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God Wants All to Know Him **Acts 17:22-31**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen. The word from God through which our Jesus speaks to us is John 14:

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.

"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. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

"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. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:22-31)

This is the word of our Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

Each year two professors from Beloit College come out with the Mindset List. It's a compilation of values that shape the worldview or mindset of those entering college. With a mixture of insight and humor, many of the items highlight how the younger generation may look at words differently than the older generation, like the professors. For example, one item was "a tablet is no longer something you take in the morning." To the younger generation, a tablet is no longer a pill you take but a screen you watch.

However on the Mindset List that came out in 2012, one item would've raised our eyebrows in concern. It said that for incoming college freshman "the Biblical sources of terms such as 'Forbidden Fruit,' 'The writing on the wall,' 'Good Samaritan,' and 'The Promised Land' are unknown to most of them.' Years ago even many unchurched and unbelievers knew those things came from the Bible. They might have even been able to

tell part of the Bible stories, since so many people a smattering of Sunday school as a kid or heard it from friends. But our country is becoming more and more biblically illiterate. What a need for them to hear about Jesus!

The Apostle Paul faced as a similar audience when he spoke before the Areopagus in Athens, Greece. These were smart people, experts in the intellectual thoughts of their day. But why would they have known anything about the writings of Hebrew prophets from centuries ago? Why would they care? That weren't Jewish.

So Paul starts where they're at in order to bring them to where God wants them to be. He doesn't talk about how God prepared the people of Israel so that the Messiah would come through the family line of David. He doesn't quote Old Testament prophecies and show how Jesus of Nazareth truly fulfilled them despite so many in Jerusalem rejecting him. That's what he preached on his missionary journeys when he began his work at the synagogues in the cities he visited. That audience knew the Old Testament. But these people of Athens didn't care about those things. So Paul starts at where they're at to bring them to where God wants them to be. For God wants all people, even the unchurched or those who have no Bible background—he wants all to know him. That's the theme, dear friends. He wants all to know him as the Lord of creation, as the Giver of all that's good, and especially as the Savior-judge.

A. As the Lord of Creation

The people of Athens were concerned about religious stuff. They had many statues and temples, shrines and altars. They worshiped Zeus and Athena, Poseidon and Hades, and all the other gods of Mt. Olympus. They honored fabled heroes like Hercules. They wanted all their bases covered. They even had an altar to the unknown god.

But did they still feel some fear and guilt? Could all this religiousness really make things right? Maybe they had missed some god. Or maybe there had to be some other god who was above all those gods that their myths and stories talked about. For these men knew that those myths weren't real. Yet there had to be something behind it all.

“This is what I am going to proclaim to you. 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 hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.” (Acts 17:23-25 NIV11). Yes, there is a god, the one, true God, who created all, who rules over all. He is the Lord of creation.

Although today people have tried to reason away the Creator by hiding behind evolution, those men in Athens knew there had to be a beginning and someone had to start it. Things just don't pop into existence. If even something like a house needs a builder, how much more the complexity of a living organism, like your body! If something even as small as a watch has a maker, how much more so something as immense as the galaxy!

But what about the age of things that science determines? Doesn't that prove evolution? But look at what the Bible says. The six days of creation were regular days marked off by the evening and the morning. But God did create Adam and Eve as adults, even though they were only a day old. When he created the stars, he created the light

between the stars and the earth so that they were visible instantly. Trees were full grown, just as the animals. The chicken did indeed come before the egg. So also couldn't the rocks and coal and strata and whatever else they dig up have been created as if it had been there a very long time? God is the Lord of creation.

And that means you and I are accountable to him. A strong appeal of evolution is that it appears to make us our own boss. But no! We are the creatures. God sets the standards; we don't. But how can we measure up? He doesn't need anything from us. All that we have came from him in the first place, even our very life and breath. We have nothing to bargain with. What hope is there for guilty sinners like us?

Maybe the consciences of those hearers began to stir. That unspoken fear and guilt whispered in their hearts, "How can I be right with this God, especially if he's vindictive and petty like the gods of our myths?"

B. As the Giver of all that's good

But as Paul continues, he makes it clear that the Lord of Creation is also the Giver of all that's good. Look at how he provides and takes care of everything. "From one man he made all nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands" (Acts 17:26 NIV11).

Everything is in his hands. From the beginning throughout all of history, he marked off the appointed times and places where we live, the rise and fall of nations. He is in control. What's more, he wants us to find him. He wants us reach out and know him. Because of our inborn sin, reaching out for him is like groping in the dark, blindly grasping at what we unable to find. But our inability does not nullify God's earnest desire for us to find him. In fact, since he has all things planned out, might he not have planned some way to bring us to himself? For in him we live and move and have our being. It all depends on him. We are his offspring. Would he abandon us?

You, dear Christians, already know the answer to those questions. Paul's heathen listeners, though, were still searching. He was leading them to listen intently in order to find this God. Yet even though we know the answer, do we completely trust him as the giver of that's good? How often we worry! We fear some misfortune that might happen. But dear Christian, your God is in control. If he can plot out the course of history, he certainly can guard and protect you. And yet we worry.

Even worse, rather than trusting the Giver of all that's good, how often don't we first of all trust in what human design and skill can do? Our objects of worship might not look like images made out of gold, silver, or stone. But how often do we run after things made of plastic, silicon, aluminum, and steel, things powered by oil, gas, and electricity. Do we trust the advancements of technology to make us happy and secure more than we trust the Giver of all that's good? How much do we turn to medicine and doctors to find some sort of cure for what ails us? "My life would be so much better if only the doctors could cure ..." How much do pay checks and bank balances drive our priorities? And when these fail (and they all will fail), worry and fear rattle us because we were trusting them more than the Giver of all that's good.

C. As the Savior-judge

And he will judge this world. That's the last point we hear Paul making. "He has

set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed” (Act 17:31 NIV11). So repent before it’s too late. Turn from evil. Turn to the Lord. For that day is coming. God has already appointed the man who will do this judging in complete righteousness and justice. In fact he has raised this man from the dead.

Who is this man? How will we stand in his judgment? Does he give us any hope? Those are the questions that should have been burning in the hearts of those first hearers. But instead when they hear of the resurrection, they cut Paul off. How might he have finished that sermon before the Areopagus?

This man is Jesus. He is the eternal Son of God in whom all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. For God sent his Son born of a woman to redeem us from our sins. Although God over all, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. By his death he reconciled the world to God. His resurrection from the dead proves that God declared guilty sinners forgiven. This risen Jesus has ascended to heaven and reigns over all for the good of his people. He will return on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead. He is the Savior-judge. Believe in him.

So, dear friends, with your hearts set on him, look forward to that day. Lift up your heads for the one who will judge is the one who died for you and rose. Rejoice, for your Savior, your own dear Savior, is the Judge. What a God for us and all people to know! Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.