

**Text: Acts 17:16-21**

**Title: “Resurrection Impact ... Seeing and Feeling”**

**SERMON BUMPER VIDEO** – My aim over the next couple of weeks is to get us ready for Easter. Yes, I want to bring us back around to the central *message* of Easter and the Gospel ... the message that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day. We must never pull away from that anchor of our faith. But I also want to get us ready for our *mission* at Easter ... to press the message of Easter into every circle where we live out our lives so that the life-changing power of the resurrection of Jesus can really impact others ... Resurrection Impact.

Open your Bibles to Acts 17:16. The book of Acts shows how the resurrection of Jesus impacted and completely transformed a small band of disciples into a movement that ultimately shook the world of their day. Before Jesus went back to heaven and sent His Holy Spirit to come upon His followers Jesus told His disciples...

**Acts 1:8 - You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

So the book of Acts shows us how the Spirit-empowered followers of Jesus obeyed Him and became witnesses of the resurrection of Christ from Jerusalem all the way out to the ends of the earth. One of the ways this happened was through a team of missionaries led by the Apostle Paul, a man who himself had been radically impacted when he met the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Paul and his team traveled all over the world of that day proclaiming the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everywhere they went people were saved and churches were formed. So here in Acts 17 we catch up with Paul and his team on one of those mission trips in what we know today as the nation of Greece. The context shows us that Paul is actually in between gigs, if you will. He’s in the great city of Athens waiting for his team to catch up with him to begin the next leg of their mission. And that’s where we are as we come to our text, and where we’ll camp for the next couple of weeks. **Read Acts 17:16-18.**

Athens, Greece was a world-class city. For Paul to go there was like you going to New York City for the first time. You just sort of walk around with your mouth wide open in utter amazement. But Paul doesn’t waste this opportunity. It says in v.18 that Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. He

was busy infecting the city of Athens with the virus of the Gospel. We'll see next week how he unpacks it more in a famous sermon. **Read Acts 17:30-31.**

I want you to see how that message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ still has the power to impact lives in ways you and I might never imagine. The Gospel message of the resurrection of Jesus slowly but surely began to impact the culture of one of the greatest cities of the world and it has the power to do the same in our city.

So how do we deliver that message in a way that it can have that kind of impact? The world where we live and work and play and go to school is in many ways just like Athens ... spiritually dead, morally bankrupt and philosophically deceived. How do we behave in that kind of culture? How can our lives be the rails down which the Gospel of Jesus and His resurrection moves to impact lives and neighborhoods and schools and communities?

Notice it says in v.16 that "while Paul was waiting" for his team to catch up with him something happened in and through him that would alter the course of many lives and an entire city ... while he was waiting.

**ILLUSTRATION** – The last album that the famous Beatle, John Lennon, recorded before he died contained a song entitled, "Beautiful Boy." The song was written for Lennon's son Sean and it describes the love John had for his son and the joy that Sean gave him. The lyrics of that song contain one of the most famous quotes of John Lennon: "Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans."

That's the way it is, isn't it. We just seem to be waiting for the next thing to happen to us. And so often we miss the opportunities that God puts right under our noses. We are making plans for the day when we'll get out of seminary and start real ministry, or land that great job, or retire, or move into that new neighborhood, or finish our degree, or whatever. And while we are waiting life is happening. God puts opportunities before us that, if we're not careful, we will miss.

Well Paul doesn't make that mistake. While he has some free time in one of the greatest cities of the world, Paul made good use of the time he has. And we learn from Paul how the Holy Spirit can use us to do what the Spirit came to do ... to make us powerful witnesses of the resurrection to people around us. And, by the way, the Easter season is a prime opportunity for us to do that by simply inviting someone to attend Easter worship with us where they will hear the message of the resurrection. This isn't optional for us as followers of Jesus. This is the main thing.

If we're missing this we are frankly just playing a religious game with Jesus. If we are not allowing His Holy Spirit to move us into the lives of other people in such a way that the resurrection of Jesus can impact them then something is seriously wrong with our faith! So here's what we learn from the great missionary.

## **1. OPEN YOUR EYES.**

It says in v.16 that Paul was distressed to "see" that Athens was full of idols. That word "see" means to observe carefully. As he roamed around the city he noticed that the city was literally smothered with idols. Think statues and shrines and temples on just about every corner. I've been to Athens and everywhere you turn there are ruins of temples and statues. History tells us that there were about 10,000 people in Athens in that day and 30,000 idols. One ancient writer commented that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man.

**PHOTO ILLUSTRATION** - Just about anywhere in the city of Athens you can see the famous Acropolis on which was built the Parthenon. Inside the Parthenon was a huge gold and ivory statue of the goddess Athena.

These idols and shrines were more than just beautiful sculptures and architecture. An idol represents something or someone people turn to for security and satisfaction in life. It has been said that the human heart is one great idol factory. When the One True God isn't real to us we turn to lesser gods or idols to fill that emptiness in us. And the presence of so many gods and idols says no one knows for sure what the gods expect. So they are constantly adding gods to worship just in case they've missed one. In fact, we're going to see next week that they even had an altar to an unknown god just in case they missed one.

So Paul's eyes were wide open to the powerful grip that idolatry had on the people of Athens. Do you see past your neighbor's infatuation with a new car, or your classmate's passion to be popular, or your coworker's obsession with promotions to the real needs they have for security and meaning in life ... security and meaning that are only found in a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. We have to live with our eyes wide open to what's going on around us. Next...

## **2. ENGAGE YOUR MIND.**

So v.16 says that Paul saw the city "full of idols" and he understood that there was something behind all of that beauty that reflected spiritual darkness. You see,

Athens was an academic and philosophical hub, like Harvard or Yale or Oxford today.

**Acts 17:18 - A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.**

Epicureans were people whose worldview was that the gods were out there detached from human existence. The gods are occupied with other matters and really don't care what humans do. So just live it up. If you only go around once in life then you die and become food for worms, then about the only thing that can give life meaning is to try to cram as much pleasure into it as you can. For them there was no life after death, so you can imagine how they were provoked by Paul's assertion that Jesus rose from the dead and therefore there is life after death.

On the other hand, Stoics were just the opposite. They believed that the gods were in everything ... in trees and rocks and stars and statues. It was very much like Hinduism today. And the gods controlled every detail of the universe and there's nothing that man can do about it but simply accept it. The favorite word of the Stoics was, “Whatever!” Today if you call someone “stoic” it means they're apathetic and disinterested.

But they are amused by what Paul had to say. They called him a “babbler” which actually a put-down. It literally means a bird that pecks around on the ground and picks up seeds and spits them out again, kind of like chickens in a barnyard? They called Paul a “seed picker” because when he talked about Jesus and the resurrection they thought maybe he had picked up a couple of new gods that might be added to their collection.

I want you to see it again. Paul wasn't ashamed of speaking the Gospel. There's power in that truth and in that message that allows it to hold its own in the world of ideas. If we are going to be the carriers of the Gospel virus, the Good News, we need to understand the competition to that message.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Last week Stephen Hawking died. He was probably the greatest scientists of this generation, but he was far from God. Hawking once wrote: “When people ask me if a god created the universe, I tell them that the question itself makes no sense ... We are each free to believe what we want, and it's my view that the simplest explanation is there is no god. No one created our

universe, and no one directs our fate. This leads me to a profound realization: There is probably no heaven, and no afterlife either. We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe, and for that I am extremely grateful.” Interesting that one of the great minds of the world didn’t recognize that the “grand design” of the universe must have had a Designer.

**1 Peter 3:15 - But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,**

Engage your mind. Think seriously about what you see going on around you. Understand the worldviews that you are up against. Next, to impact others with the message of the resurrection...

### **3. SOFTEN YOUR HEART.**

We’re told in v.16 that Paul was “distressed” by what he saw in Athens. He was emotionally upset. Why? It’s important to know what really moved Paul ... and what should move us. It’s not to win an argument or to move people over to our way of seeing things. Yes, we are driven by the Great Commission of Jesus. There’s no denying that. We are driven by compassion for the lost. They are perishing. But Paul is distressed by the sight of all these idols because they gave to manmade objects what only belongs to the One True God. Paul was zealous for the glory of God. That has to be our highest motivation. Our zeal and jealousy is for the glory of God ... for God to be exalted and worshipped in the world around us. So our heart is softened for the glory of God. And then it will be softened in compassion for others. If we really love someone we will want for God to do in them and for them what no idol or fake god can ever do.

So open your eyes, engage your mind, soften your heart and then ...

### **4. MOVE YOUR FEET.**

Paul doesn’t simply throw up his hands in despair, curse the darkness and walk out of Athens in disgust. He doesn’t picket in the streets of Athens and demand that the statues be torn down. No, he got out of his comfort zone and walked right into the heart of the city with the message of the Gospel. As we sometimes say, “Just walk across the room.”

**Acts 17:17 - So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.**

As far as we know there was not another Christ-follower in Athens, but there were some Jews who believed in the One True God. Paul starts where he usually starts ... the Jewish synagogue. If you want to know what it means to “reason” with someone about Jesus just let your eyes drift back a few paragraphs. **Read Acts 17:2-3.**

When it talks in v.17 about the “marketplace” don’t get the picture that he was standing at the checkout aisle at Wal-Mart preaching at them. To reason with someone means to have a conversation. Think of the marketplace like Sundance Square downtown, or the Commons at TCU where Paul struck up a conversation with anyone who would talk to him. And in v.19 it says they took him to a meeting of the Areopagus. This was like the city courthouse of Athens where he makes a connection with these lofty thinkers. Whether it was in a synagogue, the marketplace or the Aeropagus, the message was the same ... the Gospel that Jesus came and lived and died and rose again.

If we aren’t living in our city, in our neighborhoods, in our schools with our eyes, minds, hearts and feet moved like missionaries something is tragically missing from our lives as followers of Jesus. The message of the life-impacting resurrection of Jesus Christ moves along the rails of our lives. That’s the way the message of the resurrection has a chance to impact people around us.