

Paul at Athens, Part I

Text: Acts 17:16-21

Introduction:

After the unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica had learned that Paul was preaching the Word of God at Berea, they came down to Berea and stirred up trouble there, as well. Paul was immediately sent to the sea, where he then traveled by boat, over 250 miles, to Athens. At the command of Paul, Timothy and Silas, would soon join Paul in Athens. However, in the meantime, Paul is left alone, as he awaits the arrival of Silas and Timothy. This morning, we move on to consider what happened, as Paul awaited the arrival of his two companions.

I. Paul at Athens

"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols" (vs. 16).

Question #1: What might Paul be tempted to do, while he is waiting for Timothy and Silas? What is he doing? Where is his focus, even now? Describe the heart of Paul, here? Why is this the case? How can we apply this to us? Are we provoked by the things that we see going on around us, regularly? Why or why not?

"Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there" (vs. 17).

Question #2: Notice the word, "Therefore." What does this tell us about the provocation that came upon Paul, in verse 16? How can we apply this to us? Comment on what Paul did, where he did it, how often he did it, and with whom he did it?

"Then certain Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers encountered him. And some said, 'What does this babbling want to say?'" (vs. 18a).

Before moving on to question #3, we must note three important facts:

- 1) The Epicureans and the Stoics were two of the most popular philosophical groups of the day.
- 2) The Epicureans were material atheists, who believed that pleasure was the chief end of human existence (some saw this pleasure tied to virtue, others to all manner of fleshly pursuits and lusts). [At the root - Pleasure]
- 3) The Stoics were pantheists, who believed that virtue is perfected, when one is unmoved by any passions. Physical enjoyment of any sense, is looked at as weak and less virtuous (also denied the realities of pain and sorrow...etc). [At the root - Pride]
- 4) When they call Paul a "babbler," they are calling him a "seed picker." In essence, they are insulting him (looking down their noses at him) as an "idler who makes a living picking up scraps" of knowledge, wherever he goes. It is like saying, "What is this 'man of no significance' saying?"

Question #3: Clearly, Paul (who again, does not have Silas and Timothy with him, and is on foreign soil) is dealing with a people, who would consider themselves way out of his league. These are the so-called "thinkers," and "brilliant philosophers" of Athens (and who is Paul)? What temptations might Paul face at this point? (intimidation, fear of man, compromise the message-- especially about a "resurrected" Christ, considering the philosophical backgrounds of these men). Do we ever face these kinds of challenges, today? Explain.

"Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,' because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection" (vs. 18b).

Question #4: Did Paul compromise? Consider the level of "break through," which Paul was up against, in the midst of an idol infested Athens. What would it be like, preaching something that was diametrically opposed, to many of the well worn and aged philosophies that dominated Athens? [consider again, their calling him a "babbler," and why this makes sense] How was Paul able to preach Jesus and the resurrection in this thoroughly hardened setting? How can we apply this to us?

"And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.' For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear something new" (vs. 19-21).

Question #5: What is it that leads Paul's listeners to give him a further audience in the Areopagus? What was the spiritual climate like at Athens? [Always looking for the "new thing," so as to replace the "old" failure] Can we relate to this climate, in any respect, today? Where is God in all of this? How is the invisible hand of divine providence at work here?

Question #6: What does verse 21 teach us about the natural condition of man, since the fall? How can we relate this to us, today? What kinds of ideas might be brought up in a modern day "Areopagus?" What does the Gospel seek to accomplish, in such a setting as this? [Tear down the foundation]

Amen!!!