Sharing Jesus in a Post-Christian World
Session 5
February 22, 2026

Jesus Shared

The Point: Our daily connections with people can be opportunities to share Jesus.
Session Passages: Acts 17:16-18,22-23,30-31

Acts 17:16-18
Connection to the Point: Paul took every opportunity to share the gospel.

Context. In the previous session we discussed Paul's principle of personal accommodation for preaching in differing cultural and religious environments (1 Cor. 9:22). His strategy did not compromise the message, but looked for common ground with his listeners upon which to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Acts 17:15, Paul found himself waiting for Silas and Timothy in the Greek city of Athens. There he applied his strategy in one of the most challenging places he ever could have imagined.

Athens (v. 16). The city of Athens was named for its patron, Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, war, and craftsmanship. By the first century A.D. Athens was no longer the great city of its "golden age" of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. Its population was only about 10,000 citizens and immigrants from around the Roman Empire. Nonetheless, it still held a place of prestige as an intellectual, artistic, religious, and cultural center in the Mediterranean world.

Deeply distressed (v. 16). Athens was a center of pagan religious devotion with art and magnificent temples dedicated to the Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses. For Paul, the scene was unsettling seeing how the city was full of idols. Paul was deeply distressed. The Greek term indicates the apostle was furious and sick to his stomach.

Reasoned in the synagogue (v. 17). Paul followed his usual strategy when entering a new city. He first went to the local Jewish synagogue. Synagogues were places where Jews assembled, worshiped, and studied in towns and cities throughout the Mediterranean world. Tradition has it that a synagogue could be established wherever at least ten Jewish men were settled. Paul went to synagogues to share the gospel of Jesus Christ using Old Testament Scriptures which Jesus fulfilled. He usually got mixed responses.

Those who worshiped God (v. 17). This phrase refers to God-fearers, non-Jews who believed in the one, true God but for whatever reasons had not taken the steps to become a Jew. Though not Jews, the God-fearers participated in various aspects of Judaism including worship at the synagogue.

Marketplace (v. 17). In many ancient cities, the marketplace was the location where people met to do business, catch up on news and gossip, discuss politics, and debate philosophy and religion. Paul frequented such locations to proclaim the gospel to non-Jews (Gentiles).

Epicurean (v. 18). One prominent school of philosophical thought in Athens at that time was the Epicureans. This movement was founded by the philosopher Epicurus (341–270 B.C.). He established a school of philosophy in a private garden in Athens called The Garden. His philosophy asserted that all matter consisted of tiny particles called atoms. As a pure materialist he taught that life ceased at death, and the highest practical good was just to avoid pain and live for pleasure. While they did not deny the existence of gods, the Epicureans viewed them as indifferent to humanity.

Stoic (v. 18). Another leading philosophical movement Paul encountered was the Stoics. This group was founded by Zeno of Citium (334–261 B.C.). Zeno had taught classes at the *Stoa Poikile* (Painted Porch) overlooking the marketplace in Athens. Thus the name Stoicism. Stoics were pantheists, believing the divine rational principle (*logos*) was found in and bound all things together. Stoicism emphasized a high sense of ethics and self-sufficiency. They believed that only the soul, the divine spark, survived death.

Ignorant show-off (v. 18). As Paul debated with these philosophers, they were not impressed, calling him an "ignorant show-off"—more literally a "babbling seed-picker." The background of this term referred to birds that went about pecking the ground for seeds. It was used for those who went about collecting various ideas and then spouted them with little understanding.

Jesus and the resurrection (v. 18). The Athenian philosophers did not understand what Paul was saying. Neither the Epicureans nor the Stoics believed in bodily resurrection. The concept was incoherent to them. Some even thought Paul was talking about "foreign deities." When the apostle spoke of Jesus and the resurrection, they thought he was talking about two new deities. They assumed the Greek term for "resurrection" was the name of Jesus's goddess wife. How ironic that they were making Paul, the great monotheistic Jew, out to be a polytheist just like themselves.

Acts 17:22-23
Connection to the Point: Paul used the "common ground" of worship to build a connection with his audience.

Context. The Greek philosophers in Athens' marketplace were baffled by Paul's rhetoric. So, they decided to take him to the city's public forum where he could air his views, and they could cross-exam him. Notice Luke made a somewhat sarcastic editorial comment: "Now all the Athenians and the foreigners residing there spent their time on nothing else but telling or hearing something new" (v. 21).

The Areopagus (v. 22) was a hill overlooking the city where Athenian philosophers gathered to discuss and debate their ideas. The term also referred to the group that met there and served as the city's civil and criminal court. The term comes from a combination of two Greek words, *Areios* and *Pagos*, meaning "Ares Hill." Ares was the Greek god of war, and a temple dedicated to him was located at the foot of the Areopagus. (Some Bible translations have it as "Mars Hill." Mars was the Roman name for Ares.)

People of Athens! (v. 22). While Paul had moved from the marketplace to standing before this esteemed, powerful, intellectual body, he remained bold in his address to them as the "people of Athens." He recognized that this council comprised the duly chosen representatives of the city's citizens.

Extremely religious in every respect (v. 22). While Paul referenced the Old Testament Scriptures in his address to the Jews of the synagogues, the apostle did not do so here. He recognized that quoting from the Scriptures would have meant nothing to his pagan audience. So he began his address with an ambiguous compliment. Paul recognized that the Athenians were extremely religious in every respect as was demonstrated by their city being filled with statues, shrines, and temples to the pagan gods. Despite his emotional recoil at the great extent of the city's idolatry, Paul gave the Athenians credit for at least believing in the supernatural. But merely being religious was not enough. What is needed is a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Objects of your worship (v. 23). While wandering through their city Paul had observed all the religious icons, statues, temples, and altars the Athenians had dedicated to the pantheon of deities. Hundreds of such objects lined the streets of the city. The largest center of worship was the famed Acropolis located on a flat-topped hill above the Areopagus. On it were several temples including the magnificent Parthenon built about 500 years earlier to honor the Greek goddess Athena. Paul may have even pointed to them as he spoke.

"To an Unknown God" (v. 23). The apostle cleverly focused on one altar that had gotten his attention. It was an altar inscribed "To an Unknown God." Apparently, the Athenians at some point had erected that altar fearing they might unwittingly offend some god (or goddess) they didn't know about by failing to give the deity the appropriate recognition and veneration. They did not want to arouse the god's wrath by not giving him his entitled worship and sacrifices.

Ignorance (v. 23). Paul used his introduction as a bridge to move the Athenians from their focus on a false polytheistic worldview to the truth of the monotheistic worldview of the one, true God. He would now tell them about the God they

were unknowingly worshiping. The unknown God they worshiped in ignorance was the one, true God Paul would now proclaim to them.

Even today many people claim to be agnostics ("know nothings"), people who say they just do not know if God exists or not. Actually, they often simply have never taken the time to examine the great amount of evidence for the Creator and the truth of Jesus's resurrection. Some reject or ignore God because if they recognized the existence of God, they would be accountable to Him for their life choices. Therefore, they just plead ignorance. Paul said that won't work.

Acts 17:30-31
Connection to the Point: Paul sought to help others see the truth of the gospel.

Context. Full of the Holy Spirit, Paul boldly preached to the members of the Areopagus (vv. 24-29). The apostle told them about the one and only God who made the world and does not live in man-made temples. He told them, in fact, that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. Therefore He does not need anything from human beings. He made all peoples from one man (Adam, Gen. 1–2) giving them all life. But God is not indifferent to humanity He has made. He desires that they would reach out to Him and come into relationship with Him. To help him connect with his audience, Paul drew upon the statements of some of the Athenians' poets (Acts 17:28-29). Contrary to their beliefs, the one, true God is separate from His creation, not like any human art or images people fashion. This all must have struck the Athenians as very strange.

Overlooked the times of ignorance (v. 30). Paul again pointed to the admitted ignorance of the Athenians (v. 23). In the past, he said, God had overlooked their lack of knowledge of who He is. He had focused His revelation primarily on the Hebrews through the prophets and the Scriptures in preparation for what now had come to pass. As the writer of Hebrews put it, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him" (Heb. 1:1-2; see John 1:18).

Commands all people everywhere (v. 30). Now things were different. The times of ignorance were over. The message of the true God and His Son Jesus is for all peoples in all places. Jesus Himself indicated the extent He desires for the proclamation of the gospel: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Repent (v. 30). Now everyone everywhere is challenged to repent. The Greek term means "to change your mind." Repentance is an essential aspect of the conversion process. It means to make a radical change in life in the sense of turning away from sin and turning to faith in Christ for salvation (Acts 2:38; Eph. 2:8-9).

Set a day (v. 31). Not only was the idea of resurrection foreign to the Greek philosophers, so was the concept of eschatology (the doctrine of last things). Paul told them that God has ordained a future time when this age of world history will end. Jesus spoke a lot about it, but told His disciples that only the Father knows when that day will come. "Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except the Father alone" (Matt. 24:36).

Judge the world (v. 31). The key event of the day God has appointed is that He is going to judge the world, meaning passing judgment on all people and nations. Paul said ignorance will not be an excuse (v. 30). He expanded on that in his letter to the Romans: "For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse . . . Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles" (Rom. 1:20,22-23).

Righteousness (v. 31). The standard by which God will judge all humanity is His own righteousness. "Righteousness" is exhibiting moral character based on what is right. Only holy God Himself is completely righteous, and His righteousness will be the measure by which He judges the world.

The man he has appointed (v. 31). Paul proclaimed to the Athenians that God's justice will be administered by "the man he has appointed." At this point Paul had not yet revealed this man's name. However, the man is of course Jesus Christ who is the Son of Man, the Judge of all humanity (John 5:22-23; 2 Tim. 4:1; see Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15). The apostle was still bringing his pagan audience along toward the focal point of his message.

Proof (v. 31). Unlike the philosophers, philosophies, and worldviews which the Athenians regularly heard and debated, Paul offered them objective evidence based in an historical event. The true God did not leave the world with mere speculation about who this man was, what He had done, and what He would do. God had provided proof or guarantee to everyone as to who Jesus is and what He has done to accomplish salvation.

Raising him from the dead (v. 31). What was that proof? God had raised Jesus from the dead. Nothing on that scale had ever happened before. Paul and all the apostles could make the assertion that it was true because they were eyewitnesses to the resurrection's veracity (1 Cor. 15:1-8). They had seen and heard the risen Jesus face-to-face and nothing, not even the threat of death, could change their minds!

In this passage we see Paul's accommodation principle in action: "I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). While not compromising the truth of the gospel, Paul had changed his approach in order to relate to his pagan audience. Paul's speech at the Areopagus got a variety of reactions from those present. Some ridiculed him, while others expressed that they would like to hear him tell more about the gospel. Still others became believers. Luke even identified two by name: Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, and a woman named Damaris (Acts 17:32-34). When God's Word goes out, it never returns void (Isa. 55:11)!