

Acts 17:23-34

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- [0 : 00] If you could turn with me once again to Acts chapter 17 and we'll be looking at verses 23. We should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image made by man's age or post-Christendom age.
- And then coupled with that, we're living obviously in an increasingly, by Richard Dawkins, the God delusion is a foretaste of things to come.
- It might well be that there is a more. Whatever, it seems to me that the culture and situation that the Christian church is facing today is certainly ancient.
- This is of interest to me because he was coming against the great Greek culture and he was engaging with the great ideas of the Greek and Roman civilization.
- [1 : 20] It was, so to speak, all reared in the same culture and the same worldview and the same set of values that the Apostle Paul himself had been reared.
- It was the widespread idolatry which he encountered in Athens.
- It tells us that it greatly disturbed the Apostle Paul because it also disturbed them because he was equally passionate that men and women might come to know the truth.
- And we also looked at his cultural awareness and how the evidence for that, as he looked carefully, that were expressed towards Paul.
- What I want to do this evening is I want to look at the message that Paul goes on to deliver, to say the doctrine of God. And the second theme is man, the doctrine of man.
- [2 : 42] And it seems to me that these are two great relevant selves. Many people are using the concept and the word God, but what content is it to?
- And of course, in terms of man, we might say that man is in a crisis.
- His are very important themes for us today, and I'm going to look at what he's got to say in regards to this.
- But on what Paul found, I even found an altar with this inscription. True and unknown great achievements.
- It's great to thinkers, it's scientists, and it's philosophers in art and democracy. And yet, here as Paul is wandering around Athens, he sees this inscription.
- [3 : 58] No construct of idols made by the craft and skill of man. But we do not really, we are not able.
- If we are to have any true knowledge of God, if we are to know who this God is, then God himself will know him.
- Right away, that if we want to know where that inscription is, it's in Jesus of Nazareth. If there is to have any true knowledge of God, if you like, from his bottom-up reasoning to find God, then Jesus Christ is the one that is saying that he has the exact representation of his being.
- And let's never forget that, and let's say, take time to ponder that, because in his thinking, his teaching, his healing, his suffering, his self-denial, every single word of God.

But let's go on now to look and see just exactly what Paul says as he engages with this theme.

[5 : 21] There's the world and everything in it. So there is the first great truth about God.

Pantheism is no God. Nature is no God. A sense of awe in the feeling, in regard to nature, is not God.

I'm not saying it's not valuable. I'm not saying it's not moving. We were singing, from God your beings are.

And this is the first thing that Paul makes. God is not from creation. The God who made the world and everything in it.

And secondly, people to be unified with anything in creation, but furthermore, he does not need anything that is in that creation.

[6 : 32] Served, he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. Look, there was no lack in God.

That's not the created. We are creatures of need. God has no need.

He is perfectly at peace in his own being. Thirdly, God controls everything.

Now, although I am saying that, talking personally, I find it a very challenging, to say the least, and difficult piece of theology and biblical teaching.

It raises... But he does say, Paul, that the God who made the world is the...

[7 : 56] He is the Lord of heaven and earth. And he controls everything.

Sam, we have no answers to many of the situations, the way that things are, perhaps in our personal experience, in so much of the world tonight.

Nonetheless, this is what the teaching of the Bible is. These things, that is not part of creation.

He is prior to creation. He didn't quite say he's self-existent, although you might think that that is in plain creature. What does Paul go on then to say about man?

Well, in verse 25, and everything else, and he draws that to a conclusion, as we noted in verse 29, that we are God's offspring.

[9 : 12] Now, that is a very, very important truth. It's a very... Am I? We are not created by God.

We've just been singing, from God your beings are. We are looking to put our exercise in that field and believe that they will be able to show sometime in the future that processes and chemical processes, that there is nothing more than the sum of the parts of these chemical processes.

And it's these processes to the ego. And if we are not created by God, then it seems that I call some kind of Freudian neurosis.

I mean by that, that deep within us, we feel, for instance, and whoever there, and so that this is a mighty important truth.

The truth from God your beings are. We, even as some of your own poets have said, are God's offspring. We are made in the image of God and beings.

[10 : 45] And the second thing that Paul identifies identifies is the unity of the human race. I find it myself as disgusting and disgraceful as I think of the history of humanity and evil to man.

I can hardly believe that Christian churches and bishops and priests have been reading this Bible and have been reading the Gospels the way they are.

According to the Bible, black people, white people, any race, equally made in the image of God and are worthy of our respect regardless of their religion or culture no more have any hegemony or monopoly in terms of the image of God.

There is nothing about West thinking, the continent of Africa, for instance. third thing that Paul says about man is he were here that men would seek him.

Human beings, that is, would seek him and perhaps reach out for him. Not far. God wants a relationship with us.

[12 : 22] God wants to give himself unconditionally to us and he wants to give all of himself amnesia of humankind.

That spiritual amnesia where somehow or other we've lost our bearings. Bearings, and of course, that's what the coming of Christ has everything to do with, is it not?

God, as somebody put it, was God commands all people everywhere to repent.

And of course, they are not simply animals or biological processes. there is a person there, there is a real person need for justice that feels the need for truth, that feels the need for love.

And God to repent of our refusal to listen to God, of our refusal to make our way back to God, of our systems and our values and our truth belief systems.

[14 : 00] Paul also indicates the area of man in verse 31, he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

and he has got a date in that diary and he has written in it day of judgment. And that day will redress every injustice and every miscarriage of justice.

And in indeed the quality that will characterize this particular day of judgment is justice when he is the individual that is before him on that day is able to offer a compelling case that is just and right.

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right. But notice what he adds that we are men we are human beings we are sinful daughter of Adam but there is another man going to be at that judgment and that man's name is although he is the rightful judge and we are the ones that are liable to be judged he who is the rightful judge in the full judgment of God to which every human being is liable that our judgment will go your judgment and my judgment and if this is something that seems by raising

Jesus from the dead I come from a town called Clyde Bank that's where I was born and brought up I'm a minister in North Ayrshire and Cowinning who was a shop steward in John Brown's shipyards in Clyde Bank Jimmy Reed and he was once dubbed a old time trade union man and I met Jimmy Reed on a few occasions and I met him about a couple of months ago and I was speaking to him not for what he would call the Christian ethic or ethics of Jesus but he said to me during the course of our conversation he's certainly right in this sense that Christianity would have died had Jesus remained in the grave we wouldn't be here tonight but as neither sin nor the judgment of God nor Satan could ultimately or death it's conceivable obstacle that faced a holy and just and righteous

[17 : 34] God who wanted to deal with the God Jesus being that way himself he is our peace he is the gospel and it's interesting that this whole message is bracketed at the close of this message what is Paul speaking about Jesus and the resurrection it is critical it is crucial this is the mentis in redemptive history because this is the one that confirms and declares loudly that this is no mahas I think that these two themes are very important themes to say message it's interesting as well I think to notice what is not in this message and it's equally interesting to note the situation of the audience that he's speaking to but let me finish and conclude look see verse 32 when they heard about the resurrection of the dead some of them tell me

I don't know if you see me after the service or whatever but it seems to me that the I Christian message it might almost understandably appear to you as ridiculous so me of course the Bible itself doesn't it says that the things of the spirit are foolishness to those that do not believe there is a subject that's a more hopeful and positive response that God cannot and is not and will not do it but perhaps we need to be in for the long haul rather than the dramatic words of Paul and believed we might ask this evening in closing which of these three responses in terms of our mind do we think the claims of

Christianity are ridiculous are we willing at least to give them a second hearing face the reproach of the cross in these days may the Lord bless these thoughts to us