

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

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Welcome to Bethel Life Center, Danice and I want to tell you how much we love you. If you are here in person or online you have picked a great Sunday to attend. If you are new to Bethel Life Center or new to the Bible, we are going through the book of Acts. The book of Acts is the 5th book of the New Testament, and it tells us how the life of Jesus Christ is being lived out in the life of Jesus followers then and today! We are in Acts 17.

The book of Acts explains how the Holy Spirit's power is present every place Christ wants you to be.

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. (Acts 17-NIV)

Dr. Hugh Morehead, a philosopher at Northeastern Illinois University, once sent out a questionnaire to 250 of the best-known philosophers, scientists, writers, and intellectuals in the world, asking them- "What is the Meaning of Life?"

He then published their responses in a book. Some offered their best guesses, some said they just made it up and many were honest with, **"Got no clue!"** In the end many asked Dr. Morehead to write back and tell them if they discovered the **meaning and purpose of life!**

Like these educators, scientists, philosophers who are honest to announce, "got no clue!" Today we are going to see how, those in Athens, who had **no clue**, meet Paul who tells them about Jesus Christ.

Our story is told by Dr Luke, the author of the book of Luke. Luke traces Paul's footsteps as he tells everyone who will listen,

“I was once lost and a religious terrorist, Jesus Christ met me on the road to Damascus, Syria and Jesus saved me. I was hell-bent on rounding up Christians and executing them by stomping out their faith in this would-be preaching and healing Messiah Jesus.

At noon I was knocked flat on my back and a voice from a bright light that made the sun look like a 40-watt bulb, called me by my Hebrew name ‘Saul, Saul.’ Shaul, Shaul.

Why are you out to get me? Stunned by the question, when he could pull himself together to ask who it was, he heard to his horror,

‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are out to get.’”

Since Jesus burst out of the grave like a guided missile, this Jesus is today on a mission to enlist all who want their sins forgiven, eternal life and those who will receive the mandate to tell the world, **“Jesus is alive.”**

Jesus told Paul, don’t arrest the boys in Damascus, join them. Don’t execute them, exalt me. Don’t drag them away to Jerusalem, go to church with them in Damascus.

So, for 14-15 years, and traveling over 15,000 miles Paul went from blind as a bat, baptized on the spot to never being the same again, and neither would the world be.

Jesus forgave Saul sins. Jesus gave Saul a charge to take this message of forgiveness of sins, to everyone who would listen. This Jesus who died to atone for your sins over 2000 years ago and offer you eternal life is the same Jesus we **exalted in worship**. The same Jesus we are **studying in scripture**. The same Jesus we **sing about** at Christmas-

Joy to the world, the Lord has come.

Hark the Herald Angels sing.

Angels we have heard on high.

Paul is a Jew, and he came to believe that Jesus was the long-predicted Messiah who had come to save God's people.

Yeshua Hamashiach means **"Jesus the Messiah."**

Yeshua Hamashiach

Paul would travel the world, and travel the world he did, over 15,000 to 17,00 miles on Roman's roads and by ship. He did this over 14-15 years. Paul planted churches like a Kansas farmer plants wheat. Whenever Paul got 10 minutes to spare, he wrote some letters back to the churches he planted- Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Thessalonians, Romans, and on.

Paul coached. He coaxed. He comforted. He even cursed those who were out to stop him. Paul bore his soul. Paul kept in touch with everyone. The postage would have been a small mint.

Today we see snapshot of Paul's time in Athens, Greece.

Paul arrives in Athens Greece, around 17-18 years after the time of Christ's death. Athens was famous for culture and education. Like our world today, cultural paganism dominated the landscape. Remember, this is the Roman-Greco period of time. This is a polytheistic culture worshipping over 3000 gods with statues, temples, and mythical gods.

Athens was a place of cultural paganism that enjoyed art, theatre and was completely absent of a moral compass. World class architecture dotted the landscape. The most famous being the temple of Parthenon.

Dedicated to the Greek goddess Athena, the Parthenon sits high atop a compound of temples known as the Acropolis of Athens. It was the largest and most lavish temple the Greek world had ever built. The city of Athens is named after this god-Athena. She is the goddess of war, wisdom, and protection.

Paul comes to a city that is **submerged, blanketed**, and held **hostage** by idols of stone.

He is not coming to a city where people are sitting around in togas, eating baklava, and asking **why do I exist?** And saying, “lets read some more Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato.

These Greeks are as lost as any person can be.

1000's of years later in universities around the world people are still reading the likes of Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato. Their thinking- belief systems still hold captive modern man.

Greek religion was a world of gods and goddesses whose ambitions acted more like humans than gods. These gods were perverted and sensual - Venus and Cupid; these gods were powerful; they roamed the earth in Roman soldier's military gear - conquering for Rome. These gods possessed a thirst for blood.

Rome splattered the earth with the blood of conquered people groups from the Jews, Britian's, Nabateans from Africa, Cleopatra of Egypt, and Greece.

There were an unlimited number of deities to choose from. Some would say there were more gods than men in Greece.

One day Paul is wrecked by a city given wholly to idolatry.

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. (Acts 17-NIV)

As Paul is making his way around the town, and like any stranger to a new town, he feels amazing Mediterranean breezes. He sees architecture that is eye popping - but the most memorable site is,

“Everywhere he turns he see statues to one of 1000's of Greek gods.” Hideous statues of mythical gods; and naked women with exposed body parts.

While these statues were beautiful and eye appealing, Paul was not seduced and he could sense in his spirit the streets, the marketplace and every person was nothing more than walking zombies to idolatry and sensualism.

Idols stared at Paul. Sensual women attempted to lure him. The sirens of spiritism roamed and moaned holding those in Athens in their clutches.

Let's read some of the text.

¹⁶ The longer Paul waited in Athens for Silas and Timothy, the angrier he got — all those idols! The city was a junkyard of idols.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ He discussed it with the Jews and other like-minded people at their meeting place. And every day he went out on the streets and talked with anyone who happened along.

He got to know some of the Epicurean and Stoic intellectuals pretty well through these conversations. Some of them dismissed him with sarcasm: "What a moron!" But others, listening to him go on about Jesus and the resurrection, were intrigued: "That's a new slant on the gods. Tell us more." (Acts 17-MSG)

Greece draws tourists by the millions today to ancient sculptures, theater, art, and architecture, but in Paul's day it was all connected to Athenian religion.

Paul knew that idolatry was demonic at the core.

As Paul is finishing off his city tour, he noticed a surprising idol, a place of worship to a God called the **"to an Unknown God."** Like Harrison Ford looking for buried treasure Paul finds such a treasure, and we read about it in verse 23.

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. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. (Acts 17)

The idolatry of Athens was symptomatic of a greater problem. The problem was that the Athenians did not know the true and living God.

So, they were worshipping other gods, mythological creatures and sensual perversion, and power. Paul was troubled because these Greeks did not know the true and living God-Jesus of Nazareth. So, they are worshiping idols of stone.

This grieved Paul. When you see how people are without hope and buried in sin, are you grieved? Does the lost condition of people distress you?

Everyone's life would be better if Jesus Christ were in the center of it. You have never looked into the face of anyone, regardless of their wealth, sexual orientation, race, rap sheet who Jesus Christ has not died for. Does your heart break for the lost?

Until you weep over the lost, you will never win over the lost.

Verse 17 tells us that Paul goes into the synagogue, worships, and preaches. *¹⁷ So he **reasoned** in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. (Acts 17-NIV)*

Notice it says that Paul reasoned with them, it is the Greek word dia-ligomay - it is our English word to dialogue.

Paul answers questions. Paul reasons from the Jewish scriptures-Genesis to Malachi. Paul told the Jews and Greeks that Jesus fulfilled all the OT prophecies.

What about the people outside the synagogue who were not Jewish? Or those who did not understand the OT? Those who did not know Jewish history.

What about the people outside the 4 walls of our church? People who drive by this church daily and have no idea, God is present, their sins can be forgiven. What about people outside the church? Paul answers this.

Paul leaves the synagogues and goes into the marketplace. Paul reasoned with those in the marketplace - as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. *¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. (Acts 17)*

And his message was simple: Paul told the most religious people of the day who worshipped thousands of gods in Athens, *"The God you seek is not far from you."*

Paul would help people learn about Jesus in the marketplace and the university. The conversation Paul has reveals how to take Jesus out of the 4 walls of Bethel.

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. (Acts 17-NIV)

Since God is not far from the Athenians, how do they have an encounter with him if they are so engrossed in pleasure and pain.

The Epicurean said, “Enjoy life,” and the Stoics said, “Endure life!”

Paul gives us clinic, a tutorial about how to introduce Jesus Christ to ancient Greek paganism and modern-day Kansas paganism. Let me suggest a couple of Pauline strategies. They come in the form of 4 questions.

Question 1: Are you willing to go to where lost people live? (Acts 17:17)

We must have conversations with people about Jesus. We can't be silent with what we know. You don't have to preach at them, just tell them how Christ has changed your life.

As Paul is having conversations in the marketplace, he meets some epicureans and stoics. People who sat around rolling joints, listening to Bob Dylan. People asking, “Who are we? What is life?” Hum. I don't know.

Question 2: Will you tell others Jesus Christ wants a personal relationship with them? (Acts 17:22-23)

²² 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.” (Acts 17:22-NIV)

Religious does not mean redeemed. Only Jesus redeems.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. (Eph 1:7-NIV)

People have a need, to know God. Since God created us in his likeness, all people have a desire to have a relationship with him. Only people have a need to have a personal relationship with Christ.

Not the animals. Not the plants. Only man because we are made in his image. God has placed his spirit in each of us. **Ruach**. In Hebrew. The animal kingdom, the plant kingdom - they are not made of the highest order. The failure to overvalue, trees, spotted owls, sea turtles, and not even your cat, they are not made in the image of God. God has placed a longing in each of us to have a personal relationship with him.

When someone does not have God, they try to fill that longing with love, fill that passion with pornography, fill that belief with babes, fill that angst with alcohol, fill that void with voodoo. Your ambition and addiction are none other than a desire to find God.

Questions 3: Do you know how to unmask the unknown god, making Jesus Christ known? (Acts 17:24-29)

Greek and Romans had over 3000 gods and they were paranoid of offending any god that they did not know. To make sure they don't miss one, they have a statue to the unknown god.

Paul capitalizes on that to tell them who Jesus is. This is the most scholarly place in the world. Even those who know it all, don't know it all. **To the unknown God**, Paul uses this inscription to open the door. Let me tell you about my Jesus. He is the answer to that unknown God.

Are you anxious, let me tell you about one who gives me perfect peace. Jehovah shalom my peace.

You have been diagnosed with cancer, let me tell you about my healer. Jehovah Rapha, my healer.

Are you struggling to make it financially, let me tell you about Jehovah Jirah my provider.

Question 4: Do you live in an awareness that time is short? (Acts 17:30-31)

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 everyone by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17-NIV)

Paul talks about repentance and judgement. You come into a personal relationship with Jesus because of repentance and then God offers you forgiveness for your sins. Turn from sin and turn to God.

You don't just fold Jesus into your current lifestyle.

That is like putting chocolate syrup on Brussel sprout. Does not work. You have to renounce Brussel sprouts. The two don't mix. I am just going to add Jesus to the way I currently live my life. **NO!**

If we only give people this feel-good message. God is like a butterfly, cuddly like a puppy, he created you like a unique snowflake. **You are wonderful as you are.** Too many people are being lied to about faith. Don't sugar coat Christianity, you can be fine just as you are. **NO!**

Jesus died on a cross and told us to run away from the life of sin and run to a life of repentance, and forgiveness, and freedom. In the final verses 32-34, they tell us that results may vary, that is a marketplace slogan. **Do your best and leave the rest.** Leave the rest to God. There are 3 responses when Paul tells them about the Lord.

Some mocked. (vs 32)

Some want to know more. (vs 32)

Some joined Paul and believed. (vs 33-34)

There were 3 responses, and this is the way it will be. When you share about Jesus, give your testimony. These were our opening verses. (1) Some will mock you. Persecution comes with our faith. (2) Others will be investigators and seekers, who want more study, research, and time. Some are curious. I am not sure I believe yet, I want to know more. (3) And the last group are those who will believe. They say YES!

How can I start a relationship with Jesus? Paul faced these groups and so do we. All we need to do is our part. Our part is: (1) we are either planting the seed

or (2) watering the seed. That someone else planted. It is God who gives the increase. God who saves the soul.

Sometimes people will say to me, “Pastor Ken, you saved me.” I understand what you mean, but Jesus saved you, not me. I have never saved anyone. God does the saving, I do the planting, watering and maybe harvesting. But not saving.

You will carry out God’s purposes however you act but choose being John the beloved and not Judas Iscariot.

To me choice is self-evident. God made us in his image, and a part of that image is the privilege and responsibility to choose.

¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (Josh 24-NIV)

God took a risk of unimaginable proportions when He trusted our parents and us with free will.

God gave choice to Adam and Eve

Choice is a function of Adam and Eve’s will. God also has a will. Satan also has a will, and it is opposed to God.

²⁶ and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:26-NIV)

Your will is what makes you in the image of God, it is the property of an intelligent and eternal person. Choice is central to personality. God is intelligent, eternal, creative, communicative, and free to choose.

While we are not made in the image of God to possess God’s omni qualities, we do possess God’s qualities that are finite to us. We think because God thinks, we communicate because God communicates, we speak because God speaks, we create because God creates, (having kids), and we choose because God chooses.

From the beginning of God's creation, God knew what choices angels and humans would make under what circumstances, and while God could have intervened to stop or redirect them from sinning, God gave them the right, the option to choose freely.

Otherwise, we would be nothing more than droids, zombies, or robots.

Adam and Eve freely chose to sin.

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2-NIV)

God has made it blindingly clear; you are free to choose which tree to eat from. Hundreds of trees filled Eden, but God prohibited eating from the Google tree.

God has made it blindingly clear; you can eat from an orchard of options but do not eat from the Google tree.

The text would make no sense, if God required Adam and Eve to make a sinful choice. That would mean that God could partake in evil of which God cannot.

For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. (James 1-NIV)

Satan influenced them, later sin would do the influencing but does not control them. Humans choose to exert their own free will against God's will.

God in his sovereignty did orchestrate the circumstances in the garden in which sin entered the world.

(1) God could have given the right to choose with no prohibition.

(2) God could have made the fruit unattractive.

(3) God could have kept the devil out of the garden.

(4) God could have created a garden with no temptation and even kept Adam and Eve from sinning.

God Did NOT!

God did not cause them to sin. That would have made God a violator of his own command. It would also make God unjust, for if he forced Adam and Eve to sin, how could God hold them and us responsible and accountable?

God's word says that God does not tempt anyone. (James 1:13)

God said to Eve, "What is this you have done?" (Genesis 3:13), not, "What did Satan make you do?" or "What did I cause you to do?"

Adam, Eve, Satan, and God all made real choice and God judged and continues to judge them according to his standard of holiness.

Someone has said, "The choices that you make will one day make you."

God has created a universe where his creation can choose between good and evil. God's creation can choose freely to do evil, yet God did not surrender his sovereignty for a moment.

76-year-old Liviu Librescu tighter aerospace engineering at Virginia Tech. On April 16, 2007, when a homicidal gunman tried to enter his classroom, Librescu managed to barricade the door, giving all but one of the 20 students time to escape out of the window.

The killer shot Librescu five times, and the final shot to his head killed him. A Holocaust survivor, Librescu chose to stand between his students and the mass murderer, giving his life for them on all days-Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Whether Professor Librescu was a follower of Christ, we do not know, but he made a choice to save his students on a day when an evil killer took the lives of 32 people. In the face of death Liviu, made a brave, courage's, meaningful and eternally consequential choice.

What made his choice biblical, sovereign and life altering, is that he could have chosen differently. While his wife might have said, "wrong choice, save

yourself husband.” The parents of the students saved said, “right choice, I will be eternally grateful for the professors selfless act of sacrifice.”

Father,

Give me eyes to see the lost. Give me a passion to love the lost. Give me a heart that breaks for the lost. Give me a will to win the lost. Give me a mouth to tell the lost about Jesus!

In Jesus’ Name, Amen.