 12)
    2. Another Light is needed to give grace to idolaters. (Ps. 43:3)

#### III. “The man God appointed”: The Preaching of the Gospel. (vv. 30, 31)

- a. The preached Gospel is a *special revelation of grace* to all men.
  - i. God’s infinite creativity, independent provision, and sovereign authority culminate in the grace of the Gospel. (Ro. 1:2-4)
  - ii. God calls idolaters in the Gospel to repent and live. (Lk. 24:47, 48)
- b. Gospel preaching is the *saving revelation of God* in the Man—Jesus Christ.
  - i. Chosen by God, this Jesus unites nature and divinity. (Is. 42:1; 2 Pt. 1:1)
  - ii. Raised from death, Jesus assures the repentant of salvation. (Ro. 4:24, 25; 1 Ti. 3:16; 1 Pt. 1:20, 21)

#### IV. Concluding Applications.

- a. *First*, heed the preaching of the one true and living God!
  - i. Though you, like the Athenians, formerly were ignorant, you can *claim ignorance no longer*. Nature reveals his eternal glory and leaves you without excuse in the day of judgement. *You were warned*.
  - ii. Though you, like all of us, formerly were lost in graceless darkness, you need *not remain in darkness any longer*. The Gospel reveals the Light of the divine grace in the person of Jesus Christ. *You are called*.
- b. *Second*, do you worship this God, or dead idols?
  - i. Are you trying to *force this God to fit your worship*? If so, you arrogantly deny his divine infinity and make yourself Creator in his place. What you worship is just an idol in your own image, and it cannot save you.
  - ii. Are you trying to *placate this God with your service*? If so, you blasphemously deny his divine independence and make yourself Provider in his place. Rather than a blessing, such service merits God’s wrath.
  - iii. Are you trying to *escape this God in your happiness*? If so, you recklessly deny his divine sovereignty and make yourself Authority in his place. Instead of bliss you run headlong into the very Judge you hope to avoid.
- c. *Third*, worship the living God as preached in Christ.
  - i. *Beware of ritualism*, the shadow of idolatry. Flee everything in worship that indulges flesh, anything that feeds spirituality but obscures true divinity, and subordinate traditions and forms to preaching Jesus Christ.
  - ii. *Esteem nature’s light highly, but never to outshine Christ*. Sin’s malice deforms nature’s beauty, but God glories in creation that we might know Christ, “for whom all things exist and in whom all things hold together.
  - iii. *Embrace God’s varied providences*, knowing that he orders all things so that you may know him and the power of his resurrection. Then you will find in Christ a sovereign refuge when no worldly good can comfort and which no worldly evil can take away.