

SERMON OUTLINE

SERMON TITLE: Three Challenges to the Cross

SERMON REFERENCE: Acts 17:16-34

LWF SERMON NUMBER: #1278

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1) INTRODUCTION

- a) Paul was in Athens on a missionary journey.
 - i) Timothy and Silas had been left behind, and Paul was by himself.
 - ii) He was walking the streets of this intellectual capital of the world.
- b) When Paul walked down the street of that city, he saw, heard, and felt things that stirred him to the depths.
 - i) His heart was broken; but at the same time, there was an anger because he saw people peddling false religion in the streets of the city.
 - (1) He was grieved.
 - ii) The Bible says that he had a paroxysm.
 - (1) He was stirred to anger.
- c) Acts 17:16-18
- d) When Paul walked down the streets of Athens, he met three challenges to the cross.
 - i) We will meet these challenges as we walk down the streets of any city.
 - (1) The book of Acts is not mere ancient history.
 - (a) It is as up-to-date as tomorrow's news.
 - ii) Paul met the following:
 - (1) Superstitious idolatry
 - (2) Stubborn bigotry
 - (3) Sophisticated philosophy
- e) In today's message, we will look at the challenges that Paul met because we need to be forewarned.
 - i) We need to understand what we will encounter tomorrow as a soldier of Jesus Christ.
 - ii) We will see how Paul met these challenges so that we can also meet them.

2) PAUL MET SUPERSTITIOUS IDOLATRY (ACTS 17:16)

- a) Our cities and sometimes our churches are filled with idolatry.
- b) An idol is anything that we love more, serve more, fear more, and trust more than God.
 - i) If we love, serve, fear, or trust anything more than God, then we are an idolater.
 - ii) Matthew 6:33
 - (1) Not second, not third, but first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness.
 - iii) Exodus 20:3
- c) Mankind is incurably religious.
 - i) It is instinctive in man to worship because man is made in the image of God, and deep calleth unto deep.
 - (1) Psalm 42:7
 - ii) There is in every person's heart a God-shaped vacuum.
 - (1) No matter where we go, we will find people worshipping.
 - iii) If man does not worship the true God, then he will worship a false god.

- (1) Every person will worship.
- d) An idol is a magnified sinner.
 - i) Man takes his own worst desires, his own base proclivities, and he magnifies them.
 - (1) He makes a god out of them.
 - (a) His lust, greed, fears, hates, desires.
 - (2) Then, he begins to worship them.
 - (a) Romans 1:22-23
 - (3) An idol is just man's vices.
 - ii) Man deifies himself.
- e) Because man deifies himself, he is really worshipping himself when he worships his idol.
 - i) Nothing is too good for man's god.
 - (1) If a man makes a god out of money, then he worships by giving himself to that god.
- f) The man molds the idol, and then the idol molds the man.
 - i) We become like what we worship.
 - (1) When we worship God, we become like God.
 - (a) When we worship Jesus and behold His face, we are changed to the same image.
 - (2) When we worship an idol, we become like what we worship.
- g) The ancients worshipped the following gods:
 - i) "Mammon" was the god of wealth and possession.
 - (1) There are people today who worship that god.
 - (a) They are committed to riches, wealth, success, and achievement.
 - (2) There is nothing wrong with riches, but if we love riches more than God, then we serve the god "Mammon".
 - ii) "Bacchus" was the god of wine, the god of drink.
 - (1) Since they liked to drink, they made a god out of it.
 - (2) People today worship this god.
 - (a) Billions of dollars are spent paying homage to this god.
 - (b) He has temples on corners in cities where people go to worship through debauchery, drink, and drugs.
 - iii) "Aphrodite" or "Venus" was the goddess of sex.
 - (1) She stood for licentiousness and lust.
 - (2) They had temples where acts of fornication and adultery were committed to worship this god.
 - (3) That goddess is with us today.
 - (a) The Playboy empire was built upon the worship of that god.
 - iv) "Sophia" was the god of learning.
 - (1) The name "Sophia" meant wisdom.
 - (a) We get the word "sophisticated" from this word.
 - (2) There are people today who worship in the great universities.
 - (a) They bow down at the shrine of their computers.

- (b) They are proud of their learning.
 - (i) But without God, it is splendid nothingness.
 - (c) Their Bible is the science textbook.
 - (d) Their salvation is the inevitable progress of mankind.
 - (e) Their heaven is the plastic utopia that they hope to create.
 - (3) We boast of great wisdom while civilization is tumbling in on our heads.
 - (4) Today, we call the god of wisdom “intellectualism”.
 - v) “Mars” was the god of war and revenge.
 - (1) This god lusts for power and bloodshed.
 - (2) We worship that god today.
 - (a) Television programs are full of sex and violence.
 - (b) People are shot because of road rage.
 - (i) Isaiah 59:8
 - (ii) Romans 3:15
 - h) Anything that we love more, serve more, and trust more than God is an idol.
 - i) It will bring the judgment of God.
 - i) Paul walked down the streets of Athens, and he saw all of these gods.
 - i) He met in that day superstitious idolatry.
- 3) PAUL MET STUBBORN BIGOTRY (ACTS 17:17)
- a) The word “devout” here means “religious”, but religious of a different kind.
 - b) These people were not idolaters.
 - i) It was unthinkable to them that men would glorify their vices and then worship things, such as vermin, beasts, sticks, and stones.
 - ii) They were monotheists.
 - (1) They believed in the one true God, Jehovah God.
 - iii) They had the Old Testament.
 - c) Paul went into the synagogue and began to preach to them Jesus Christ, but they would not hear him.
 - i) They were so sure that they were right, and he was wrong.
 - (1) They had a stiff-necked bigotry.
 - d) The hardest person to win to Jesus Christ is the person who does not see his need for the Lord Jesus.
 - i) Many times, that person has a religious bigotry.
 - e) Normally and naturally, they should have come to Jesus Christ.
 - i) The entire Old Testament is about Jesus Christ.
 - (1) It was written to present Jesus so that when Jesus Christ was presented, they would come to Him.
 - (2) Galatians 3:24
 - (3) The Old Testament was to bring people to Jesus Christ.
 - ii) But there was a stubbornness.
 - (1) The Bible says that Paul disputed with them.
 - (a) Acts 17:17

- (2) Rather than being open to the Gospel, they were hardened and close-minded about the Gospel.
 - (a) They thought they were fine just like they were.
 - (i) They were so close but so far away.
 - f) There are many people like this today.
 - i) We talk to them about knowing Jesus Christ; and they will tell us, in no uncertain terms, that they have their religion.
 - (1) Most people need to turn from religion to Jesus Christ.
 - (a) It was a religious crowd that crucified Jesus.
 - ii) The hardest person to win is that person who doesn't see his need.
 - (1) They have a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.
 - (a) 2 Timothy 3:5
 - (2) They like what they have, and they don't want to be disturbed.
 - (a) They are settled in their minds.
 - (i) Paul met that kind of opposition to the Gospel.
- 4) PAUL MET SOPHISTICATED PHILOSOPHY (ACTS 17:18)
- a) Perhaps this was the hardest of all to deal with.
 - b) Acts 17:18
 - i) In this verse, “babblers” literally means “seed picker”, like a bird picking up seeds.
 - c) What is philosophy?
 - i) The idol “Sophia” was the goddess of wisdom or learning, and “phileo” means “lover”.
 - (1) When the words “phileo” and “Sophia” are put together, we have the word “philosophy”.
 - ii) A philosopher is a lover of wisdom.
 - (1) This is a person who takes pride in his learning.
 - d) Philosophy leaves people empty without Christ.
 - i) When the philosopher Schopenhauer got to the bottom line of his philosophy, he said that life is a curse of endless cravings and endless unhappiness.
 - ii) Bertrand Russel said that his philosophy proved to be a washout to him.
 - e) Paul encountered two kinds of philosophies in Athens:
 - i) The philosophy of the Epicureans
 - (1) Epicures lived about 300 years before Jesus.
 - (a) He taught that God doesn't exist, or that if He does exist, then we cannot know Him.
 - (i) He believed that there was no personal God.
 - (b) He believed that life has no purpose or meaning.
 - (c) He believed the wisest thing that people can do is to just feel as good as they can until they die.
 - (2) Epicureans lived for pleasure.
 - (3) We have this philosophy with us today.

- (a) Some say, “If it feels good, then do it.”
 - (4) This was the philosophy of pleasure.
 - ii) The philosophy of the Stoics
 - (1) Acts 17:18
 - (2) The Stoics were the disciples of Zeno.
 - (3) Stoics believed in pantheism.
 - (a) “Pan” means “everything”, and “Theos” means “God”.
 - (b) They believed that God is in everything, and everything is God.
 - (4) They believed that there is no personal, knowable God.
 - (5) They were materialists and felt themselves to be victims of whatever happened.
 - (a) Today, they are called humanists.
 - (6) They didn’t believe that there is a God who is imminent, working, and knowable in mankind.
 - (7) They believed that people are the sum total of their body chemistry and the environment.
 - (8) There are people like this today who believe that there is no meaning or purpose to life.
 - (a) They are just simply trying to get through.
 - f) *“There is nothing new under the sun.”*
 - i) Ecclesiastes 1:9
 - g) The Apostle Paul went to Athens long ago.
 - i) He met superstitious idolatry, stubborn bigotry, and sophisticated philosophy.
- 5) HOW PAUL MET THESE CHALLENGES (ACTS 17:19-23)
- a) Areopagus was the speaker’s forum.
 - i) They wanted something to tickle their intellectual itch.
 - (1) So, they wanted to hear what Paul would say.
 - b) In Athens, they had 30,000 gods; but in case they missed one, they had one extra called “The Unknown God”.
 - i) Paul used this to get their attention.
 - c) Paul told them just who this God is.
 - i) He is the God who created us.
 - (1) Acts 17:24
 - (2) We will not corner this God in a temple, or make Him out of sticks or stones.
 - (3) He is the great God who created all things.
 - (a) You cannot have a creation without a Creator.
 - ii) He is the God who controls us.
 - (1) Acts 17:26
 - (2) He is not some pantheistic god; He is not some distant god.
 - (3) He is a God who is active in the affairs of men.
 - (4) He is the sovereign God who watches over the affairs of the world.

iii) He is the God who convicts us.

(1) Acts 17:27-28

(2) We are made in the image of God; therefore, there is a longing to know the one true God.

(3) Psalm 14:1

(a) Not in his head but in his heart.

iv) He is the God who commands us.

(1) Acts 17:30-31

(2) There is a judgment coming.

(3) There is a God.

(a) He is not some stick or stone.

(4) This God became a man.

(a) He lived, and He died on the cross for our sins.

(b) He was buried, and He was raised again from the dead.

(c) Receive Him, and you will be saved.

(d) Reject Him, and you will stand before Him at the judgment.

(5) He is a God who commands all people everywhere to repent.

(a) If you will repent of your sins and trust Christ, then you will be saved.

d) What was the result of this?

i) Acts 17:32-34

(1) Some laughed.

(2) Some procrastinated.

(a) That is why many people will die and go to Hell.

(i) Proverbs 29:1

(ii) Proverbs 27:1

(3) But others believed.

6) CONCLUSION

a) God loves you.

i) He is the God who created you.

ii) He is the God who convicts you.

iii) He is the God who commands you, calls you, and says, "Repent, believe, and be saved."

(1) If you will trust Him, then He will save you.

b) Do you know Jesus personally? If not, you can pray to Him today by asking Him to come into your life.

c) Call upon Jesus today. Repent (turn) from your sins, and turn to Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and acknowledge Him as Lord of your life.

i) Romans 3:23

ii) Romans 10:9-10

iii) Romans 10:13

iv) Acts 16:31

v) John 3:16