

## Acts 17:24-32

### "Christ and the intellectual set"

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. <sup>(25)</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

<sup>(26)</sup> "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. <sup>(27)</sup> God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. <sup>(28)</sup> 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

<sup>(29)</sup> "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 man's design and skill. <sup>(30)</sup> In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>(31)</sup> 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 all men by raising him from the dead.'

<sup>(32)</sup> "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.'"

You may be thinking:

**"Why should I pay attention to a preacher who is talking about something that happened 2000 years ago?"**

**In about a month the spring equinox occurs.**

**First buds and blossoms appear—the Lord wiling.**

**Animals quit hibernation and their shivered huddles.**

Some churches will observe Ash Wednesday this week.

On Tuesday, some will celebrate Mardi Gras, French for "fat Tuesday."

**Easter is on its way.**

There's a rarely-recognized fact about Easter.

**Easter and Halloween share something in common.**

**Before you start to wonder whether I'm mentally derailed, I'll explain.**

Years ago, some L.A. friends sent us a Halloween card with a cartoon showing a park ranger opening his door to a grizzly bear.



**That mammoth beast holds a trick-or-treat sack.**

**The cartoon caption reads: 'Every Halloween,**

**Ranger Bob faced the same dilemma...maybe it was a big kid in a bear costume, maybe it wasn't.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> © Hallmark Cards, Inc.

We all face something scarier than a grizzly outside.  
That grizzly isn't outside; it's inside our house.  
We never know where we'll encounter that "foe."  
Wherever we live, we share space with this huge grizzly.

You are likely thinking:

"Bob, where are you going with this subject?"

Did you notice how today's text ended?

Some of those people in Athens said to Paul the preacher:

"We want to hear you again on this subject;"

that subject being the resurrection.

It appears those people in Athens thought: "Maybe this stranger has discovered how to get rid of the grizzly."

The scholar H. E. Dana wrote: "The entire first century world went to school at Hellas--and the world has not yet quit going to school at Hellas."<sup>2</sup>

A quick explanation about the term "Hellas:"

By "Hellas" the scholar meant Greek culture, language, and influence.

"How has Greek culture affected me?" you ask.

It's touched you in ways you might not recognize.

We fall in love, but the one we fall in love with isn't quite as smitten and says, "Let's just be friends."

No lover wants to hear those four words.

When two people of opposite sexes are simply friends, some call it a "Platonic relationship."

As you know, Plato was a Greek philosopher.

So you have been affected by Hellas, haven't you?

Dr. Wade Ruby used to speak of a young man to whom a girl wanted their relationship to be Platonic:

"It might be play to you," he said "but it's tonic to me."

To more serious matters; Greeks influence our architecture. Many of the world's great buildings have columns of Doric, Ionian, or Corinthian design – all Greek forms.

One of Nashville's most popular tourist attractions is a replica of the Greek Parthenon in Athens.

The Greeks practiced a democratic form of government and Plato wrote a book entitled "The Republic."

Some people connect heaven with "boring" harp music.

Both country and gospel music feature guitars.

Our word guitar can be traced to Greek "kithara," often translated *harp* in the Bible.

Miss heaven and you might miss out on some "far-out" guitar music.



We have Olympic Games patterned after contests the Greeks held during their prime.

Seen a doctor lately?

He or she probably took an oath to follow the ideals and ethics of the Greek physician Hippocrates (460-370 BC).

Greek philosophy influences present life to greater extents than most people realize.

<sup>2</sup> H. E. Dana The New Testament World, p- 178

Many folks still embrace Epicurean and Stoic (Greek) philosophies.



The original Parthenon stood on an imposing hill called the Acropolis.

Greek philosophers often called Athens home.

A prestigious council met on Mars Hill or the Areopagus.

The group later began meeting in the market place—sort of like moving to a more convenient location downtown.

Was hard for some of the old guys to walk up the hill?

Though downtown, but they were still called Areopagites.

Before Jesus' time, the Romans conquered the Greeks.

The Romans allowed the Mars Hill guys to meet.

That prestigious group gathered to discuss serious and weighty issues—but they mostly just talked, and talked.

The Apostle Paul visited Athens about 52 AD.

At Philippi (Northern Greece) Paul and Silas had been severely beaten and jailed.

At the next city, Thessalonica, a mob tried to kill him.

Paul got a better reception in a town called Berea, but the mob from Thessalonica came to Berea and tried to finish him.

The brothers sent Paul to Athens for a little quiet R & R.

Paul visited a few synagogues in Athens to tell Jewish people about Jesus.

He also browsed the Agora or marketplace downtown.

He got an invitation to talk to the Mars Hill group—those Greek intellectuals in Athens.

Athens was named for the Greek goddess Athene.

A huge statue of Athene stood near the Parthenon.

Athene posed with a spear raised so high that sailors at sea forty miles away caught the rays of the sun on the point of that spear.

Five centuries after Jesus, the notorious Goths came to invade Athens, it's said that when their soldiers first saw that image, they scattered like cowards.

The Greeks filled Athens with idols and temples dedicated to various gods, many with obscene, pornographic-like images.

Seeing all of those images and temples, Paul saw an opportunity to speak about God and Jesus' resurrection.

In Athens, they developed world class architecture that designers still try to imitate.

Athletes worked out at gymnasiums, another Greek word, and developed muscular male (pecs, abs, biceps, etc.) and alluring female bodies, extraordinary in every way.

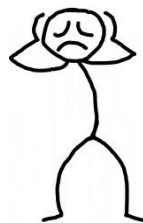
But grizzlies inhabited the homes of all architects and athletes.

Aeschylus, Euripides, and Aristophanes wrote poetry and plays dealing with life's serious issues.

They produced tragedies and comedies for all.

But the grizzlies wouldn't leave them or their audiences.

The Epicureans and the Stoics formulated lifestyles to help folks deal with pain and life's challenges.



### The grizzly would not go away.

Decades ago, Harry L. Newman, of the Illinois Institute of Technology . . . compiled a timetable of worriers (It probably hasn't changed much).

Newman secured his data from questionnaires filled out by 103 other psychologists. Results showed that our chief worries at age 18 are idealism and personal appearance; at 20, appearance; at 23, morality; and at 26, making a good impression. After the thirties, our worries follow another pattern. At 41, political convictions; 42, marital difficulties; 45, giving up ambitions. Over 45, this survey found, we worry mostly about death.<sup>3</sup>

**The big grizzly death haunts every house, tent, and bedroll.**

**Demosthenes asked his countrymen: "Do you like walking about and asking one another: 'Is there any news?'"<sup>4</sup>**

**We always want to know the latest news. Checking the news is like asking, "Do you know where the grizzly is now?"**

**Centuries after Demosthenes, the Mars Hill guys still walked around discussing some "new thing." (Kainos)**

"Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21 NRSV).

**Acts uses the same term for new that Demosthenes used.**

**We still demand to hear news alerts and late-breaking news.**

We still ask: **"What's the latest news?"**

**The news never changes: "It's still about the grizzly."**

So this Jewish preacher who spoke Greek and Hebrew walked through a city filled with idols and temples dedicated to war gods, fertility gods, mountain gods, sky gods, and sea gods.

The Mars Hill intellectuals and professors invited Paul to speak.

**Paul used three key words pertaining to the grizzly.**

**God commands: "all people everywhere to repent."**

Often in worship programs, you see: **"Words of Assurance."**

**We all like to hear reassurance.**

So I might stand up here and say: "You're doing fine. You are all okay. The Lord accepts and loves you just as you are."

I could impart a blessing. "The Lord bless you and keep you..."

But I'd be neglecting something because you probably walked in here today troubled about something going on in your life—perhaps an issue with a loved one you've been avoiding.

Maybe a habit has a hold of you that you haven't confronted.

**Perhaps you carry bitterness you won't let go.**

If I simply say, "God loves you the way you are."

**Go in peace," I'd be deceiving you.**

<sup>3</sup> ON LIVING WITH YOURSELF, Charles M. Crowe, pp. 167, 168

<sup>4</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Book of Acts*, p – 352. Other sources re: Athens include: *The Compact Handbook of New Testament Life*, E.M. Blaiklock Bethany House pp. 82, 83. Edith Hamilton, *The Echo of Greece*



If we expect God's forgiveness, we must forgive.  
If we want God's mercy, we've got act mercifully.  
We gain peace with God by quitting doing wrong.  
"God commands all people everywhere to repent."

**Judgment:** For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

One day we shall be called before the Lord for judgment.

**On what basis will He judge us?**

Not by any of the 4000 laws issued by folks in Rome.

Not by laws devised by Protestant leaders, political elites, newspaper editors, Hollywood producers, or talking heads.

**As God's word says:**

"By works of law shall no person be justified," Romans 3:20.

After we accept what God did for us in Christ, He expects us to follow the life-example Jesus gave us.

Are you ready for another reading assignment to know what Christ expects?

Matthew 25 would be a good start.

**The 3rd key word: resurrection,**

**"He has given proof of this to all men by raising him (Jesus) from the dead."**

Paul wasn't teaching immortality of the soul.

The Greeks believed in immortality of the soul; the new thing to them was **resurrection**.

**Paul meant this:** when Jesus arose from death, he mortally wounded the *grizzly* and he, death, won't survive the Judgment.

When Jesus returns for the Judgment, the bully will be gone forever: **"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."**<sup>5</sup>

You've likely read of *Revelation's* lake of fire.

After all people are judged by what they have done, death and Hades will be **"thrown into the lake of fire."**<sup>6</sup>

If you have repented and trusted Jesus, he'll bring you out of the grave the same way Jesus came out.

I love the story about a little boy who was constantly bullied by bigger kid.

One day as the bully approached the little boy, he stood his ground. The amazed bully asked,

"Why aren't you running scared as usual?"

The little boy replied confidently,

**"Look behind you. See my big brother standing there? He's tougher than you ever hope to be."**

**Our elder brother Jesus defeated death for us.**

**Turn to him today and trust him.**

**He will bring you peace, joy, and confidence now.**

**And in the resurrection, immortality.**<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15: 26 NIV

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 20:14 NIV

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:50-57, especially verses 53 & 54.