

Lesson 5: Athens: Common Ground
Sermon Date: February 3rd
Text: Acts 17:16 - 34

1. In the opening of this passage, it says Paul's spirit was provoked by what he saw around him. Have you experienced this sense of God's presence in your life since becoming a believer? Explain.

2. Paul seems to figure out quickly that he is in the midst of those who are interested in hearing new ideas. How does he use this information to (a.) gain access to a larger audience, and (b.) connect with that audience on a common ground?

3. What are the key points Paul raises in his talk delivered in the Areopagus (vs. 22 – 31) to present the gospel message?

4. Based on vs. 32 – 34, it appears that many in attendance did not immediately accept Paul's message, but some did. Do you think Paul felt this was an acceptable outcome? Why?

5. Compare the people of Athens with those Paul encountered in Lystra (Acts 14:8-23) and Philippi (Acts 16:16-40). For each city, describe:
 - a. Paul's approach:

 - b. How God works:

 - c. The end result:

6. Paul weaves Athenian culture into his appeal to them to understand and accept the gospel message. What are ways we (you) can adapt in reaching out to those around us with a gospel message that is more relevant, approachable, and intriguing?

Getting Started (ideas for how to transition to begin this study):

- Ever been to a party with a group of people you didn't know and who were all very different from you? How did you (could you) relate?

Digging Deeper (optional material to consider):

- Epicurean philosophers were practical atheists in that they believed that the gods had no interest in humanity and were unknowable. Their leader, Epicurus, maintained that a tranquil life free of pain, passions, and fears was the highest good of humanity. This could only be achieved by detaching oneself from indulgence and the cares of the world.
- Stoic philosophers had a pantheistic idea of god as the World-Soul; people were a spark of the divine and, upon death, would return to the divine spirit. A good life was one lived in virtue that didn't give in to the pressures of life (circumstances) or passions.
- In verse 22, Paul declares that he believes the Athenians are very religious (or "superstitious") based on what he's seen of their city. The Greek for this word could be used to congratulate a person or to criticize him, depending on whether the person using it included himself in the circle of individuals he was describing. The Athenians would not know which meaning to take until Paul continued. In this context it is clear that Paul wanted to be complimentary in order to gain a hearing. As a tactic for presenting a foreign concept to an audience you don't know, consider the effectiveness of Paul's strategy.
- Paul stresses in his speech the fact that God is living and that Jesus (although he doesn't cite Jesus' name) was a man, like them, who was appointed by God to reach out to them so that it is now possible for them to know this living God. What do you suppose got in the way of the Athenians who did not accept this message?
- In your comparison between Lystra, Philippi, and Athens, which city (prevailing attitude of its people) most fits those you encounter day-to-day?