

## The Effects Of Preaching The Gospel.

Text: Acts 17:32-34

Suggested Hymns:

500, 302, 304, 840, 544

1) Paul's Disappointments

2) Paul's sermon

3) The effects of preaching the Gospel

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Acts 17:32-34, <sup>32</sup> *And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter."* <sup>33</sup> *So Paul departed from among them.* <sup>34</sup> *However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the Gospel lesson for today and also in our text we see the effects of preaching the Gospel. Everybody is invited to believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, but many, although not all make excuses. Let us consider the effects of preaching the Gospel. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. Paul's Disappointments.

There were two great disappointments in the life of the apostle Paul as a preacher and missionary. The first disappointment was his failure, or inability, to convert the Jews. It was only natural that he would seek to minister to the Jews. They were his own people according to the flesh. He was bound to them by ties of blood, and one always loves those who are one's own and wishes for them all that is good and every blessing possible.

So intense was Paul's desire to save the Jews that he once declared that he would gladly be accursed himself if only he could thereby lead his own people to the cross of Christ, where they might find reconciliation with God.<sup>1</sup>

His was a spirit closely akin to that of Jesus, who hung on the accursed tree and gave His life a ransom for sinners.

Paul was disappointed over his inability to convert the Jews also for another reason. Every true and sincere soul seeks to undo the wrong that he has done. One always seeks to win where one has lost, to conquer where one has suffered defeat, and to build where one has torn down.

And because Paul was so keenly sensitive of his earlier, misguided zeal in persecuting the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem, thereby frustrating the cause of Jesus Christ, there must have run through his mind a keen sense of disappointment over the fact that he was never to experience the satisfaction of leading Jerusalem to Christ and eternal salvation.

Now, if Jerusalem furnished Paul's first great disappointment, then Athens surely furnished the second disappointment. There is no epistle to the Athenians in the New Testament — for the reason that, as far as we know, no Christian church was founded by Paul in that classic city on the Aegean Sea.

As Paul had a physical, blood kinship with Jerusalem, so he had a mental, intellectual kinship with Athens. Athens was the ancient seat of the arts and sciences. Here dwelt the cultured and educated people of that day.

And St. Paul himself, a highly cultured, educated, learned man (whose Roman citizenship gave him additional prestige), was completely at home among the thinkers and scholars of Athens. They were his kind of people, and therefore he longed to acquaint them with the wisdom from on high.

## **2. Paul's Sermon.**

While visiting the marbled city on his second missionary journey — disputing with the Jews in their synagogues and discussing Christ's Gospel in the market place with any and with all — he received an invitation from the Greek philosophers to speak on the Areopagus, also called Mars' Hill.

On this famous hill,<sup>2</sup> an open forum was held for the hearing of things new and old. Here Paul came with his presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul rose to speak, he was surrounded by many fine temples of marble, honouring scores of gold coated idols — the work of men's hands. Just before him stood a dainty temple dedicated to the memory of three great victories won by Athenian armies at the time of Pericles.

Across the valley was the famous prison within whose stone walls the great Socrates had languished and, before drinking the poison hemlock, had spoken of the immortality of the soul.

Paul took his text, or rather his subject, from things near at hand. It was an inscription which he had seen chiselled into a marble altar down in the market place. *The inscription read: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.* Paul responded, *Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.*<sup>3</sup>

And then he proceeded to declare to them the essentials of the one religion whereby anyone in Athens or in Jerusalem or in Australia can and must be saved — saved from sin and from self, saved to righteousness and to God.

Briefly summarised, his sermon contained these essentials. First, the living God, the Creator of all things, can neither be confined in temples erected to His glory, nor worshiped in the form of wood and stone which are the work of men's hands. Second, the true God, "unknown" to them, nevertheless is now to be made known to them. Third, "*in [God] we live and move and have our being,*"<sup>4</sup> for "*we are His off-spring.*"

Fourth, to God all people must give account for the deeds done in the flesh. Fifth, God requires perfect righteousness of all who want to approach to Him. Sixth, this righteousness can be secured only from and through Jesus Christ, the Lord, who is both Redeemer and Judge. And finally, Christ's deity is proved by His resurrection from the dead.

### 3. The Effects Of Preaching The Gospel

That was a big day for Athens when Paul preached this message on Mars' Hill. But the people of Athens did not know it. Most big days in history were not recognised as such at the time.

Here was a man greater than any of their Greek heroes, greater than Pericles, greater than Socrates, greater in his influence upon future generations, greater in wisdom because he had the knowledge unto salvation. Here was the greatest man who had ever appeared in the streets of Athens, pleading and praying that his God, his Christ, might be welcomed into the hearts of these Greek people.

The sermon was over. The sun sank low into the distant sea. The congregation rose up and departed to eat and to drink. Paul's preaching of the Gospel in Athens was completed.

Two verses in our text give the three-fold results. *Some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." ...*<sup>34</sup> *However, some men joined him and believed.*

My friends, what happened that day in Athens happens in every city in every country and in every age whenever the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached. We always have these three effects when the Gospel is preached.

John McNeil, a co-worker of Dwight Moody, said: "*Whenever I preach, men are made mad, or they are made sad, or they are made glad.*" The Gospel acts in these three ways upon the people who hear it. And, my friends, the effect it has upon you will reveal the state of your heart.

Let us look at these three effects in more detail. The first effect is that some mocked.

When the Gospel was preached at Athens, "*some mocked.*" The mockers are mentioned first because they are always noticed first. Such people always thrust themselves forward, and their mocking laughter rings through the corridors of time.

To mock at a thing is to treat it lightly, as of little or no importance, and to laugh at its implications. In Athens a portion of Paul's congregation treated the Gospel of the Saviour in this way. So do men and women in every city today. God forbid that anyone present in this congregation today should treat Christ like that!

Some time ago a university professor said: "*There is absolutely no reason to doubt that man is capable of going on happily and sanely without any sense of dependence upon God and without any apprehension of cosmic support.*"

Now, that is a carefree statement of the philosophy of an age which is inclined to mock at religion and to take God out of the universe and to say to Him (as did some of these people in Athens): "*We really have no use for God.*"

We rarely hear people actually talk in this way in so many words; but the actions of many people say these things more emphatically than words could ever

say them. One example of mocking God is the theory of Evolution. It is a theory but it is taught as fact. It takes God out of the picture thereby removing man's accountability to God.

There is also more mocking of God, for instance, in the reliance that is placed upon material things — wealth, industrial power, big armies, battleships, planes, and guns — instead of relying upon God who alone can make the plans of men effective and give success to their efforts. No people and no age can mock at God, either in times of war or peace, in prosperity or adversity.

But it is not the mocking of a nation or of an age that we are so much concerned about today; but rather the mocking of individuals. Mocking the Gospel is to make light of it, by neglect, by indifference, by insensibility to the calls and duties of Christ's religion.

Parents mock the Gospel when there is no serious discussion of religion in the home or when they neglect the religious education of their children. Men and women mock the Gospel when they do not heed its calls nor acknowledge its challenge in their own lives.

Young people mock the Gospel when it plays no role in their courtship and marriage. All of us mock the Gospel when we treat Christianity as something of minor importance in the world and in our lives. Jesus says, as written in John 15:5, *without Me you can do nothing.*

The second effect was that some delayed. There were others at Athens, however, who said: *"We will hear you again on this matter."* They put off making a decision. True, they did not abruptly dismiss the Apostle and his Gospel from their thought and consideration.

They did not throw God out of their world with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. Their hearts had been touched by Paul's message; the Holy Spirit was knocking at the door of their hearts, and they heard Him knocking. Nor did they declare that they would never embrace the faith of Christ, would never confess their guilt and seek the righteousness of the divine Saviour.

On the contrary, there is a hint in their words that they might probably do all this. But not just now. *"We will hear you again on this matter."*

How prevalent is this plea today! Even the most degenerate sinners, the drunkards, the lewd, and the profane, may have the good intention to heed the voice of conscience and the Word of God, and to reform and turn to the Christian life. But not just now.

And such procrastination is also found among people of excellent character and morals. Some people are just “too busy now,” making a home or making a living, to give time and attention to God and the Church and the one thing needful.

It cheats us all, more or less. How otherwise can you account for the fact that people can hear the precious Gospel Sunday after Sunday and, understand its implications, yet go on living and doing as if these things meant nothing at all to them during the rest of the week?

Do we not all long for the time when we shall not only agree with the things we hear, but shall actually do something about it? We are always going to give more, pray more, read the Bible more, practice the Christian life and show forth the Christian virtues and perform our Christian duties more consistently — sometime! But this is a dangerous delusion.

So far as this story goes, these people of Athens never came back to hear the Apostle again on this matter. The more convenient time never came — and will never come to them where they are now. They neglected Christ’s salvation; and to neglect it is to reject it. Scripture says in Hebrews 2:3, ***how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.***

Let us thank God, that the story does not end here. The third effect of preaching the Gospel was that some people believed. The text is not so sad a record as might first appear.

It ends like a grand doxology bursting in triumphant tones from a mighty organ. The last verse reads, ***However, some men joined him and believed.*** Thus even in this Gibraltar of heathendom and superstition, a small group of people believed the Gospel and became followers of the Cross — including a prominent woman by the name of Damaris, and Dionysius, a member of the supreme court of Athens.

They learned to know ***“THE UNKNOWN GOD”*** as the God of love, who gave Himself to save and to win even His enemies. They learned to know the God who ***“so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,”***<sup>5</sup> and they believed in Him.

Thus while not many of the mighty, not many of the noble, not many of the wise, of this world<sup>6</sup> are brought to repentance and faith, occasionally some people are touched by the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ and find the peace of God which passes all understanding<sup>7</sup> and are made glad, inexpressibly glad.

My friends, may your hearing of this Gospel make you not mad and not sad, but glad, in time and in eternity. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 9:3

<sup>2</sup> Mars' hill, Areopagus, Acts 17:22

<sup>3</sup> Acts 17:23

<sup>4</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>5</sup> John 3:16

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:26

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 4:7