

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

ACTS 17:22-23 • TV145A

A television broadcast sermon delivered
SUNDAY, MAY 31ST, 1981

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Transcribed, edited and published
MAY 1ST, 2014

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Zebulon Baptist Church
6088 Zebulon Highway
Pikeville, KY 41501

Acts 17:22-23

“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”

I’m reading this morning from the **Book of Acts, chapter 17: verses 22-23.**

The title of the message today is: **“THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS.”**

In **Acts Chapter 17:22** the Scripture says: *“Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill, and said, ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious, (that is most religious).*

Paul said: *“Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are most religious. I passed by and beheld (your shrines, your altars, and the tributes to the gods which you worship) I found among them*

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an altar with this inscription, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD: whom therefore, ye ignorantly worship (or recognize and honor) him declare I unto you."

Now, like the people of Athens, the people of America are most religious. Like the city of Athens our cities are filled with churches, shrines, altars, sects, and cults of every variety. Like the men of Athens, the men and women of America have many different ideas about who God is and how God is to be worshipped.

Like the city of Athens, somewhere, in all of this praise, fad, traditions, motions and enthusiasm about religion, somewhere there is a revelation, somewhere there is a true Word, somewhere in this religious atmosphere, there is an understanding of the true and the living God.

Paul addressed these philosophers of Athens and he said: "I perceive that you are a most religious people. I have walked up and down the streets of your cities and I've seen the shrines and altars and temples that you have erected to your many gods."

He said: "I have found one shrine, one altar in the midst of all these other tributes to gods and inscribed on that altar were these words: **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. In case we have left out some god, here is a shrine and altar to the **UNKNOWN GOD**."

He said: "*Him* (who you ignorantly recognize, him whom you ignorantly honor, him whom you ignorantly worship), *declare I unto you*."

In **1 John Chapter 5:20**, John said: "*and we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding*." That's what I am saying, somewhere in all of this religious tradition and all of this religious enthusiasm there is an understanding.

There is somebody with a revelation. "*God hath not left himself without a witness*." There is somebody with a revelation. There is somebody with an understanding of the true God. This is what John is talking about in **1 John 5:20**:

"And we know that the Son of God has come and hath given us and understanding that we may know him that is true, that we may know him that is true and that we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the true God; this is eternal life."

Now, I speak for myself and I hope I speak for you. I am not content with the traditions and customs of my fathers. I am not content with the religious customs and traditions that have been handed down by generations.

"My soul, (like that of David), panteth after the living God." I am not satisfied with the hoop-la and the enthusiasm and the emotional zeal of today's religious cheerleaders.

I speak for myself and I hope for you to. "*I want to win Christ and be found in him. I want to know him and the power of his resurrection*." Paul said: "*That I may win Christ and be found in him*."

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I am not persuaded that a way is right because everyone is walking that way. I am not persuaded that a thing is right because everybody is doing it. I don't think that we prove anything is right by the multitudes that follow that way.

I must search the Scriptures *"to see if these things be so."* Let every message and every activity of our churches be proven by the Word of God. *"Try the spirits whether they be of God. Let God be true and every man a liar."*

Let God be true and the multitude liars. Let God be true and the masses liars. Isaiah said, *"If they speak not according to the word of God, it is because there is no light in them."*

Paul said: *"Whom, therefore, (you ignorantly honor, whom, therefore, you ignorantly recognize) this unknown God, him declare I unto you."*

I feel like that is the message for this day. I walk down the city streets, the streets of our little towns and suburbs and communities, there are all kinds of churches, and all kinds of ideas about who God is and how God is to be worshipped.

I think of Him whose Bible is in every home and every motel and every filling station and in every church building but seldom read, and even more seldom believed, *"him declare I unto you,"* Him whose cross is superstitiously declared this day, not only on church steeples but around people's necks, on the walls of our homes.

Him whose cross is superstitiously displayed, but rarely understood and more rarely preached, *"declare I unto you,"* Him whose name is on every tongue, yes Jesus of Nazareth. Him, whose name is on every tongue most of the time in profanity but sometimes in mocked praise, *"him, declare I unto you."*

Him whose house is now a place of entertainment, merchandise, social gathering and business enterprises, but seldom a house of prayer, how long has it been, seldom a house of worship, and seldom a house of praise, *"declare I unto you."*

If I can find someone with an ear to hear (and our God says): *"let him that hath an ear to hear,"* hear what the Spirit of God saith to the churches, if I can find somebody whose eyes long to see the beauty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

If I can find someone who can say with David: *"my heart, my soul panteth, (diligently panteth, yearneth) to see and to hear from the living God,"* I believe I have a message of truth and grace and I call it the message of the Gospel and the message of His cross.

Here are seven things for you to consider. If you would like to, write them down, but listen carefully as I give them to you one at a time. Here are seven things that I believe that tell us what the message of the Gospel really is, this true Gospel of God's Son, this Gospel of redeeming grace, this Gospel of God's glory, this Gospel concerning God's Son.

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There's not another gospel. Paul said, *"Though we or an angel preach unto you any other gospel than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."* Here's that Gospel and here's the message of that Gospel, presented under seven headings:

First of all: Now listen to this: the religion of the Gospel arises from a right knowledge of God and of ourselves!

Pharaoh once said to Moses: *"who is the Lord?"* That's a good question: *"Who is the Lord that I should obey him?"* The heathen said to David: *"where is your God?"*

The heathen says: *"We know where our god is, our god is where we put him. Our god is where we left him. Our god is in the little house that we have built for him. We keep him there all the time. We go to see him once in a while on holidays or special days or holy days."*

"Where's your God David, where is your God?" Christ said to the disciples: *"Whom do they, (the multitude), say that I am?"* When the disciples answered, he said, *"Well whom do you say that I am."* Who is Jesus Christ, who is God almighty?

The message of the Gospel arises from a right knowledge of God. Our Lord said: *"This is eternal life that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."*

When God almighty revealed himself to Moses, Moses asked this: *"when I go down to Egypt now to deliver the people. When I go and tell them the God of your fathers of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, sent me to deliver you from Egypt and from bondage, they are going to ask me, what's his name, what is the name of this God who sent you, what am I going to say?"*

The Lord God spake to Moses and said: *"you tell them I AM that I AM."* That's His eternity. Our God is, was, and always has been, and always will be, *"I AM."* *"Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."* That's what David replied.

When the heathen said: *"now, where's your God;"* we know where our god is; our god is where we left him. Our god is on the little throne we built for him. We designed it especially for him.

"Now where's your God?" David stretched out his hands and he said: *"Our God is in the heavens, (the heaven of heavens won't contain him). The earth is his footstool. He considereth the inhabitants of the world as grasshoppers."*

He hangs the earth upon nothing. *"He hath done whatsoever he pleased. Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."*

Our God is not only eternal, our God is sovereign, absolutely, immutably, unchangeably sovereign, not only in creation and providence, but in salvation.

Isaiah said: *"I saw the Lord."* Let's call in Isaiah as a witness; who is the Lord Isaiah? *"I saw the Lord, in the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord high and lifted up and his train filled the*

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temple and the cherubim's and seraphim's of glory covered their faces and covered their ears and cried, holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, holy, holy, holy."

Our God is holy. *"True and righteous are his judgments."* A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of His blessed kingdom. Our Lord is righteous, true, holy, and just, but our God is merciful. John said: *"He is love."*

That led David to cry: *"When I consider the heavens, the work of thy hands, (when I consider thy eternity, when I consider thy majesty, thy sovereignty, thy holiness, thy righteousness, truth and love), what is man that thou art mindful of him?"*

Well, what is man? He is everything God is not. Man is dead and God is life. Man is darkness and God is light. Man is sin and God is holy. Man is evil and God is good. Man is hate and God is love. Man is a lie and God is truth. Man is mortal and God is immortal.

"Man at his best state is altogether vanity." Job said: *"How can a man be just with God? Behold the moon it shineth not, the stars are not pure in God's sight: How much more abominable and filthy is man that drinketh iniquity like the water."*

Yes, the true religion of the Gospel arises out of a sense of the holiness, the majesty and awesomeness, unchangeableness, immutability, eternity, sovereignty, the character of the holy God and also a sense of our own guilt and shame and unworthiness.

Secondly: The religion of the Gospel arises from a sense of the great things that God has done for fallen sinners through His grace and His mercy

You know, in the **Book of Ephesians chapter 2**, when Paul describes the fall of man and the sin of man and the darkness and depth that has gripped us and enslaved us and put us in bondage, he says, *"but God, who is rich in mercy for his great love, wherewith, he loved us."*

We didn't love him; he loved us! *"Herein is love, not that we love God, but he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* We love him; yes, every believer loves God because *"he first loved us."*

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love, wherewith, he loved us, even when we were dead in sin hath quickened us together with Christ: By grace are you saved."

It was God's grace that purposed to redeem a people. It was God's grace that sent Christ into the world as our Substitute, as our Representative, as our Saviour, as our atonement. It was God's grace that suffered our rebellion and in His long suffering He put up with our sins and waited to call us *"in the day of his good pleasure."*

It was God's grace that called us by His Spirit and awakened us and quickened us and brought us forth to life and led us to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. It was God's grace that has preserved us to this day:

**“Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved,
How precious would that grace appear?
The hour I first believed.”**

It’s by his grace I’ve come thus far and it will be His grace that will lead me home for God in His grace will one day raise our vile bodies and He said in **Philippians chapter 3**: *“make them like unto his glorious body.”*

So, this religion of the Gospel arises out of a deep sense of the great things that God has done for fallen sinners through His mercy and grace in Christ Jesus.

Thirdly: The religion of the Gospel produces a well-grounded hope!

Now, the Bible talks about salvation as a hope, a hope in Christ. He has given us a good hope, a blessed hope. He has given us a living hope. This Gospel of redemption, this religion of the Gospel produces a well-grounded hope based on the Word of God and of our saving interest in Jesus Christ.

Job said: *“I know that my redeemer liveth.”* Whatever has happened or whatever will happen, there is one thing I know: *“the root of matter is in me; I know that my redeemer liveth.”* I know that!

David said: *“The Lord is my shepherd.”* Again he said: *“The Lord is my rock, the Lord is my fortress, and the Lord is my salvation.”* Paul said: *“I know whom I have believed. I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.”* John said: *“We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.”*

All assurance is the result of faith in Christ and all assurance is based on the Word of God. Assurance is drawn from a saving interest in Christ. He’s the object of faith.

Faith itself does not give assurance; the Lord gives it and it is based on every promise of his Word. *“Abraham believed God that he was able to perform all that he promised.”*

Fourthly: The religion of the Gospel produces a principle, a principle of sincere love to Him *“who first loved us”*

“We love him because he first loved us.” This principle of love reigns in the heart of every believer and this love for Christ leads men to worship Christ.

Men do not worship God unless they love God. This principle of love for Christ constrains His people and restrains them. This principle of love for Christ makes us serve Christ.

He sat down by the fire one day and looked at His disciple Peter and said: *“do you love me?”* Peter said: *“You know that I love you.”* He asked him a second time: *“Peter, do you love me? Lord; you know I love you.”*

He asked him a third time: *“do you love me?”* He said: *“Lord; you know all things.”* He was grieved that the Master should ask him the third time, *“Do you love me?”* He said: *“You know all things; you know I love you. Feed my sheep; feed my lambs.”*

Love for Christ makes us serve Christ. Love for Christ *“casteth out fear.”* There’s fear of condemnation, fear of separation, fear of death, and fear of men.

Love for Christ causes men to love Christ’s people. You can’t love Christ and not love His people. *“Whosoever is born of God loves Christ and loveth those who are begotten of Christ. He that loveth not knoweth not God. God is love.”*

Love for Christ causes people to love His Word; they delight in His Word. They long to hear His Word preached. They love His commandments:

**“I love thee Lord; I love thee in life; I love thee in death
I love thee as long as you give me breath
And I will say when the death’s dew lies cold on my brow
Whenever I love thee, my Jesus is now.”**

Fifthly: The religion of the Gospel consists of a total surrender of us to Christ Jesus as our Lord and King!

Now, when all of this misfortune had come into the life of Job; he had lost everything he had. God permitted Satan to take it away. Even his town’s people, his friends, had turned against him and his servants had turned against him. Even little children laughed at him on the street.

Finally, his wife came and she said: *“why don’t you just curse God and die.”* Listen to what the old man said in the face of all this trial and tribulation, agony, and misfortune; he said: *“though he slay me; I will trust him.”* This is what Job declared.

Listen to Joshua, he said: *“as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”* Listen to Eli; they came to Eli and said: *“Eli, God has pronounced judgment upon your sons. These young men have offered strange fire upon the altar of God; God is going to slay them.”*

Eli replied: *“It’s the Lord; let him do what he will.”* My friend; this is what I am saying: if Jesus Christ is not your Lord He is certainly not your Saviour because He is the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

You can’t have half a Saviour. You can’t have half a Redeemer. You can’t have Christ and some of His offices and reject the rest; He is Prophet, Priest, and King! *“We are not our own; we are bought with a price.”*

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The redeemed of the world have been conquered. They are now bond-slaves of the Son of God. That's the way Paul liked to refer to himself; *"I'm a bond-slave of Jesus Christ."*

What is a bond-slave? It's a willing, loving, bond-slave. It's a willing, loving, obedient, servant. Thomas summed it up when he fell at his feet and lifted his eyes into the face of God and said: *"my Lord and my God."*

That's the solution for the rest of life. That's the solution for every promise. That's the solution for every conflict. Thomas recognized that Jesus Christ was His Lord.

That happened to Saul on the road to Damascus. There was no conflict after that. He looked into the face of Jesus Christ the Lord and he said: *"Lord; what will you have me do? You are my Lord and I am your servant; say what you will and I will do it. Your will is my command. Lord; what will you have me to do?"*

That's the gateway to the kingdom of God. **Romans 10** says: *"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be Lord and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."*

Sixth: The religion of the Gospel; carefully listen to this now, makes the goodness and grace of God to be, to be the motive and model of my attitude and conduct and behavior toward you.

That's what the Scripture says. Listen to this: *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."* Listen to this in **Ephesians 4:32**: *"Be ye kind, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake, forgave you."*

What I am saying is this; if you have been a partaker of the mercy of God you will yourself be merciful. If you have been a recipient of God's love, God's undeserved love, God's unmerited mercy, then you will certainly learn how to give that which you yourself have received.

How can you be hard upon someone who owes you so little when God has forgiven you and me of so much? *"Be ye kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."*

So, the goodness of God, to me and to you, is mercy to us in our sin and affliction and infirmity and is the model and is the motive of my attitude, not only my conduct: "I will forgive you but I won't forget it." That's not the right attitude. Suppose God says: "I forgive you but I won't forget it." God has not only forgiven our sins *"but has cast them behind his back to remember them no more."*

Seventh: The religion of the Gospel presses upon men; it's an active principle; it's a nature, the Holy Spirit within; it's a new creature in Christ Jesus.

It's not just an outward profession or a mental assent to some facts or a decision, a religious decision, but this religion of the Gospel presses upon men three goals, all of them unattainable in this life. We

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will never fully realize one of these goals in life but the seed is planted. The principle is there and the root is there and it begins to grow.

Now, here are these three goals:

First: Total commitment to Jesus Christ; that's exactly what the believer wants above all things, total commitment to Jesus Christ.

The disciples said: *"Lord, to whom shall we go; thou hast the words of eternal life."* Paul said: *"I know whom I have believed. I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."*

Second: Total communion with Christ; that's what the believer wants, total, complete, perfect communion with Christ!

That's what Paul is saying: *"O that I may know him."* Don't you know Him Paul? "Yes, but I want to know him better."

Thirdly: Total conformity to Jesus Christ!

That's the three goals of a believer, total commitment to Christ, total communion with Christ, total conformity to Christ. David said: *"I shall be satisfied when I awake with his likeness."* That's when I will be complete; that's when I will be happy, thoroughly, completely happy.

Until then everything else is judged in its relationship to that total conformity to Jesus Christ. Everything else falls in that picture; I'm going to be like Christ! *"He that hath this hope in him (that he's going to be like Christ); he purifieth himself even as Christ is pure!"*