



Gospel to multi-faith society, Acts 17:29-31

This sermon explores different scenes, starting with a reminder from Acts 16. (scene 1 prequel)

Perhaps explore just one scene at a time: [each scene is posted separately to help do that]

Each has a scripture setting, a thought and then a reflection to think and pray about; and to discuss in your small group

Scene 3, Being a Good Different

"People were hearing Paul correctly when he announced that "there was another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7), and they correctly saw the Christian way of life as a challenge to many Roman cultural values." (Bible Project)

Acts 17:29-34,

'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. (NIV)

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 everyone by raising him from the dead.'

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 Some of the people 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.

"All of these themes show the paradox that the early church presented to the world. It was a Jewish messianic movement made up of ethnically diverse communities. Men and women, rich and poor, slave and free were all treated as equals because they all gave their allegiance to King Jesus alone and to no other god or king." (Bible Project)

Paul reads his culture; he is a keen observer who does not accept the status quo as it is, nor does he seek to be like and fit into the culture. Instead, he seeks a Jesus-way of observing the world around him and observes a Jesus-way of speaking into that culture.

In essence, the message is,

- You are not to be like the people of the world
- Do not be drawn in by it, but don't ignore it either.
 - Ask, 'what is the main messaging of my culture?'
 - From that, what can I use to point others toward Jesus the Christ?

In some ways, I think the modern evangelical church has lost this skill.

We speak of **(a) God's of Love for all people** of all nations as described in v.26-27, but we miss out the concept in v.29 to 32, that Jesus 'will judge the world with justice' and we lack a sense of **(b) urgency to affect our culture with Jesus' gospel: (Being a Good different)**



Gospel to multi-faith society, Acts 17:29-31

This sermon explores different scenes, starting with a reminder from Acts 16. (scene 1 prequel)

Perhaps explore just one scene at a time: [each scene is posted separately to help do that]

Each has a scripture setting, a thought and then a reflection to think and pray about; and to discuss in your small group

(a) God's Love for all people of all Nations. (Acts 17:26-27)

'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. ²⁷ 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.

National Pride? Here, Paul confirms God's creation of all people and his desire for close relationship with them. A cultural problem Paul observed was that the Athenians born to families who had always been Athenians had an extra pride of themselves,

they 'were the only Greeks on the European mainland who had no tradition of their ancestors' coming into Greece; they belonged to the earliest movement of Greek immigration.'¹

It is the same message he would have told to the Jews; in their case to say that yes, they are the chosen people of God to show his Kingdom, but God's Kingdom is open to the Gentiles too.

In other words, God's love is surely for all people of all nations, but this is not told to allow a liberal love of all people no matter who or what they believe in and worship and is a reminder that all people are his creation, so don't let national pride spill over into national superiority.

(b) Being a Good different:

"Their very existence subverted the core values of Roman culture, yet they posed no military threat because Jesus had taught them to be a people of peace. Really, the only crime that they could be accused of was not conforming to the status quo."
(Bible Project)

It is also a challenge to say, 'whose Kingdom do you ultimately belong to, the Kingdom of the Risen Lord or the Kingdom of the world?

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. (Acts 17:29 NIV)

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.



Gospel to multi-faith society, Acts 17:29-31

This sermon explores different scenes, starting with a reminder from Acts 16. (scene 1 prequel)

Perhaps explore just one scene at a time: [each scene is posted separately to help do that]

Each has a scripture setting, a thought and then a reflection to think and pray about; and to discuss in your small group

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 17:29-31 NIV)

Paul wanted the people of his time to turn their hearts toward God and to be on the right side of Jesus' judgement. Jesus is not an abstract concept, but God made flesh who is now resurrected.

He used the belief concepts of the people to whom he addressed, to give a new narrative; not something completely new but using connections to re-appropriate the meaning to show Jesus.

He is not dead but alive! As I have shared before; if today's Christian keeps Jesus as a private faith, in the eyes of the world he is no more than a pretend friend; an inner construct to calm and comfort us.

The ignorance of our culture must be met with a similar message – that all people are God's creatures and have a duty to honour him. He is not found in gold, silver or plastic. He is not found in fame or fortune, but the invisible God becomes reality through his spirit who, still today, desires connection with his people.

Reflection: Desires for love, fulfilment and peace are God-given, so let's turn toward God who so creatively made us and the world in which we live. There is another King, it is Jesus. Let us turn to him for love, fulfilment and peace; for he is alive, and he wants his people to truly be alive too!

Action: How to find him? Turn away from the self-obsessed culture we live in that is full of worship to the physical. The culture is a worshipping culture because people were created to worship. The culture is self-obsessed because we have a desire to be loved. People still desire their own peace because we were created to be still and know God.' (see Psalm 46:10)

Prayer: King Jesus, I invite you to rule in and over my life, the life of my family and my friends. Help me to live in a way that is a good different: a life of trusting in you for everything from my basic needs to godly desires of heart and relationship with you. Be public in my life and encourage me.

ⁱ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p.337 footnote.