

Acts 17 - John Karmelich

1. What makes a person receptive to you sharing your faith in Jesus?
 - a) With that question asked, should we *only* preach to those who *are* receptive?
 - i) The answer to the latter question is no.
 - ii) I stated last week, and wanted to state again that God does not measure our success based on how many people we convert. Period. That is the job of the Holy Spirit. Our responsibility is simply to be a good witness *for* Jesus.
 - iii) With that said, let's go back to the 1st question. What makes a person receptive?
 - iv) Chapter 17 has lessons on who is receptive and who isn't to Christianity.
 - v) Those lessons will teach us about *how* to be a good witness as a Christian.
 - b) Back in Acts Chapter 1, Jesus commands his disciples to "be his witnesses" in Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). That command is still active today. What Chapter 17 shows is some lessons on *how* to be good witness.
 - i) There are lessons on adjusting your message to your audience.
 - ii) There are lessons on what kinds of people respond better than others.
 - iii) There are lessons on helping/supporting those who are "leading the charge".
 - iv) You'll find some of these lessons will also be helpful in your career, in teaching your children Bible lessons or in just communicating with people. There are some good communication principals in Chapter 17 to be aware of, and I'll point them out as we go.
2. If you can only remember 3 words from Chapter 17, they should be 1) some 2) many & 3) few.
 - a) Acts Chapter 17 is all about Paul making 3 separate sermons to 3 separate groups in three separate cities. Those 3 words summarize the results of Paul's sermon.
 - i) In his 1st sermon to the Thessalonica some Jews were persuaded (Verse 4)
 - ii) In his 2nd sermon to the Bereans, many Jews were persuaded (Verse 12)
 - iii) In his 3rd sermon in Athens, a few men believed. (Verse 34)
 - iv) In all fairness, the results are not that simple. In the case where "some" Jews believed, it did state that "many" of the Greeks believed.
 - b) The questions to ask in this chapter are why did "many" believe in one location and only "some" in another? Why only a "few" in another?
 - i) This chapter teaches a lot about different personality types, personal backgrounds and interests as it affects their ability to be open to the Gospel.
 - ii) Two of the 3 sermons were given in Jewish synagogues. Th first two messages were *very* Jewish in their presentation. The 3rd was to a Greek audience. There was not even one Old Testament reference in that 3rd speech!
 - iii) That's the lesson for us. The mistake we often make in sharing our faith is we spend too much time talking and not enough time listening!
 - a) A popular old Christian expression is "people don't care what you know, until they know that you care!" Keep that in mind as you talk with them.
 - b) In the business world of sales you are taught that: "90% of sales is listening to the customer". That's a good lesson for us as well!
 - c) Again, remember that it is up to the Holy Spirit to convert people. It is *through us* that people learn about Jesus. I believe it is our responsibility to do the best job we can to present the Gospel accurately, sincerely, humbly and truthfully.

3. Verse 1: When they (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.
- a) Remember at the end of Chapter 16, Paul & his companions were leaving Phillipi. They were whipped in jail, and their singing and praising God, despite their pain. This was impressive enough to lead to the conversion of the other inmates & the jail guard. Acts 16 said they left a day later. Paul and Silas' backs were still stinging from whipmarks. The trip to Thessalonica is roughly a 100 miles. They made the trip in 3 days.
 - b) Why did Luke mention Paul passing through Amphipolis & Apollonia and "that's it"?
 - i) We don't know. Most commentators theorize that Paul was focused on Thessalonica, which is a major city. Possibly he wanted to win souls in the major city, and let the Gospel spread from there.
 - c) From Phillipi to Thessalonica one could travel along one of the main Roman highway.
 - d) When Paul gets to Thessalonica, where is the first place he goes?
 - i) Paul hits the Jewish synagogue. That's Paul's pattern. He has a Jewish background. He goes to where he knows he can relate to people.
 - ii) There is a lesson for us when we talk to people about Jesus. Sometimes it is best to start where you are comfortable. Go to a place you can relate to.
 - a) The application for us as Christians can be summarized in the expression: "bloom where you are planted and plant where you bloom".
 - b) Sometimes God calls us to be a witness in our own neighborhood. Those are the people and the location where we are comfortable and are aware of the local situations. For others, it might be a distant location. God will sometimes call us to strange places we may have never foreseen us awhile back, but base on the testimonies of missionaries, they have found happiness in the locations where God has called them.
4. Verse 2: As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,³ explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ, " he said.
- a) One of the neat things about this little story is we have a great cross-reference. That is Paul's 1st Letter to the Thessalonians. When you read that letter, it was obviously written right after he left this city. That letter gives more details on what Paul taught here as well as the events of this chapter.
 - i) Your extra credit assignment for this week is to read 1st Thessalonians! ☺
 - b) Thessalonica was a large Greek city. There were enough Jews to form at least one synagogue. Paul was allowed to be the guest speaker on 3 Sabbath days (Saturdays).
 - i) Why did the synagogue allow Paul to speak for 3 Sabbath's on this topic?
 - ii) I suspect a lot of those Jews traveled to Jerusalem for the annual feast days. Many of them knew of Jesus, and the great controversy surrounding Jesus. They are also aware there was a movement in Jerusalem as some Jews were becoming Christians. Thus, the interest to "air out" the debate.
 - c) What did Paul do on days other than Saturdays (the Jewish Sabbath)?
 - i) He worked his "day job". We'll learn in Acts 18 that Paul was also a tent maker. During the week, Paul probably bought material from the marketplace and sold tents.

- ii) Notice Paul's comments in his 2nd letter to the Thessalonians: "nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. (2 Thessalonians 3:8 NIV)
- d) Why is so important to understand that Paul had a "day job"?
 - i) First of all is that we think of "ministry" as a profession. Either you make your living as a minister or you don't. With all due respect to my minister friends, that is not Biblical. If you are a Christian, you are in the full-time ministry, no matter what your occupation. Your full time ministry is whatever God calls you to do. That could mean a business career and supporting your local church. That could mean raising Godly children. Part of the joy of following Jesus is finding your purpose and fulfilling it. (A good way to start is to find what you enjoy and what special talents you have, and combine them for God's use.)
 - ii) Second, sometimes it is necessary in cultures to not ask for money from those you are preaching to. That will cause people to question your motivations. I know of some churches where they encourage guests and visitors not to give money when they pass the plate. I know of one church that *refuses* to pass the plate just for that reason! They trust members will simply mail in donations or drop off their checks outside the main room! Now that is faith in God!
- e) Let's get back to the verse. What did Paul preach? He focused his sermon on explaining that Jesus *had* to suffer and rise from the dead.
 - i) Paul used the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus and the Messiah to validate his arguments about Jesus.
 - ii) Prophecy in the Old Testament about the Messiah comes in many forms. Some were more blunt, using the title: "The "Son of David". The "Son of David" was a recognized title of the Messiah. Other prophecies were based on patterns. Jews and Christians both agree that some stories in the Old Testament are taught as patterns to watch as predictions of the Messiah.
- f) Why did Paul have to convince people that Jesus is the Messiah?
 - i) The Jewish concept of the Messiah (meaning King) would be someone who would rule the earth from Jerusalem. Paul had to educate the crowd on just *what* is the role and purpose of the messiah.
 - ii) The most famous passage in the Old Testament about the "suffering messiah" is Isaiah Chapter 53. The description sound *exactly* like what Jesus did on the cross. Another good reference is Psalm 22. It *reads* like it was written in first person from the cross. Both passages were written *centuries* before Jesus was born. They are both great verses to share with people of Jewish backgrounds.
 - iii) The problem is that there are prophecies in the Old Testament about a "suffering messiah" and others about a "ruling king messiah".
 - a) Some Jewish Rabbi's theorized there must be 2 Messiahs. One was to "suffer for our sins" and another to rule as king. They don't believe it could possibly be the same person.
 - (1) They also don't believe Jesus is the suffering Messiah because they don't believe the Messiah/King is also God. Jesus claimed to be God (and is!!!).
 - b) Other Rabbi commentators "spiritualize" the suffering Messiah and say those prophecies refer to the nation of Israel as a whole.

- iv) Jews today try to argue that Isaiah Chapter 53 is about “the suffering of Israel” and not the Messiah. That argument doesn’t make sense. This chapter describes someone “paying the price for our sins”. If you read Chapter 53, verse 5, he was “martyred” for our sins. How can Israel be “martyred” for their own sins? That argument doesn’t hold up!
- g) Where in the Old Testament do you find a prediction of Jesus being raised from the dead? I would answer in Genesis, Chapter 22:
 - i) That is the story of God telling Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. The problem is that God also told Abraham earlier that through his son Isaac, Abraham would be blessed with many descendants. Therefore, when Abraham was about to offer Isaac, Abraham *knew* that God had to resurrect him.
 - (1) Remember that patterns are considered prophecy.
 - b) I believe that Abraham *knew* he was “acting out” prophecy. Because after God told him to offer a ram instead of Isaac, Abraham gave a “name” to the location where this whole event took place:
 - (1) So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." (Gen. 22:14 NIV)
 - (2) I’m underlining the word “will”, as in *future tense*. The prophecy pattern is that Abraham believed there would be a future day when a “provision” will be offered.
 - (3) Here’s the neat part: That location, is the same location where Jesus died on the cross, approx. 2,000 years later!
- h) Ok, 2 pages on 2 verses, better get moving! ☺
- 5. Verse 4: Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.
 - a) On page one, I said to note the 3 words “some, many and few”. Here we read of “some” Jews being persuaded. Why didn’t more get it? Did Paul not pray hard enough? Was Paul not convincing enough in his arguments?
 - i) Remember it is the Holy Spirit that convicts people’s hearts. There is still the decision on our part to accept that message. The more I study this passage and the letters to the two letters to the Thessalonians, the more I’m convinced it was simply a case of stubbornness to accept the truth.
 - ii) To accept the truth for the Jews meant changing their beliefs about the Messiah. That’s a tough obstacle to overcome. It also meant they had to accept the fact that their effort to keep the law was not good enough. The argument of accepting Jesus’ payment for their sins was too much for their egos.
 - a) We’ll read in a few verses about their jealousy over people accepting the Gospel. I suspect that jealousy, and their angry actions were partially due to the guilt due to conviction.
 - b) That’s a danger we face when we tell people about Jesus. The conviction will often cause people to change, but often it causes anger and violent reactions. Guilt in a man’s heart causes that reaction.
 - b) This verse also tells of “Greek men and prominent women” who accepted the Gospel message. The Greeks and prominent women were probably those who attended the Jewish Synagogue. They had enough disrespect for the Greek gods to know it wasn’t the truth, and they were trying to find the true and living God via Judaism. Given the impossibility of trying to perfectly keep the Jewish Law, this caused the Greek men and prominent women to accept the Gospel message.

- i) That's a sign of someone who is ready to accept the truth of the Gospel message. A person who realizes that God is perfect, but they can't be perfect before God. Therefore, they are willing to accept Jesus *perfect sacrifice* on their behalf.
 - c) When the author Luke says "not a few prominent women", that is Luke making an understatement. Several times in Acts you'll notice Luke using that term "not a few" as a flippant way of understating the number of people.
- 6. Verse 5: But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.
 - a) Why were the Jews jealous?
 - i) These Jews had a good following of Greek converts. Those people donated to the synagogue. Now some Jews and these Greeks were leaving the synagogue to follow Jesus. The jealousy is about a loss of power and all that goes with it.
 - b) I have to share with you the 1611 King James translation of "bad characters" as described in Verse 5:
 - i) The King James calls these men "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort,"
 - a) I don't know why, but I found that funny! Next time someone cuts me off in traffic, maybe I'll yell out, "you lewd fellow of the baser sort". ☺
 - c) I was thinking about the anger of those Jewish leaders. It's one thing to be angry and resent someone's actions. It's quite another to be so angry, you hire a bunch of mobster-types and start a riot, with the purpose of wanting to kill Paul and Silas.
 - i) Part of the reason is a demonic influence. Satan is doing all in his power to stop spreading the gospel message.
 - ii) The Jews guilt and rage may have based on conviction of the Holy Spirit.
 - iii) The text says they were jealous, probably due to a loss of power and money. That lust for power instigated their actions.
- 7. Verse 6: But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here,⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.
 - a) The first thing to notice is the wonderful testimony given to Paul by the people trying to persecute him in Verse 6. It says: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here."
 - i) Actually, I like the New King James Version better for this phrase:
 - a) "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too."
 - b) You have to think Paul must have smiled when he heard that line.
 - ii) There have been many sermons preached with this reference to "the world turned upside down". Many commentators use that cliché as a metaphor for sin. They argue the world is *already* turned upside down by the actions of sin, and by preaching Jesus, we're in the process of turning it "right side up" again!
 - b) In these verses we get introduced to a character named Jason. This paragraph is all we know about him. There is a "greetings" reference to a Jason near the end of Paul's letter to the Romans, but I suspect that is a different person.

- i) Notice the “mob” knew that Paul & Silas were staying at Jason’s house. Jason must have been a convert from the first time Paul preached.
 - a) I suspect this “mob” first did some property damage in the marketplace to get some attention, and then charged over to Jason’s house.
 - ii) Notice the price Jason had to pay just for *believing* in Paul’s message.
 - a) Jason wasn’t preaching. He was simply condoning Paul’s actions and letting him/ them stay at his house.
 - b) That’s a price you can pay for being a Christian. Sometimes we suffer just for being *associated* with Christianity. Just ask anyone living in parts of the world where Christians are persecuted.
 - c) Jesus said: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (John 15:18-19 NIV)
 - c) The Jewish leaders appeal to the Roman authority by stating that the Christians see Jesus as their king instead of Caesar.
 - i) They did this because Romans allowed some freedom of religion. Roman laws allowed were mainly concerned about treasonous acts against Rome.
 - a) Therefore, they charged Paul & Silas, through Jason, with treason and thus this reference in this verse.
 - ii) While the accusation is true that Christians believe in Jesus as Lord of all, the accusation should not “hold water” as treasonous. The New Testament preaches strongly to respect those in authority. (Romans 13:1). The only time Christians take exception is when governments ask us to deny our faith in Jesus. That is a case of “higher law”. Except in those types of cases, God calls us to be obedient to local authorities.
 - d) Jason was asked to “post a bond” in verse 9. Some translations say, “post bail”.
 - i) The concept is different than we think of bail, or a bond.
 - ii) The idea was Jason was to pay a fee on behalf of Paul & Silas. If Paul & Silas return, Jason could serve jail time, or worse. The concept is one of a contract agreement to keep Paul & Silas out of the city.
 - a) Commentators are mixed on this one. Some say Jason made a mistake by doing this, and thus preventing Paul from coming back and ministering further to Thessalonica. Others say that Jason was doing this out of love for Paul & Silas, and didn’t want them to get hurt.
 - b) There is an interesting reference in Paul’s 1st letter to the Thessalonians:
 - (1) “For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, did, again and again--but Satan stopped us. (1 Thessalonians 2:18)
 - (2) Did “Satan stopping us” from returning refer to Jason’s bond agreement? Neither the text in 1st Thessalonians, nor in Acts says, but many commentators speculate there is a connection.
8. Verse 10: As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.
- a) For whatever reason, Paul & Silas were not at Jason’s house at the moment. The new Christians of Thessalonica worked to sneak Paul & Silas out of town.
 - i) Berea is “off the beaten path”. Paul & Silas were traveling along a main Roman highway that leads through major cities of Greece. Berea is not on that road.
 - b) Paul’s usual pattern: “Driven out of one town? Big deal, where’s the next synagogue?!”
 - i) Paul and Silas’ determination to press onward despite the danger and persecution is an inspiration to us all.

9. Verse 11, one of my favorite verses in the whole Bible (pay attention! ☺) Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.
- a) Verse 11 is special to me. It compliments the Bereans (“more noble”) because when Paul & Silas preached on the Sabbath’s (Saturdays), the Bereans checked the Scripture daily to verify if this was true.
 - b) If there is one thing I encourage, it is *serious, daily* Bible study. One of my mentors, Chuck Missler, uses this verse as his trademark. The idea is “don’t take my word for it, study the Bible for yourself”. My sentiments exactly! Don’t just take my word for it in some of these opinions. Study the verses yourself! That is the noble action to do!
 - c) The first page of this lesson emphasized 3 words “some, many and few”.
 - i) In verse 12 it says many of the Berean-Jews believed.
 - ii) The difference between them and the Thessalonian Jews is simply the desire to search out for the truth.
 - iii) The reason more Jews believed in Berea than in Thessalonica was that the Thessalonians trusted their previous knowledge. The Bereans were opened minded. The Bereans believed the Bible is the ultimate authority. They checked it out for themselves and discovered the truth.
 - iv) The secret of “many” is simply to encourage people to check it out for themselves. The best way to create on-fire-Christians is to get them to diligently study the Scriptures.
 - a) Show me a church where the vast majority of members are serious Bible students, studying the Word daily, and I’ll show you a church with lots of zeal for Jesus and is making a difference in the world!
10. Verse 13: When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.
- a) It’s one thing for the enemies of Paul & Silas to drive them out of town. It’s another for them to find out where they were and continue to persecute them.
 - i) You have to wonder about their motivation. Even if they lost power and prestige in Thessalonica, you wonder if church growth in Berea would affect them. Once the enemies of the cross declare war, I suspect it becomes an obsession.
 - ii) Jesus himself predicted this action: “Therefore I (Jesus) am sending you (Jewish leaders) prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. (Matthew 23:34 NIV)
 - b) Don’t read this persecution too lightly. In the United States, we respectfully disagree with those of different religious backgrounds. We disagree, but for the most part, we don’t get violent over it. What you are reading here is a life and death struggle.
11. Verse 14: The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵ The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.
- a) It’s interesting to think about these two verses from Paul’s perspective. First Paul preaches in Thessalonica. After some successful conversions, he has to escape a violent mob to get out of town.
 - i) Next, he goes to a remote town of Berea. After some successful conversion here, again, he gets run out of town.

- ii) Now, he's off to Athens, the great intellectual capital of ancient Greece. Is Paul upset about the persecution? Does he want to take time off? Verse 15 says he left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.
 - iii) The lesson here is one of determination. Paul focused on what God called him to do. He didn't let attacks of the enemies prevent him from his mission. If Satan was having a temporary victory, Paul just moved on.
 - b) Despite the danger, Silas and Timothy stayed behind. The desire to help the new Christians grow was just as important to them as working with Paul in the next town.
12. Verse 16: While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.
- a) You can always tell when a man has a heart to win souls for the Lord. The key words in this verse are "greatly distressed".
 - b) This verse gives you a proper attitude to be a good Christian witness.
 - i) Paul didn't say, "Look at these guys and their ridiculous worship of idols. Boy are they going to burn in hell". ☺
 - ii) Paul didn't think, "Well, live and let live. If they want to worship all those Greek gods, let em be! After all, who's to say who's right and wrong?"
 - iii) No! Paul has a heart for the Lord. He knows how empty and futile life is. A city with *thousands* of statues dedicated to *thousands* of gods shows a hunger for spiritual satisfaction.
 - a) Not much is different today. Thousands of gods exist today. Find out where people's priority is with their spare time and spare income, and you'll find their gods.
 - c) Before we move on, it would probably be helpful to talk a little about Athens.
 - i) At this point in history, I would describe Athens as a great "has-been" city.
 - a) It was diminishing in importance and significance.
 - ii) At the height of the Greek Empire, (which was just prior to the Roman Empire) Athens was the world center of intellect & culture. The great Greek philosophers that many of us studied in school were based out of Athens. These included Plato, Aristotle and Socrates. These men lived several hundred years earlier.
 - iii) By the time of Paul's visit, Athens had declined significantly in terms of both population and significance. Yet its residences prided themselves on their historical significance.
 - iv) Athens had the atmosphere of a modern "university town", especially one with a long historical significance, much like Oxford and Cambridge in England.
 - v) For those of you who have ever spent a few years in a university setting like this, you'll sense the college professor attitude in the next few verses. "Debate, theory and philosophy" were far more important than practical matters in this type of setting.
 - d) With that intro, let's get on to Paul's witness to the residents of Athens.
13. Verse 17: So he (Paul) reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.
- a) Paul did what Paul did best – he "hit" the synagogues. He also did, what Christians call today "street witnessing", simply sharing the gospel on a busy street corner with whoever passes by.
 - b) Remember that Paul paid his way by making and selling tents. I'm sure he passed the time in the marketplace by talking to whoever was listening. Either that, or Paul just picked a busy corner in the marketplace and just started preaching!

14. Verse 18: A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler 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.¹⁹ 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?"²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean."
- a) First of all, who are these "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers"?
 - i) "Epicurean's" are pleasure-seekers.
 - a) Their philosophy, can be summed up by "Eat, drink and be merry",
 - b) To quote a more modern phrase "Don't worry, be happy".
 - c) They believed in the existence of gods, but they didn't believe the gods interfered in the affairs of man. The view is "it's up to us" to make the best out of our lives.
 - d) The modern phrase "self-made-man" applies to this view on life.
 - ii) "Stoic's" believed that the greatest achievement is dignity and honor.
 - a) It's almost like making a god out of the Boy Scout mottoes!
 - b) Think of a policeman, a judge or a bureaucrat who believe the highest calling is "to keep things in order". It is up to me (or us!)
 - c) They believed god was in everything, and everything was in god.
 - d) They believed there was no particular destiny for man.
 - iii) In both cases, the focus is on man's pleasure and man's accomplishments.
 - iv) Both philosophies are appealing because they appeal to our ego. In either case, it is a case of self-gratification to accomplish happiness.
 - a) The problem is, in the end of life there is no satisfaction. By focusing on your own efforts, you never know if you are "good enough for God". There is no way to measure success for entering heaven. Everything becomes relative (e.g. "well, I'm better than that guy over there!").
 - b) That is part of the joy of Christianity. It is the assurance of salvation.
15. Verse 21: (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)
- a) That is Luke's commentary on the people who lived in Athens. It is almost funny if it weren't so true. Spend time in a university town and you will see people like this. They are so busy trying to impress each other with their debates they ignore the reality that exists all around them.
 - b) This leads back to verses 19 and 20. The "debaters" took Paul aside and gave him a place to speak; why? This verse seems to indicate they are just interested in "the latest fad". People can be like that at times.
 - i) Christianity has its moments like that in history. There are times when it is popular to say you're a Christian. Most Americans believe they are good Christians. Only a small percentage who actually "practice what they preach".
 - ii) Reading the rest of the verses, I also get the impression that some of these guys just wanted to hear Paul talk so they could debate him for the sake of their ego's and prove the superiority of this view.

- iii) There are people who I simply do not waste time with sharing the Gospel. They are only interested in debate and not genuinely interested in what you have to say. It usually doesn't take long in a conversation to find this out. At that point, I find it best to be quiet, or simply change the topic. If people's hearts aren't open in the first place, debate-for-debate's sake is not worth the time, as Paul will find out here. The only exception I'll make if there are other people listening in. Others may be more open to what you have to say.
16. Verse 22: Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ 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. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.
- a) We are now beginning Paul's speech to the people of Athens. Some paraphrase translations will refer to "the Areopagus" as "Mars' Hill". Commentator's will often refer to this as the "Mars' Hill Sermon". Mars' Hill is just another name for the Areopagus.
 - b) This is arguably Paul's most refined speech in Acts. It sounds rehearsed. Whether it is or not, is only speculation. In many ways, it is Paul's most brilliant speech. It is also his least successful. Keep that in mind as we read further.
 - c) Athens was a city given over to gods. One ancient historian estimated that there were at 30,000 gods! They were not just statues, but statues given over to worship.
 - d) In Verse 23 Paul found a statue with the inscription "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD."
 - i) Think of that particular statue as "covering all your bases". The people of Athens wanted to make sure they didn't miss *any* gods, so they built a statue to an "unknown" god, as to not offend anyone.
 - ii) The modern equivalent is the "good luck charm". People who carry around something just to make sure things happen their way.
 - e) Paul uses that statue as a point of reference to introduce them to the God of the Bible.
 - i) Remember that we are dealing with a people with little to no knowledge of the Jewish Bible. Thus the references are all non-Jewish.
 - ii) In the art of persuasive speech, this is a good example, of starting off with something your audience can relate to and understand.
17. Paul continues, Verse 24: 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 hands.
- a) Here's Paul's argument. Suppose we could make a building that God could dwell in. That would mean we are capable of pleasing God by our own efforts. It also means God is small enough to fit into something we can make!
 - i) Paul is saying, "A god that is capable of creating the heaven and the earth is too vast and great to fit into something made by man.
 - ii) It argues against the futility of building a "home" for a god. This goes back to the argument of man trying to do things to please God. God is perfect. A perfect God has no need of anything. Paul will argue this further in Verse 25.
18. Verse 25: And he (God) is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.
- a) If God is perfect, God does not need anything. That is Paul's argument.
 - b) This leads to the next question: "If God is perfect, why did he create man? The answer is to show his love for us!" (See Ephesians 2:7) If God is a God-of-love, he desires something to *show* that love.
 - i) For example, if you were an artist you desire to paint/sculpt as an expression of your love of art. You *create* art to express that love. Only with God, it is for our benefit, not his!

19. Paul continues, Verse 26: From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'
- a) Paul is arguing here against "random chance". He states that God *determined* when and where each man and woman should live.
 - b) Paul is saying you are not here by accident or random chance, as the Greek philosophers argued. If God created you, then He has a *purpose* for your life. That purpose is to glorify God *through* your life. Once the "sin-problem" is taken care of through Jesus, you seek God through prayer and his Word to find out how to glorify Him!
 - i) Solomon was possibly the wisest man who ever lived. He had everything in life one could possibly desire. At the end of his life, this is his conclusion about living life and finding purpose. "Here is my final conclusion: fear God and obey his commandments, for this is the entire duty of man." (Eccl. 12:13 TLB)
 - c) Some people make a big deal about the fact that Paul quoted a local Greek poet in Verse 28 when it says, "We are his offspring." The issue is "If Paul quotes it, does that make the source "Biblical"?
 - i) The simple answer is no. You can find truth in many sources, but it does not make the source itself always correct. All truth does stem from God.
20. Verse 29: "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 man's design and skill.
- a) One of God's 10 commandments is not to make an image of God. (Exodus 20:4).
 - i) Ever stop to think why?
 - ii) The answer is when we paint or carve an image of God; we mentally limit our image of God. God is too big for us to comprehend, so he simply commands us not to try to make any image.
 - iii) The other issue is that when we make an image of God, and worship it, we put our focus on the image, and not God himself. We focus on our own ego as "hey, look what I made. God must be pleased with me!"
21. Verse 30: In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.³¹ 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 all men by raising him from the dead."
- a) One of the arguments of the Greek philosophers is that "life just goes on. There is no day of judgement."
 - i) The Bible argues otherwise. In fact, there is going to come a day, not only when God will judge man *individually* (Revelation 20:12), but there will be a day when God will *destroy* the earth and create a new one (Isaiah 65:17, Isaiah 66:22, 2nd Peter 3:13, Rev. 21:1.)
 - ii) The reason God promises to destroy the earth one day is because 1) it is corrupted by sin. A new perfect life with God requires a new perfect world, and 2) it prevents us from becoming too materialistic. Before you get too excited about any object, remember that God will destroy it one day.
 - b) A day of judgement is necessary because of the issue of "God being perfect". Think of all the corrupt people who have gotten away with things and have never been punished in their lifetime. A day of judgement *is* necessary if God is perfect in his judgement of mankind. Bottom line "You can't get away with it!"

- c) OK, so why did Paul say in Verse 30 “God overlooked such ignorance, but now...?”
 - i) Suppose every time you wanted to cheat on a test, lie, speed down the road, an angel physically stopped you. You would be complaining how God never gives you a chance to “prove yourself”. This is a free-will issue. God allows free will to show our imperfection and show how much we need him.
 - d) Paul ends his argument about with the resurrection of the dead. The Greek philosophers had a difficult time with that concept.
 - i) When you study the New Testament as whole, the amount of *evidence* to the physical resurrection of Jesus is amazing. It is an undeniable historical fact.
 - ii) *How* we are resurrected is a classical debate in Christianity. Some believe God takes our basic “DNA” and rebuilds us. Others argue a physical resurrection based on our existing bodies. Paul discusses this a little in 1st Corinthians 15. (We’re running long as it is. I’ll save that for another day!)
22. Verse 32: When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.
- a) OK, here are the results of Paul’s sermon: Only a handful of converts. Arguably, this speech is a brilliant argument for God and the necessity of a Savior. Yet we read of only a few converts. In Acts, we do not read of a church established in Athens.
 - b) Was the problem in Paul’s delivery? Did he not pray enough? Did his sermons lack the wrong elements?
 - c) I believe the answer is you can’t convert people by logic. There are a few exceptions, like there was here in Athens, but for the most part, it doesn’t work.
 - i) Let me talk about the exceptions first. Every now and then you’ll read of a scientist or a professor who studies the evidence, and converts from atheism to Christianity. The evidence in nature and the emptiness in their hearts had led some people to Christ. This is the exception more than the rule.
 - d) What did Paul do wrong? Simple, he didn’t preach “The Cross”. From this point on, you will see a change in style on Paul’s message. He will no longer focus on “logic” but simply on the message of the Cross. Paul turns the results over to God.
 - i) Paul learned a valuable lesson. If Paul succeeded, God would have to give him the credit for his brilliant arguments. God doesn’t share his glory with man!
 - a) “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. (Isaiah 42:8 NIV)
 - e) The next city Paul hits is Corinth. Notice Paul’s attitude in 1st Corinthians:
 - i) “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.” (1st Corinthians 1:22-25 NIV)
 - ii) What’s Paul saying? Don’t try to please the Jews with “signs”. They can see signs and still not convert because their heart (their ego) is not willing to change. Don’t try to please the Greeks with “wisdom”. Even if you give brilliant arguments, only a few will get it, and only because those see the emptiness of their beliefs. Just preach Jesus, and let God do the work.

23. Let's Pray: Father, thank you for these lessons on "The 'many', the 'some' and the 'few'". Help us to remember that our lives *are* a witness to you. Let not these lessons on being a good witness for you be wasted. Help us not to put our trust in our own wisdom, but in you working *through* us. We ask your guidance, in Jesus name, Amen.