

**TITLE: MAKE THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES**

**TEXT: ACTS 17:16-34**

**INTRO:** This sermon is about looking for opportunities to teach others about Christ, and using those opportunities wisely by knowing your audience. **1 Cor 9:19-22** – “...I am made all things to all, that I might by all means save some.”

**I. OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT CHRIST (v. 16-21):**

- A. With the Jews (v. 16-17)
  - 1. While waiting on his coworkers, he observed the city’s idolatry (he’ll mention a little of this in v. 23).
  - 2. He disputed with the Jews in the synagogue. He didn’t waste time. He didn’t use the lack of Silas & Timothy as an excuse.
  - 3. Idolatry was rampant. But it was forbidden under the Mosaic Law. Were the Jews doing anything to oppose/combat it?
- B. With the Gentiles (v. 18-21)
  - 1. He looks for opportunity in the marketplace. The Epicureans & Stoics were the two major competing philosophies in Athens. Epicureans were the if-it-feels-good-do-it liberals, while the Stoics were the cultic religious extremists.
  - 2. “Babbler” (seed-picker) – one who picked bits and pieces from each religion/philosophy and combined them (syncretism).
  - 3. He was preaching the resurrection. Again, this is the difference between Christianity and every other religion.

**II. OPPORTUNITY TO PREACH ABOUT CHRIST (v. 22-31):**

- A. Introduction (v. 22-23)
  - 1. Here Paul carefully presents to them their problem – idolatry. But notice that he doesn’t say it as he would to the Jews.
  - 2. (v. 22) The word lit. means “fear deity.” In a bad sense (superstitious); in a good sense (religious). Paul wouldn’t begin his persuasive speech with an insult!
- B. What God needs (v. 24-26)
  - 1. (v. 24a) Introduction of the one true living God. He is the creator of all, and Lord of all.
  - 2. (v. 24b) He doesn’t live in man’s houses (7:48). He doesn’t need His creation to create for Him.
  - 3. (v. 25-26) He isn’t served by man (they would bring food to the altar to sustain their god). *He* is the one who gives life & breath, and (v. 26) even controls death. He made all nations from one blood (one man – Adam). Given the number of different nations/races (even during Paul’s day), this is an amazing fact – that all came from one.
  - 4. So God doesn’t *need* anything from us. But what does he want?
- C. What God wants (v. 27-28)
  - 1. (v. 27) Purpose for His creating us – **to seek Him!** Parents, why did you “create” your children? You want them to love you, because you love them (unconditionally). This is what God wants – for his creation to search for Him (feel, touch, handle -**Lk 24:39**–“*Behold my hands/feet, handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh & bones*”). This word is used of a blind person – he can’t see, but through searching, touching, handling the evidence, he *knows* what’s around him.
  - 2. This person who seeks will find God, who is not far from each of us. \***Psa 145:18**–“*The lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.*” Note that it must be in truth (“*thy word is truth*”–**Jn 17:17**).
  - 3. (v. 28) Two quotes from Greek philosophers/poets to help prove his point. These are in reference to Zeus, but Paul doesn’t make this the issue. Rather in reference to the real God, says that these poets are correct. Paul was “finding and exploiting a point of contact with his hearers” (F.F. Bruce, NT History, p.312).
    - This is an important approach – these people were worshipping any an every “god” so as not to be offensive to any higher power. This is at least a good, caring attitude (though still unacceptable). Instead of rebuke, Paul used this to his advantage – as an opportunity to teach.
- D. What God expects (v. 29-31) – Main point of the sermon
  - 1. (v. 29) If we are God’s offspring, then how can He be made of gold, silver, or anything that man can craft? This is illogical! Gold, silver, & stone can’t have human offspring! (Similar question: If we are God’s offspring, how can we be born sinful?)
  - 2. (v. 30) God overlooked certain things in the past (multiple wives, divorce, and to some degree, idolatry). Regardless of what, when, and for whom God overlooked things, **NOW** He commands repentance of ALL! Everyone must change and be obedient to Him. Nobody can claim ignorance!
  - 3. (v. 31) The day of judgment is coming! Paul isn’t rude or arrogant about this; he’s telling the truth in love. A day has been appointed when God will judge the world by Christ (**Jn 12:48**).
  - 4. We can be assured of this because of His resurrection. This is the central element of Christianity, and what ends the sermon.

**III. OPPORTUNITY TO BELIEVE IN CHRIST (v. 32-34):**

- A. Some rejected – mocked (v. 32a). Some procrastinated – we will hear you again (v. 32b). Some believed (v. 34).
- B. Paul had done his job (and done it well), but that didn’t mean guaranteed success.
  - a. The Athenian attitude seemed to be, “I believe in God(s) and want to worship. So I’ll just trust (w/out evidence) that I can appease him, that whatever I give will be accepted as coming from a sincere heart.” Paul says this won’t work anymore.
  - b. It’s not about what God needs. If He *needs* our worship, than the attitude might be that He needs to accept whatever He can get. But if He doesn’t *need* it, but yet *wants* it, then He can be more selective about what He wants. Compare being starved & *needing* food, with just being hungry and therefore more selective.
  - c. Religious people today are very similar to the Athenians. There are some hypocrites, but many are very sincere in their belief in God and desire to worship Him. But they don’t put forth the effort to find out what He *wants*. They assume He’ll accept whatever they give as long as their hearts are sincere. This is just as incorrect today as it was in Athens!

**CONCLUSION:** We all need to have the purpose of Paul–“*that I might by all means save some.*” Then, we need to have the approach that Paul had–“*I am made all things to all people.*” This is more difficult (we have to relate to people). But we’ve just seen an example in Acts 17.