

THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

MINISTRY NOTES

- A. The Second Missionary Journey
 - 1. Paul sought to revisit churches from the first missionary journey in order to encourage them.
 - 2. God had bigger plans that included taking the Gospel where it had never been proclaimed, to what is now Europe.
- B. Ministry in Thessalonica and Berea
 - 1. The Word of God bears fruit despite personal difficulties encountered when sharing God's truth.
 - 2. It is important to search Scripture diligently when considering claims from others.
 - 3. The Word of God is divisive since it is life against death, light against darkness, truth against untruth.

AT ATHENS, ACTS 17:16-34

- A. Paul's initial ministry in Athens (16-21)
 - 1. He was struck by the numerous idols in the city (16), *Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.*
 - a. Paul arrived in Athens awaiting the arrival of Silas and Timothy.
 - b. He was distressed by the number of idols in Athens.
 - 1) Athens was the center of intellectual, philosophical and religious discussion but all it produced was idolatry.
 - 2) A. T. Robertson, *His very spirit was provoked to see this city, the home of so much that was high and noble, given over to false gods. There were gods at every turn; some thirty thousand in all were worshiped in Athens.*
 - 2. He began his teaching ministry in the synagogue and the marketplace (17), *So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.*
 - a. Paul couldn't wait to proclaim the Gospel in Athens until Silas and Timothy arrived.
 - 1) He had to share the Gospel with those in such great need, Jeremiah 20:9, *If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.*
 - 2) Also, Paul didn't wait for rejection in the synagogue but split his time between Jews and non-Jews.
 - b. Paul went to the marketplace daily to speak to whoever would listen.
 - 1) The marketplace or agora was not only the place to shop but a place to trade ideas.
 - 2) Paul developed a Gospel presentation for these Greeks who were inclined toward philosophy not Scripture.
 - 3) Richard Lenski, *The cultural and the intellectual life of Athens throbbed in the Agora. Here Paul could always find an interested audience and men who were ready for serious discussion.*
 - 3. He interacted with philosophers (18-21)
 - a. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers tried to determine what Paul was teaching (18), *Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.*
 - 1) There were primarily two groups of philosophers who interacted with Paul.
 - a) Epicureans
 - 1] This philosophy emerged in Athens about 300 B.C. and was developed by Epicurus.
 - 2] It considered happiness, or the avoidance of pain and emotional disturbance, to be the highest good.
 - 3] It taught that gods were uninvolved in human affairs and that there was no after life or judgment.
 - b) Stoics
 - 1] Zeno was the founder and it flourished about 300 B.C. and its name came from their principle meeting place in Athens, called stoa (porch).
 - 2] They were pantheists who believed happiness is bringing oneself into harmony with the universe.
 - 3] Leading features were materialism, fatalism, and pride.
 - c) Richard Lenski, *Both of these philosophies were diametrically opposed to Christianity with its doctrine of God, the soul, sin, redemption, salvation in Christ, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life.*

- 2) Responses to Paul's teaching
 - a) Some philosophers interacted or debated with him.
 - b) Others said he was a babbler
 - 1] Literally, a *seed picker*, like a bird picking up scraps from different places.
 - 2] They thought he couldn't make a rational argument because he was trying to piece different ideas together which he didn't fully understand.
 - c) Also, he was accused of preaching about foreign or unknown deities.
 - 1] There were two unknown items being proclaimed, Jesus and resurrection.
 - 2] Some thought resurrection referred to a person, a female counterpart of Jesus.
 - 3] A. T. Robertson, *The Athenians made gods out of the abstract virtues*.
 - 4] They definitely understood that what they were hearing was something they had never heard before.
 - d) Richard Lenski, *Luke describes this result of Paul's discussions in the Agora to show what a task the apostle was facing, and how hard it was even to make these lovers of philosophy and learning really understand what he meant. It is still so.*

b. They took Paul to the Areopagus and asked him to present his teaching (19-20), ***And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean."***

- 1) Some of the philosophers took Paul to the Areopagus.
 - a) The Areopagus is literally, *the hill of Ares or Mars Hill*.
 - b) It was the meeting place for the Council of Areopagus which gave oversight to religion and education.
- 2) They wanted to further discuss his beliefs.
 - a) They hoped to better understand what Paul was teaching.
 - b) At that time in Athens, the Areopagus was a place where new ideas were heard and tested.
 - c) Another motive for having Paul appear before the Areopagus, Longenecker, *We should doubtless understand Paul's appearance before the Athenian Council of Ares as being for the purpose of explaining his message before those in control of affairs in the city so that he might either receive the freedom of the city to preach or be censored and silenced.*

c. Luke notes that Athenians at the Areopagus spent their time listening to ideas (21), ***Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.***

- 1) Luke inserts a note concerning the emphasis in Athens of discussing new ideas.
- 2) It appears that Luke believed Paul's invitation was due to their interest in the latest topics.
- 3) Demosthenes, *We Athenians stay at home doing nothing, always delaying and making decrees, and asking in the market if there be anything new.*
- 4) Such interest gave Paul the opportunity to preach the Gospel.

B. Paul's message at the Areopagus (22-31)

1. Introduction

- a. Paul used an argument from natural theology based on God's self-revelation in nature, note Romans 1:19-32.
- b. It was similar to his first message to a group without a background in Scriptures in Lystra.
- c. He used his knowledge of Greek poets to build bridges from paganism to the truth of God.
- d. He began with God as Creator and took listeners to God as Judge.

2. The parts of Paul's message

a. His introduction (22-23)

- 1) Paul acknowledged that they were very religious (22), ***So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.***
 - a) This was evident due to the many temples throughout the city.
 - b) He was not stating that they had truth but that they had an interest in the spiritual.
 - c) His wording was carefully chosen, literally, he said that they were *firm in reverencing their deities*. They would have thought of their deities but the word Paul used implied that their deities were demons not the true God.

- 2) Paul stated that he was there to inform them about the God they did not know but had built an altar to honor Him (23), ***For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.***
 - a) Among the many objects of their worship, altars and temples, he found one *to the unknown god*.
 - 1] Edward Blaiklock, *An altar has been found at Pergamum inscribed 'to the unknown deities'.* Such altars had no special deity in view. The dedication was designed to ensure that no god was overlooked to the possible harm of the city.
 - 2] The Greeks were so religious they wanted to cover all the bases, in case they had overlooked a deity.
 - 3] This was not unique to the Greeks since God gives desire to know Him as seen in Egypt, *the great god whose name is unknown* or the Aztec mound dedicated to the *unknown God, the cause of all causes*.
 - b) Paul declared his purpose was to make known the God they did not know.
 - 1] God was unknown to them due to ignorance.
 - 2] Now, they would have the opportunity to worship God in truth.
 - 3] Paul opened a whole new world to the Greeks who listened because he started where they were.
- b. Teaching on the *Unknown God* (24-29),
 - 1) Creator God does not live in a manmade temple (24), ***The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man***
 - a) He is the Creator of all things in heaven and earth.
 - b) He is not contained by a manmade temple, Acts 7:48-50, *Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?'*
 - c) Thomas Constable, *This harmonized with the Epicureans' idea of God as above the world, but it corrected the Stoics' pantheism.*
 - 2) He is not sustained by mankind but the Sustainer of mankind (25), ***nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.***
 - a) This God is not sustained by mankind because He is transcendent.
 - b) He is the Sustainer of mankind because He is immanent.
 - c) Thomas Constable, *This contradicted the Epicureans' belief that God took no interest in human affairs as well as the Stoics' self-sufficiency.*
 - d) Paul continually takes the listeners from their ignorance to God's truth.
 - 3) He made mankind from one man and has set boundaries by which mankind lives (26), ***And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place***
 - a) All people descended from one source, Adam.
 - 1] The Greeks, and especially the Athenians, prided themselves on being racially superior to others.
 - 2] Kenneth Gangel, *The Athenians believed they had originated from the soil of their homeland and were different than other peoples.*
 - b) God is sovereign over the affairs of nations.
 - 1] God determines the rise and fall of nations, as well as their boundaries, Deuteronomy 32:8, *When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God.*
 - 2] The Greeks thought they could determine their own destiny.

- 4) His purpose for mankind is that they seek and find Him (27-28), ***that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually 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 are indeed his offspring.'***
- a) Mankind is to seek God who may be found.
 - 1] We have God-given faculties that enable us to know about Him, Romans 1:19-20, *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*
 - 2] Despite the Athenians' great education, they were still ignorant concerning the *Unknown God*.
 - 3] God is not only transcendent but immanent, as well.
 - b) Paul declared that God is near each one of us and quoted two poets with whom they would be familiar.
 - 1] Epimenides of Crete wrote *In him we live and move and have our being*.
 - 2] Aratus of Cilicia wrote *for we are indeed his offspring*.
 - c) Stanley Toussaint, *The Athenians' very creation and continued existence depended on this one God whom they did not know! No such claim could ever be made of any of the scores of false gods worshiped by the Greeks.*
- 5) Creator God was not formed by the imagination of man (29), ***Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.***
- a) Humans are God's creations, Genesis 1:26, *Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*
 - b) God is not man's creation, Isaiah 40:18-19, *To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains.*
 - c) Paul's conclusion is that idolatry makes no sense, Romans 1:22-23, *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*
- c. Man's accountability to the *Unknown God* (30-31), ***The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.***
- 1) Man has always been accountable to God
 - a) It was based on general revelation, Romans 1:18-20, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*
 - b) It was a time of ignorance compared to the greater revelation which has come in Jesus Christ.
 - c) It was a time of patience on the part of God.
 - d) Stanley Toussaint, *All through time the Gentiles were responsible for the general revelation given to them; now with the worldwide proclamation of the gospel, the Gentiles are also responsible to special revelation. That response is to obey God's command to repent of their sins.*
 - 2) Now, He has appointed a day where all of mankind will be judged righteously.
 - a) The judgment will be based on response to the work of one man of God's choosing, Daniel 7:13-14, *I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*
 - b) The resurrection of that man from the dead assures that He is God's appointed judge.

- 3) Resurrection and personal judgment went against Greek philosophy but Paul emphasized sin, righteousness and judgment as Jesus said the Holy Spirit would through convicting people, John 16:8-11, *And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*
- C. Responses to Paul's message (32-34), *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.*
1. Some *mocked* at the thought of resurrection of the dead. Literally, it mean *throwing out the lip*.
 2. Others procrastinated but were intrigued by what they heard.
 3. A few believed.
 - a. Dionysius was a member of the Council of Areopagus.
 - b. A woman named Damaris was among others who were never mentioned again.
 4. A church was not founded but God's Word was forcefully proclaimed, S. Toussaint, *If no church was begun in Athens, the failure was not in Paul's message or method but in the hardness of the Athenians' hearts.*
 5. Thomas Constable, *The lack of response in Athens was due to the fact that the Athenians loved to discuss issues but did not like to take action. Moreover unsaved educated, intelligent people generally tend to be more critical and non-committal than others when they first hear the Gospel.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Methods can change but the message is sure.
- B. Success is not based on results but faithfulness.
- C. Kenneth Gangel, *Luke certainly does not portray the Areopagus address as a failure. Anytime people believe and are saved, regardless of the number, the ministry has been effective. Furthermore, Paul's speech contained all the basic elements of the Gospel: it condemned idolatry and sin (v. 29); it showed need for repentance (v. 30); it argued the certainty of judgment (v. 31a); and it offered salvation through Christ's resurrection (v. 31b).*