

THE GOD WHO MADE THE WORLD AND EVERYTHING IN IT

Acts 17:1-34 (Key Verse: 24-25)

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.”

In today's passage we are going to learn from Apostle Paul, who preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, reasoning and explaining from the scriptures with 3 groups of people, the Thessalonians, the Bereans, and the Athenians. Even though Apostle Paul was consistent in preaching the gospel message to the 3 groups, we will witness different responses from each of the groups. In Thessalonica, even though some Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks and some prominent women were persuaded to follow Paul and Silas, some Jews became jealous of Paul causing a turmoil in the city hindering the people from believing the message. In Berea on the other hand, there were Jews of noble character who received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true. Lastly in Athens, there were thinkers and philosophers, who also did not receive the message, but called Paul a babbler.

Now in today's passage we are going to learn about the secret of the Bereans, who received the message with great eagerness. Their secret was that they knew who God truly is, the God who made the world and everything in it. Furthermore, we are also going to learn, what was the problem of the Thessalonians and Athenians who could not receive the message with great eagerness like the Bereans. May God be with each one of us to receive one word from today's message.

The passage today begins with Paul and his companions continuing with their missionary journey passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia and arriving in Thessalonica. Now Thessalonica was an important port city, with Greeks and some Jews residing there. Now what did Paul and his companions do while in Thessalonica? Let us look at **verse 2-3**: *“As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, / explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said.”* Here we are first told about Paul's custom, meaning a specific and particular thing that he did, a tradition that he followed. And that is going into the Synagogues, reasoning from the scriptures, and explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. Paul did not reason based on his intelligence and or knowledge, but rather reasoned from the scriptures.

Preaching the gospel is about what the word of God says, it is not about how we can intelligently explain things according to our wisdom, but it is about the scriptures. In **2 Timothy 3:16-17** it says: *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, / so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* Therefore, as God's servants our primary goal should be to study the scriptures, which is God's breathe. And indeed, when Apostle Paul followed his custom, something amazing happened. Let us look at **verse 4**: *“Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.”* When Paul, reasoned and explained from the scriptures that the Messiah Jesus Christ, must suffer and die on the cross to save all mankind, some Jews, a large number of God-fearing Greeks and the few prominent women were persuaded to follow him and Silas. Only by reasoning and explaining that Jesus is the Messiah from the scriptures, these men and women believed and followed the way. By the scriptures, which is God's breathe, this good news touched these men and women's hearts.

Now you will realize that the scripture says, some Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. What then happened to the other Jews? Let us look at **verse 5a**: *“But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some*

bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city.” Because of Jealousy, the other Jews did not believe the message that Paul was sharing with them from the scriptures. They missed the opportunity to be blessed with the grace of the Messiah. They missed it because their hearts were occupied with worldly thoughts and selfish desire for power and authority. When they saw the large numbers of God-fearing Greeks and prominent women following Paul, they became jealous and considered Paul and Christian believers to be lowly to have such influence. They wanted to be the ones attracting such following, they did not know that these men and women were not necessarily following Paul and Silas but following God whom they heard from through the scriptures. The men and women followed Jesus Christ who had compassion unto them, revealed through the scriptures. Paul probably shared with them the scriptures from the likes of Isaiah **53:3-5** saying:

“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. / Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. / But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

The men and women of Thessalonica were moved by this and followed Paul and Silas. But the other Jews hardened their hearts and were occupied by jealousy and caused great turmoil in the city, rounding some bad characters to cause trouble. They made some false accusations against Paul and his companions saying: *“These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here.... They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.”* Because of Jealousy, the other Jews interfered with the gospel ministry, they positioned themselves as the enemies of the gospel ministry. Indeed, Jealousy is a very dangerous thing we should be careful of, repent from it.

Now as the turmoil proceeded, when night came the believers in Thessalonica sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. Amazingly, Paul and Silas were not discouraged by the persecution and turmoil they witnessed in Thessalonica; they did not even tell themselves that they should slow down perhaps, maybe try to avoid the Jewish synagogues since they are clearly the troublemakers. Paul and Silas continued with their custom, reasoning and explaining that the Messiah had to suffer, and that this messiah is Jesus Christ. Paul and Silas indeed were filled with so much faith in the scriptures, they were indeed fully convinced that the scriptures are God breathe, filled so much power. Now how did the Bereans respond to Paul and Silas? Let us look at **verse 11-12**: *“Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. / As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.”* Unlike the Thessalonian Jews, the Berean Jews were more noble, this indicates that the Thessalonian Jews had some corrupt nature, they lacked the truth, they were not honest. They were just concerned about self-gain, power, and authority. On the other hand, the Berean Jews, received the message with great eagerness, they had an incredible attitude towards the word of God and examined it daily to see what Paul had said was true. Their attitude towards the word revealed that they had faith and belief that the scriptures are indeed God breathe. The Berean Jews were indeed admirable, and of great influence. So when Paul and Silas came proclaiming Jesus Christ the Messiah, many of them believed and so did a number of prominent Greek men and women.

When the Jews in Thessalonica heard about Paul who was preaching in Berea, they were filled with jealousy again, and went there agitating the crowds and stirring them up. Now the believers in Berea sent Paul to the coast, but Timothy and Silas stayed in Berea. Paul was thereafter escorted to Athens, leaving instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. Now while Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens, he witnessed something troubling. Let us look at **verse 16**: *“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he*

was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” The city of Athens was filled with so much idol worship, and this distressed Paul. What did Paul do? Paul did not deviate from his usual custom; he maintained his faith and still proclaimed the message of the Jesus Christ the messiah, reasoning and explaining through the scriptures. In **verse 17** it says: *“So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.”* Apostle Paul did not give up on them saying they are already lost and sucked deep into idol worship, but rather he had a shepherd heart towards them and shared with them the gospel message and reasoned with them through the scriptures. Today also we should not give up on our brothers and sisters who might seem to be sucked into deep into dark things like idol worship, sangomas, and ancestral worship. Like Paul we should share with them the gospel message from the scriptures which is God breathe.

How did the Athenians respond to Paul’s message? Let us look at **verse 18-19**: *“A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbling 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. / Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?”* Here Paul was met with the thinkers and philosophers of Athens, who instead of receiving the message they called him babbling. They did not believe in the resurrection and so they thought Paul was advocating for foreign gods. And they said to him that he was bringing some strange ideas to their ears. Even though they did not accept the message, it was quite encouraging to see how they were willing to hear more from Paul. They said we would like to know more....

How then did Paul respond to them? Let us look at **verse 22-23**: *“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. / For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.”* Here Paul acknowledges that indeed the people of Athens are religious, he acknowledged their desire to have a god and to worship for there is so many objects of worship in the city. Actually, what Paul saw, was a true indication that all mankind were created to worship. In **Psalms 29:2 (NLT)** David said: *“Honor the Lord for the glory of his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.”* This what all human beings were created to do. But because of ignorance, the Athenians created their own gods, they ignored the true God. This is the same as the Thessalonians Jews, they ignored the true God and worshiped their own man-made god. Even though they confessed with their mouths that they are God’s servants and they worshiped God, their actions said otherwise, they ignored the true God and worshiped their power, authority and respect. And so when God spoke through the scriptures, they became ignorant and rejected him, and pursued their own man made god, such as power and authority as result they became jealous towards Paul and Silas.

How about today? Do we truly live life with full knowledge and acknowledgement of the true God or is it just lip service? Are we truly worshiping God, or are we consumed by the pursuit of power and authority? Are we just all about doing many things in ministry? At work, at school in our households?

After Paul had revealed to the Athenians their fundamental problem, he went further to restore them into the original being that God created to worship him. How did he do that? Let us look at the **key verse 24-25**: *“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. / And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.”* To help the Athenians, Paul revealed to them the true God, whom we all ought to worship. The God who created the heavens and the earth and everything in it, the God who does not live in temples built by human hands, who is not served by human hands. The God

who he alone is able to give life and breath and everything else. This is the image we need to have concerning God, he the Lord of everything. Today it is very easy for to have a glorious image of our bosses at work, willing to do just about anything for them just to secure our jobs. We do the same to our lectures, our spouse and the likes. However, what about God? Do we have the true image of God in our hearts, the giver of life and everything? The Berean Jews had this image in their hearts, and when Paul reasoned and explained to them about Jesus Christ the Messiah from the scriptures; they received the messages with great eagerness, they examined the scriptures which is God breathe daily and they lived life filled with so many blessings.

Paul, who had a shepherd heart towards the Athenians, revealed who God is to them to restore them. And this is God's desire for us today as well, to restore us to have this glorious image of God in our hearts. The God who created the world and everything in it. Furthermore, in **verse 29-30** it says: *"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. / In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.* Here Paul is urging us as God's children to repent, from our own little idols and gods, let us have a true image of who God is in our hearts so that we too can receive the message of the gospel with great eagerness, so that we can have great zeal to examine the scriptures and hear from our creator God on daily basis.

Conclusion

From today's passage, we have learnt that in order for the word of God to work in us we need to know who God is, the creator of the heavens and the earth and everything in it. When we have this image about God, our attitude changes, instead of rejecting the gospel message for our own ideas and manmade idols, we will receive it with great eagerness and will examine the scriptures daily, to hear from God for the scriptures are God breathe. I pray that God may be with each one of us today, to meditate on the creator God who gives life to all creatures and repent from any sort of idol worship and come to Jesus whom the creator God has raised from the dead.