



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Ignorance is Over” **Sermon on Acts 17:22-31**

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Imagine telling a world that is ignorant of Jesus about Jesus. What would you say? Today, we hear what the Apostle Paul had to say. Paul was in Athens. And Athens was the Athens of the Mediterranean. Art, architecture, music, poetry, philosophy, all very cutting edge. Luke says the people there would “spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.” What’s new with you? What’s new with you?

What’s new?

Paul was new, and he’s distressed by what he sees. Idols everywhere! And so, he was quite vocal in his criticism of the city. Nothing is as lovely as a visitor criticizing your city. “If you don’t like it here, I know a place where you can go.”

Paul offered his criticism before a gathering of Stoics and Epicurean philosophers. Kind of an odd mixture. Like tax accountants showing up at a Grateful Dead concert. Stoics and Epicureans united in their critique of Paul. They take him up to the Areopagus... “Let’s see what this pretentious babbler has to say. Imagine telling a world that is ignorant of Jesus about Jesus. Here’s how Paul did it.

Acts 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely spiritual you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What, therefore, you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all peoples to inhabit the whole

earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him— Though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we, too, are his offspring.'

"Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

How do you tell a world ignorant of Jesus about Jesus?

Paul's elevator speech on Jesus begins with a compliment... of sorts... well, it's less a compliment - more tongue-in-cheek. "Athenians, I see how extremely spiritual you are in every way." It's a town full of idols.

But he uses their spirituality as a way into his argument. He says, "I looked carefully at all your objects of worship." You see, that's not a compliment. If someone pulls up in a Ferrari, you don't say, "I noticed your object of transportation." I mean, it's a Ferrari...it's a god! "I looked carefully at all the objects of your worship. I found one altar with an inscription, "To an unknown god." He's found the doorway. The Greeks had an unknown God.

What's that about? My guess is that if you've carved, out of stone, a god of war, a god of love, a god of marriage, a god of wisdom, a god of agriculture, god of the sea, a god of hunting, a god of wine, a god of metalworking, a god of healing, a god of archery. Psyche, the god of the soul. Pan, the god of the wild. Hypnos, the god of sleep. Iris, the goddess of rainbows- god, god, god, god.

After a while, it gets to be like party buses in Nashville, you hit your limit. "Do we really our Nemesis in the middle of the traffic circle?"

You see, you start down the road of making an idol of everything, and you might leave, say, the god of TOENAIL CLIPPERS out. No one wants to incur the wrath that that might bring.

Imagine if we did that in Nashville. Where would we put all the gods? God of politics, god of schools, god of career, god of health, god of golf, hockey, basketball, football, soccer, baseball. The Canadians would want their god of curling. Canadians! There's the god of traveling sports, the god of vacations, the god of social media, the god of looking younger, and the god of worry. All the things that demand our nervous system.

Our Calvinist theology says the mind is a factory for idols; we can make anyone and anything into an idol. An idol is something that needs defending. Imagine worshiping a god that needs you to defend. "We are asking the governor to sign the bill, to protect our Judeo-Christian Western god. Because they've taken away our god and I do not know where they have laid him."

Anyway, I noticed all the objects of your worship!

“How do you tell people about Jesus who don’t know Jesus?”

Paul says to a “know-it-all” city, “There’s something you don’t know. You have this unknown god. I know what you don’t know.”

“For I have a God who is over heaven and the earth, a God who created all things, a God in whom we live and move and have our being, and this God can’t be kept in a box, carved in stone. And you all know about an unknown God. You know you’re missing something! You fear it! Well, let me tell you!”

“...The holy Almighty God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, but now God commands all people everywhere to repent...” Did you catch that? “God has overlooked the times of human ignorance... but now...” I think Paul just called his congregation ignorant. Now that’s preaching! I looked it up in my introduction to homiletics book. If you don’t know, homiletics is a Greek word for preaching to the throngs. It said in the introduction, “The preacher is called to bring a cherished Word to people who do not know, or have forgotten, or are prone to resist the claim...”

What that translates to is what I say to myself every time I climb into the pulpit. “Thank God I’m here, this crowd’s time for ignorance is over...” I say that to myself. I wouldn’t say that out loud. You’d probably find it a little offensive.

Paul says, “God has overlooked the times of human ignorance; you all have received a Pass for being ignorant...but now!”

You know, ignorance comes in all forms. Ignorance doesn’t always look stupid. When the mother is holding the baby, no one says, “Beautiful baby, but she’s ignorant. Look at her! Doesn’t know a word. Can’t form a sentence. Doesn’t know a green bean from a booger. Ignorant.”

And all that is true, but we have a much nicer word, “innocence.”

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. A new creation is something we don’t know. We are to be babies. Innocent. Not hardened and scarred by the ways of the world. There are things I know now that I wish I didn’t know; I wouldn’t mind getting my ignorance back.

Ignorance comes in all forms. There’s the kind of ignorance that knows the truth but chooses to be ignorant of the truth. Ignorance is bliss. You don’t have to do anything. Ignore...-ance.

It’s all those things we should do something about but don’t. Ignore...-ance! I read in the Smithsonian Magazine that the human brain may contain up to a spoon’s worth of microplastics. That’s not a spoonful of microplastics. It’s seven grams... the weight of a plastic spoon. Microplastics are in our water, fish, and plants. Is the time for ignorance over? What are we doing? We’re collecting a whole place setting in our brains.

I read this week in the Wall Street Journal that the US debt tops 100% of the GDP. Lawmakers in both parties have expressed alarm... Maybe we should all join the Tea Party, I

just don't know where they meet anymore. Both parties expressed alarm... Hmm... Is the time for ignorance over?

I read that social media can cause cyberbullying, social anxiety, depression, and reduce attention span. Hello? Hello?

Hottest April on record... Hmm...

Matthew and Maria Raine are suing OpenAI because the chatbot not only discouraged their son Adam from discussing his suicidal notes with them, but it also offered to write his suicide note! How heavily invested are we in AI?

There's a kind of ignorance that just pushes things down the road. Then there's the kind of ignorance that has to dawn on you. I am stupid.

While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

I was walking around the city, worried about this and that. And someone pointed out that I have spent a lot of time at worship. "Well, I am a preacher."

"No. No. I have seen you worshipping the god of calculation." "You saw that, did you?" "It's evident. Your furrowed brow. Your reticence to help. You questioned giving a tip at a restaurant. Well... "She was just touching buttons how hard is that?" How much do you make? All. Right!

Ok... I'll give you that...I have been spending some time...wondering if I have enough. Will it be enough? Will it last long enough? I'm not sure that I have enough. I can't get enough!"

Someone said to me, "Enough. Enough! The time for ignorance is over. Repent... Have the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus... and have a peace that surpasses all understanding. Peace."

Someone offered that to me...I think his name was Paul... But it might have been you. How do you tell a world ignorant of Jesus about Jesus?

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