

April 22, 2018

One Message for Many Peoples

Acts 17:16 – 18:11

Intro

➤ *Freedom from anxiety, shame, & conflict: willing to be adjusted*

- Easter launched a mission to reach every nation, culture, and religious system.

The Gospel Confronts Assumptions in Every Culture

- Paul engages people who have existing ideas and beliefs.

“Gospel Intelligibility”

Jews

“Judeo-Christian Worldview”

*“Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.”
(Acts 18:5)*

Greco-Romans

Philosophers, Polytheists, & Pluralists

✚ Epicureans & Stoics

- Paul’s message was the same whether he was speaking to Jews or Greeks. But what he emphasized or took time to develop differed.

“A missionary to Japan or Thailand or north India would have to learn not only another language or two but also another culture. No less important, they would have to begin their evangelism farther back, because many of their hearers would have no knowledge of the Bible at all and would tenaciously hold to some worldview structures that were fundamentally at odds with the Bible. The best schools gave such training to their missionary candidates. But pastors and campus workers were rarely trained along such lines. After all, they were doing nothing more than evangelizing people who shared their own cultural assumptions, or at least people located in the same domain of discourse, weren’t they? We were naive, of course.”
–D.A. Carson, “Athens Revisited,” *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, 385

➤ *A Bible-Belt church planter in the Pacific Northwest*

- When we engage people in a post-Christian setting, we can’t just jump to Christ being the answer to a problem they don’t think they have.

“Gospel Credibility”

- Christianity challenges *every* culture. But depending on the time and place, it might do so for different reasons.
 - *“Love your enemies” in the West vs. the East*

Stumbling Block to Jews: Suffering Savior who calls you to Submit

“We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews” (1 Cor. 1:23)

“Christian values were always more popular in American culture than the Christian gospel. That’s why one could speak of ‘God and country’ with great reception in almost any era of the nation’s history but would create cultural distance as soon as one mentioned ‘Christ and him crucified.’ ...We cannot build Christian churches on a sub-Christian gospel. People who don’t want Christianity don’t want almost-Christianity.”
–Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*, 6, 5

Folly to Gentiles: Real Resurrection

- For Greeks, to claim that someone has come back from the dead in bodily form was not just to say something unbelievable—it was almost *immoral*.

- Paul doesn't flinch from preaching the resurrection. He uses the one word that makes their skin crawl! While Paul adjusts his approach in sharing the Gospel in different contexts, he never adjusts the Gospel.

The Gospel Claims Authority over Every Culture

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. 28:18-19)

- Paul announces in the Areopagus what they do not know (v. 23) and calls them to change their beliefs.
- Today, it doesn't feel affirming or loving to "impose" your viewpoint on someone else. ...But the reality is, everyone does this.
 - *The Blind Men & the Elephant*
- To say "everyone has some version of the truth" is actually an exclusive view!
 - *British Prime Minister Theresa May's announcement*

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world" (Acts 17:30-31)

- Paul's spirit was "provoked" by their idolatry. Do you ever experience this concern and inner disturbance about the falsehood that holds people captive?

The Gospel Creates Access in Every Culture

"Gospel Plausibility"

"In him we live and move and have our being" - common saying in the Greek world

"We are his offspring" (Poet Aratus, 315-240 BC)

- Humanity knows God at one level and tries to avoid him on another level (Rom. 1). All cultural artifacts express the truth and suppress the truth.

Mind: Deconstructing Worldviews

- He points out the inconsistencies in their thinking. “If God made you, how can you make God?”
- Paul presses on their perceived self-sufficiency.

Heart: Speaking to Longings

- We create idols out of our own insecurities. But they are poor God-substitutes. They can never deliver what they promise. They just take, and never give.

“...nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:25)

“Let’s listen to what our culture is saying, hearing beneath the veneer of cool the fear of a people who know that Judgment day is coming because it’s written in their hearts (Rom. 2:15-16). Let’s listen beneath the cynicism to the longings there, expressed in the culture, longings that can only be fulfilled in the reign of a Nazarene carpenter-king. Let’s deconstruct what they—and we—tell ourselves when it’s nonsense. But let’s not stop there. Let’s run toward and not away from the strangeness of an old gospel of a Messiah who was run out of his own hometown, but who, oddly enough, walked out of his own graveyard.”

–**Russell Moore**, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*, 90

The Gospel Continues to Advance in Every Culture

- Paul’s vision in Corinth: “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking...” (18:9).

“Likely it is the reputation of the city that frightened him. At least in Athens they were interested in debating ideas, and Paul could speak of Jesus and the resurrection and get a hearing. But not in Corinth! The youth in particular were more interested in sex and sport than in talking about religion.” –**Derek Thomas**, *Acts*, 512

“Gospel Opportunity”

- The sovereign God who sets the boundaries of nations and cultures *has* people in every nation and culture!