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“Mystery Island: Tracking Down the One True God”
Acts 17:16-34

INTRODUCTION:

Good Evening, ladies and gentlemen! I do hope you are enjoying our kickoff service for this year’s Vacation Bible School thus far! This is certainly not the way we thought our program was going to turn out when we began to plan earlier in the year, but how thankful we are that we serve a God Who is never shocked or surprised by our circumstances, but instead has a plan for every moment within our journeys through this life. To Him be the glory for all He has done, and will continue to do, as we traverse these uncharted waters we find ourselves.

As it has become my habit during our introduction, I would like to say a word of thanks to several individuals who have sacrificed their time and talent in making our Virtual VBS possible this year. These are the volunteers who have worked both in front of and behind the camera in the past several weeks to ensure our ministry will be a success; please know that Vacation Bible School would not be possible without them.

To our teachers, Mrs. Mary Copeland, Bro. Jacob and Mrs. Kenzie, as well as our Pastor and Youth Director Bro. Travis – Thank You for putting in the time to prepare for your lesson segments, making them fun and engaging for our students. It is marvelous to know we can entrust the spiritual growth of our students in

your capable hands. And Thank You to my wife, Bethany, for stepping in to do a memory verse segment for each day, even though it was a spur-of-the-moment decision; I admire your love for the Scriptures, and it is wonderful to see you transfer your passion for God’s Word to our students. I would also like to say Thank You to our families for making sacrifices while we were busy preparing these videos; too often we thank our workers for their dedication, but someone had to take care of the business at home in order for us to work, which makes their service just as meaningful as ours.

To our song leaders, Bro. Greg and Mrs. Jennifer, Thank You for preparing and performing songs for each episode; the Bible is clear on the importance of lifting our voices up to the Lord in praise, and our church is blessed to have such a talented couple who can lead us in worship and music.

To our craft organizers, Bro. Tim, Mrs. Missie, and Bro. Andrew Ousely, Thank You for taking the time to not only film instructional videos for the students, but to also prepare bags so they can enjoy their crafts at home – the dedication you demonstrated is greatly appreciative.

To our delivery team, Ms. Deanna Climer, Mrs. Melissa Hughes, Mrs. Leandrae Young, Bro. Bill Lippelmann, Bro. Zeke and Mrs. Sadie Jesek, and Pastor Bingham – Thank You for taking time out of your weekend to take the craft bags to our students’ homes; you gave Amazon a run for its money!

Lastly, but certainly not the least, we need to thank Bro. Travis and the Jezeks for their work behind the camera in filming all of our video segments, not to mention the countless hours spent on editing said videos

to ensure the highest quality is given for our videos. In fact, if it wasn't for these individuals' dedication to our video ministry, our church would not be able to host recorded and live-stream services. These servants, accompanied by Bro. Brian Young, Bro. Jeff Ghan, and Bro. Bryan Robertson, have worked diligently throughout this pandemic to ensure our church can carry on the Great Commission in ways we never had to before. And the way they scramble to retrieve communication and connection when one or several of our systems fail moments before services is humbling to behold. Thank You, All!

In Acts 17, the apostle Paul is in the midst of his second missionary journey. It is this passage in the book we find one of the greatest examples of Christian apologetics. From the Greek word *apologia* (ἀπολογία), apologetics means to give a plea or defense, like a lawyer presenting his case before a jury in a way the jury members can understand and base their decision. And the defense Paul provides through his sermon will reveal to his audience (as well as to us today) why there is only one God, and how we can believe on Him. This is the first great mystery of God we will uncover tonight in lesson one of our VBS. But before we dig in further, let us pray...

QUESTION: What Does Paul's Sermon Reveal About God?

INCOMPLETE SENTENCE: Paul's Sermon Reveals...

I. One God vs. Many gods

A. Paul's Reaction to Idolatry

v.16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

v.17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

v.18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

v.19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

v.20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

v.21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

-- Acts 17:16-21

- i. By simple definition, idolatry is worship given to anything other than God, whether it is a person, a place, or a possession.

- ii. Idolatry is nothing new under the sun; it has been around since man first fell into sin back in the book of Genesis.
- iii. And God's viewpoint on idolatry has not changed over the years; remember the first two commandments given to Moses:

v.1 And God spake all these words, saying,

v.2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

v.3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

v.4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

v.5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

v.6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

-- Exodus 20:1-6

- iv. Idolatry stems from man's attempt to be independent from God; however, within that attempt, mankind produced false gods that were often harsh and merciless.

- v. Let's take some of the false gods served during Paul's day, gods like...

- Cronos, who was said to have swallowed his own children in order to prevent them from overpowering him and taking his throne.

- Zeus, who was known for throwing lightning bolts to the earth in fits of rage.

- Nike, the goddess of victory, who desired to win so badly she often resorted to cheating.

- Poseidon, the god of the sea, who sunk ships on a whim.

- vi. And idolatry is not a historical problem – it is a current problem. Can you think of things in your life that pull you away from serving the Lord? It could be sports, social media, television, books, family, ministry; we must be on guard against the false gods of today's world!

B. Paul's Reply to Idolatry

- i. When the Athenians asked Paul to speak, he emphasized the truth that his God was the only true and living God, one of a kind.

v.22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

v.23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN

GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

v.24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

v.25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

v.26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

v.27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

-- Acts 17:22-27

- ii. The God of the universe is not reliant on the worship of man, or is limited in His power, but is the Sustainer of all things.
- iii. If we could recall the plagues of Egypt in Exodus chapters 7 through 11, they were not only sent from God to judge Pharaoh, but to demonstrate His power over the gods of the Egyptians, as each plague corresponded to at least one of their false idols.
- iv. There is but one God, and it is He in whom we should believe!

Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

-- Isaiah 44:6

C. Regarding the Trinity

NOTE: I had debated whether or not to add this point to the sermon, as the doctrine of the Trinity is perhaps one of the most confusing, and quite fittingly, mysterious aspects of the Scriptures. However, the Trinity is a doctrine that we as a church hold to as biblical truth; therefore, it is important for us to study it, albeit briefly, within our lesson of God being One.

Now some of you may be thinking, "I thought this message was geared for the kids?" That is quite true. But I can reassure you, ladies and gentlemen, that within my brief time as a children's leader, I have discovered that your children have a greater capacity to understand the truth of Scriptures, even the hard truths, than some adults who attend! You must simply have the willingness to teach and demonstrate God's Word in a way they can comprehend.

To neglect teaching the full truth of Scripture to our students for fear they will not understand is irresponsible on our parts as teachers, and in my opinion it is viewed as a sin in the eyes of God, for they are members of our church, and as such they deserve to know the Bible.

- i. As we look into the Trinity, opponents of Christianity often look to this doctrine as proof of the contradiction of Scripture, and that we as Christians actually worship three gods instead of one God.
- ii. But the Bible clearly states that there is One God, yet Three Person within the Godhead; as *Matthew 28:19* states,
Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
- iii. So how does the Trinity work? There are three simple examples I would like to provide in order to illustrate this concept; bear in mind these are not perfect examples, but perhaps they can help us better understand this particular mystery...
 1. The Apple Example: Apples, like most other fruits, are comprised of three main parts – the skin, the flesh, and the seeds. Each part is distinct from one another, yet they are equally important to the fruit.

2. The Water Example: In his book *Basic Theology*, Dr. Charles Ryrie uses the example of water to illustrate the Trinity...

“Water may serve as a ‘three-in-one’ illustration since it retains its chemical activity whether in solid, gas, or liquid state. There is also a triple point for water, a condition under which ice, steam, and liquid water can coexist in equilibrium. All are water, yet distinct from each other.”
(*Basic Theology*, pp.55, 56)

3. The Marriage Example: I, Cory, am married to my wife, Bethany. The Bible states that when a man and woman are joined in marriage, they shall *“leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”* (*Genesis 2:24*). Therefore, our one marriage is comprised of two distinct but equal persons, two-in-one.

- iv. I have even heard an idea that when someone argues for three gods by addition (Father + Son + Holy Ghost = 3), you can discuss one God by changing the perspective to multiplication (Father x Son x Holy Ghost = 1).
- v. As previously stated, though we may not be able to fully comprehend the Triunity of God, we can have faith that our God, though three distinct persons, is still One, and He is all together mighty!

II. A God of Relationship vs. A god of Religion

A. As Paul continues his message on Mars' Hill, he begins describing a God who desires personal relationship rather than a religion filled with ritual.

v.28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

v.29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

-- Acts 17:28, 29

- i. Although the Athenians would have agreed with Paul that humanity was created by a higher power, their understanding was that the gods created man as a plaything,

something made for their amusement, which gave the gods liberty to cause havoc whenever it pleased them; therefore, man was required to offer sacrifices to the gods, but out of fear of judgment rather than a feeling of loyalty.

- B. But Paul's use of the offspring analogy gives evidence for a parent-child relationship between God and man.
 - i. If I may once again use our daughter as an illustration to this point: it has been an adventure thus far watching Betty grow, to see her engage more and more with her surroundings; most of all, it is a delight to have her comprehend our relationship with her as parents.
 - ii. And you may be able to see this illustrated in your own lives with the children in your lives, whether you are parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or church family – to have opportunity to develop relationship with the ones you love is extraordinary!
- C. As a parent loves a child, so too must a parent discipline a child when they go astray; Paul continues...

v.30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

v.31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

-- Acts 17:30, 31

- i. Repentance is required because of our sin, and it is God who paved the way for us through His Son Jesus.

v.4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

v.5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

v.6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

v. 7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

-- Galatians 4:4-7

Conclusion:

QUESTION: What Does Paul's Sermon Reveal About the God We Serve?

INCOMPLETE SENTENCE: Paul's Sermon Reveals...

I. One God vs. Many gods

II. A God of Relationship vs. A god of Religion

APPLICATION:

In the final verses of Acts 17, we are introduced to two types of people within Paul's audience – those who rejected the message, and those who received it:

v.32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

v.33 So Paul departed from among them.

v.34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

--Acts 17:32-34

Ladies and gentlemen, where do you stand? Do you receive the message of the One True God, the God who sent His only Begotten Son into the world with the purpose of dying for your sins and mine? What is hindering you from fully believing? What gods of this world do you need to let go of in order to cling to the real God, the One who truly loves you unconditionally?

Perhaps you are hesitant in receiving the Lord's gift of salvation because you have not been introduced to Him. Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias would frequently offer a challenge to his audience to read through the Gospel of John three times, then pray this simple prayer: "God, if you truly exist, I ask that you please make yourself known to me." I can assure you, if you seek the Lord, He will make Himself known.

Or perhaps you have been searching, and are now ready to receive that gift of salvation. The steps are simple, as ready as ABC...

A – ADMIT you are a sinner. God's Word makes it clear that all have sinned.

Romans 3:10 "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:"

Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"

B – BELIEVE Jesus died and rose again to pay for your sins. Put your total trust in Jesus as your only hope of salvation. Realize that Jesus paid the price for your sins on the cross.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

C – CONFESS Jesus is Lord of your life. Confess Jesus by your mouth and believe in Jesus with your heart.

Romans 10:9 "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

If you would like to know more about what it means to be saved, or would like someone to lead through the Scriptures the way of salvation, please do not hesitate to contact our church at 417-865-7286; you can also send us an email at info@Hillsidebc.com.

We want to thank you once again for joining us on our first evening of Vacation Bible School. The fun is only just beginning – be sure to tune in tomorrow at 11am for the next episode of Mystery Island as we discover more about the God we serve!

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.

-- Psalm 145:3

Until next time, God Bless!