

Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, November 4, 1973

Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (45:44)

This morning, I'd like to take you to a place that's well-known, even to this day, although what happened, in the message, took place almost 2000 years ago. The place is Athens, and a particular part of Athens that very many people go to see; it's well-known. It must have been a wonderful place in its day, but today there's just a few temples left, and especially the ruins of the Parthenon, well-known to practically everyone in the world that's interested in art, and architecture.

So we'll have to go to find out about it in the Word of God in the 17th chapter of Acts. And I'd like to, before we get to Athens, take you to another place, a little north of Athens, it's now known as Salonica, but in the Apostle Paul's day it was known as Thessalonica. And we'll see how differently God uses his servant to speak to different people. The first one was the nation of Israel, as it existed after the Lord was crucified, rose, and went back to heaven. And the Apostles then carried the message of the gospel throughout the world. But at that time it was still largely in synagogues and marketplaces and to the nation of Israel. The Apostle Paul was called out especially to go to the Gentiles, like you and I, and speak to them the same message, the same gospel that had been given to the nation of Israel. The nation of the Jews was now to be expanded, to go forth throughout the earth.

And so if we'll just read a few verses in the beginning of the chapter, and then go on to the rest, we'll have the subject before us. "Now when they," that is Paul and his companions, "had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in to them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging," now this word opening is really an unusual word that may have been well known 300 years ago when the translation was made, the word really means explaining, "and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach to you, is the Christ." I put in the word "the" because Christ is not so much a name as the word that characterizes the office. Christ is the Greek for the Jewish word messiah. And the messiah in the Old Testament was the anointed one, the one who had oil poured on his head and by authorization and by order of God was appointed to some office. He was either the prophet, or the priest or the king. Tonight, we'll speak about, we'll have before us, Elisha. He was anointed with oil, he was acclaimed a prophet, the successor to Elijah. Well, these first three verses, and I should just read the first phrase, or the first line of verse 4, "and some of them believed."

The message that is described in a few words here, that Jesus, whom Paul was preaching, was the Christ, was the immediate message that the nation of Israel needed, because the Lord had come to earth in the form of a babe, born in Bethlehem's manger, and at the age of 30, the age when priests were anointed, he was not anointed by men, but at his baptism, in the river Jordan, at the age of 30, the spirit of God came upon him. It appeared as if a dove had appeared upon his head, and the voice from Heaven said "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased" [Matthew 3:17], in whom is all my delight. And that was the form of anointing that God gave his Son.

We know that the Lord was the most humble, in fact he proclaimed himself, the only character he gave himself was what we have in Matthew 11, "I am meek and lowly of heart." [Matthew 11:29] And

on the basis of that he could ask men to come to him, and he would give rest to their souls. And I'm sure that the majority of persons who heard that thought, what an amazing claim to make, not only that he was meek and lowly, but that he could give peace and rest to the heart and conscience. Just absolutely impossible from a human standpoint, but we must remember that he was God. God had proclaimed him as his anointed Son. This is my beloved son. And I like to think that that's the real meaning of the five-times-repeated expression "the only begotten." Here's one on earth, of whom alone it could be said that he was the beloved son, God's beloved son, in whom was all his delight.

This was the message that Paul proclaimed to this synagogue where the Jews were gathered every Saturday, their day of rest, the day in which they were to read the scriptures, to pray, and to worship God. This is what the message to them was. And this was the stumbling block. Here was a man who had lived, and had been accused of all manner of things, being associated with demons, a deceiver, a blasphemer, one whom God had put under the curse, that such a person was the Christ, was the Messiah, was the one that the nation of Israel was looking for to bring them into glory and blessing, that's impossible.

But you see, the message was for certain ones, those whom God had chosen. It takes faith to believe upon a dying man, and this is what you and I have had to do. And it goes contrary to reasoning and to our thoughts. Because a man who is dying, and dying as a result of men's judgment upon him, and also of God's judgment upon him, is certainly no one, according to reason, to believe.

But that's just the wonderful thing. God has made a way of salvation whereby you and me can be saved by simple faith. And this involves all men, and is the only way by which all men could be saved. You could be saved at the eleventh hour and 59th minute of your life. Just before you pass into eternity you can be saved. The youngest child can be saved, just by simple faith, taking the Lord as his or her savior, and for every age in between, no matter what the person. I think of two of the greatest anomalies in history; that they should have been saved is a marvelous proof of the grace of God. Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament, just as he's raised from that terrible condition, of living like an animal, he acknowledges God as Sovereign. I'll quote that verse a little later in the message.

But the other is the Apostle Paul himself, the one who is the chief character here, the one who is explaining and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and died, risen again from the dead and now glorified at the right hand of God, he extends salvation to all that will put their trust in him. That was a message to the Jew, but you see there were so many things that hindered them. There were the Old Testament scriptures, so many of them, that proclaimed that God was going to send the Messiah in glory, and power. That's what they were looking for in their condition. They were subjects and slaves to the Romans, they wanted that kind of a Messiah, they wanted that kind of a Savior, but they didn't realize that the Law, which had kept them bound for 1500 years before Christ came, that was the score that had to be settled with God. God's holiness required implicit, and immediate, and unfaltering obedience to the Law, or they were all dead.

And the Apostle Paul in the book of Ephesians says that about us, that all, all men, are dead in trespasses and sins [Ephesians 2:1]. God looks at us all as having failed, failed his Law of perfection, and so he can speak to us on one simple basis, that by faith in his beloved son, who died upon the cross as a sacrifice for sin and sinners, we can be saved for eternity.

There's much more room for expansion of this subject about the gospel to the Jews, but God had, after Christ died and rose and went back to the glory, he had the whole world in his view. And that was prophesied before in the book of Isaiah, for the Lord says himself there "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" [Isaiah 45:22].

Let us go on. What happened after the message was that, as I read, some believed. Let's hope it was a good number, and that an assembly was formed. But there is always opposition where the gospel is preached, not only in the human mind that listens to it and rejects it, or just says it's time, or procrastinates, you know, as we all do. I never was reminded so much of the human tendency to procrastinate as at times when in New York the licenses for your car, for driving your car, you couldn't drive a car without a license, and that's here too, but year after year it would be impressed upon me how men dilly-dally, how they wait, how they procrastinate upon even the simplest things. It only meant the expenditure of a dollar, but they were blocks long, hundreds, perhaps thousands of people, standing on line to get their tickets, pay their three dollars, and then be free for another year.

And so I believe it is with the gospel. The gospel is so simple, and it does not demand immediate compliance or death. That was the condition in the Old Testament; if certain laws were not complied with, death was the consequence. Thank God that death was not always carried out. God is a patient God, and that's part of the message of the 17th of Acts. Well, the Apostle was chased out of Thessalonica, just like a common criminal, a man who had to flee for his life. And he gets to Berea, and the same message is given and the same result: chased out of Berea.

"And then we continue with the 15th verse; And they that conducted Paul brought him to Athens: and receiving a commandment to Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him." (And this would include the Gentiles, wouldn't it, the Athenians.) "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seems to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him to Areopagus, saying," (and that Areopagus was the Mars hill, the place that's always pointed out to tourists as the place from which Paul gave this message.) "saying, may we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean." (Now notice this; we must keep in mind all through the message, This is basic, this is what was the prevailing custom at that time) "(For all the Athenians and strangers" (the visitors), "which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing." They wanted the latest news, and what was special.

Then Paul in answer to their request to speak to them, stood in the midst of Mars Hill and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious." Now, I'm sure he didn't say that. That would have been an insult, that would have been a slap right in their faces, and they wouldn't have listened to him another minute. That might have been very good translation 300 years ago, but the real meaning of the Greek in today's language is that "you are very religious. I perceive that in all things you are very religious." That would be a compliment wouldn't it. Why that would ingratiate himself with them right at the start; certainly didn't last long. And then he takes this as his prefix to the

message, and it shows how divinely he was guided, because just the very thing that gave him the opportunity to touch the very thing they needed, the very message they needed.

“For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore you worship not knowing him,” and I’m sure he didn’t say “you ignorantly,” he didn’t proclaim their ignorance, because these were wise men. These were men who prided themselves on their knowledge, and the Greeks were a very knowledgeable people, not only in philosophy but in arts, in painting, in sculpture, in architecture, and in a great many things. And they had gods for everything, and one supreme god too, Zeus Z-E-U-S. And so that what the Apostle Paul says, from now on, what we’re reading here to the end of the chapter, will be in conflict with what they believed. And they of course certainly considered them superior to this man, whom we’re previously read they considered just a babbler.

“Whom therefore you ignorantly worship not knowing him, I declare unto you.” And then he goes on to this description of God which is a masterpiece. And it’s based upon what the Apostle Paul had known of the Old Testament. He could never have said these things about God if he had not known the Old Testament. And I believe what is told us in the book of Galatians about the Apostle going to Arabia for three years is the secret why he could speak so eloquently about God. He had met the Lord, you know. His is one of the most remarkable conversions ever given, and is a picture of what God is going to do not only for one man, but for a whole nation. For the Israel that is to come, about which Mr. Harper has been speaking so eloquently this last month, that nation will be converted in a day, at the sight of the Lord, appearing from Heaven to relieve them of their oppression, and deliver them from the death that awaits them. [Mr. Harper is probably Bob Harper, a travelling Plymouth Brethren preacher who I believe was the son of a better-known preacher, and who was invited to give some special meetings at Willo Bible Chapel.]

All the present success of Israel is just another another chapter in the wonderful way in which God has been preserving that nation, and I believe preserving all men, as we shall see as we read along in this wonderful chapter. Verse 24: “God that made the world and all things therein,” now I should read, for the continuity I should read the rest of the chapter, but I’ll probably have to change a few words. “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” And he probably extended his hands around, his arms around, to acknowledge the beauty of these temples, all around him. They had altars and temples for all their gods, a great multiplicity of them, a god for almost everything. Verse 25: “Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And has made of one,” I’d rather leave out the word blood there; I think it is one man, Adam, “made of one man all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;” What is the purpose of all this? This is a remarkable statement, and confirms absolutely that which we find in the Old Testament, “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:” And I believe that was the message of the calendar slip this morning, God is everywhere, God is with us, God sees everything that is done, he knows our thoughts, everything about us.

Verse 27 For in him” or through him, “we live, and move, and have our being; as certain of your own poets have said, we are also his offspring.” This word offspring has been largely misread and

misunderstood. The apostle didn't say that we are his children, he said we are his offspring. But man would take this word offspring to mean children, as we do. "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God," the word really is the creatures of God, the ones that he's preserving, "we ought not to think that the Godhead is like to gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance," the times of this not knowing, God not winked at, God overlooked. "but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness" notice that word, righteousness, "by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him," and here of course he meant Christ. They knew who me meant, because they had been interested in hearing about a person by the name of Jesus and his resurrection. If the Apostle had just been speaking of Jesus, that would have been only part of the story, wasn't it.

But it was the grand message of the first century: and of all the centuries up til now. That the person whom men crucified, who was judged for our sins, he not only died but was raised again" and is now seated at the right hand of God, extending forgiveness to men. That's the wonderful message. That's what arrested them. That's what they wanted to hear more about, though they weren't ready to believe it. "in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. However certain men believed."

He had a few that God gave him as a reward, for this wonderful courage, to stand up before a world, a man against the world, because the message that he brought was certainly not one that they believed, or would receive. I like to think that as these progressive statements, these wonderful statements, almost divine statements, because they're confirmation of what had been written in the Old Testament, that they progressively became more indignant and resisting the truth, though they could realize the power of this person that he was speaking about, the one and only true and living God, their consciences were pricked, but when he spoke to them about coming judgment, they could stand it no longer, and then some mocked. The company was divided. That is what always happens at the preaching of the word of God. Some believe, and most do not believe.

That's what's happened here. Some mocked, some thought the man was crazy, some couldn't, wouldn't believe, just as the Lord said to the Pharisees, you will not come to me that ye might have life. They knew the Scriptures, he credited them with that, he said "ye search the Scriptures," but he put the thing on the right basis: "you think that in them you have eternal life" [John 5:39]. No, no one has eternal life because he has the Scriptures.

And I was reminded the other day of the fact that the Israelite had a daily reminder, a constant reminder of the word of God. The word methusa, a Jewish word which means doorpost, was for certain portions of the law, what was it, the heart of the Law, the Lord said, and it was to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself. That's one of the things that are on the Jewish doorpost, and that he was to read, and that he was to speak about, when he's sitting down, when he's rising up, when he's traveling. He was not to get away from the power of the word of God, and his responsibility to love his creator, to love the one who had taken control and was preserving his nation.

Well I'd like to, in the remaining few minutes of our message, just go over these remarkable things that Paul says about God. And show how that from creation, from before the foundation of the world,

right to the end of time, when men will be judged for their sins, God is present in everything, and is controlling, and is seeking to rule men, and bring them to himself through his beloved son. So God in creation in the 24th verse is not explained, and there are at least 100 times throughout the Scriptures Old and New Testament, where God is proclaimed to be the creator, but nothing's said about how he did it. Genesis 1 has been explained by many in different ways: as literature, as literal, and in many other ways. But God, so far as I can find, and if you find otherwise in these 100 mentions of God as the creator, or God the Son as the active agent in creation, I wish you would tell me, because I find only two: two ways in which God is said to have created the earth.

The first one is in Psalm 33, and I'd like to read that from the Scriptures itself, so that you'll see that I'm not misquoting or that there's anything that I'm hiding. Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." And verse 9, "For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."

And then in the 66th of Isaiah we have the other way in which the Lord is spoken of as having created the heavens and the earth and all therein. In the 66th chapter and the first verse the Lord says himself, this is the Lord himself speaking, not the Psalmist, for "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build to me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made," Mine hand: notice, it's not his word now but his hand, his power, and all those things have been, saith the LORD." I won't go further because that takes us into his relationship to man.

But this is the way in which the Lord has created our visible heavens and earth, and I think that the Lord gives us an example of this when he was here upon earth. You remember there were ten lepers that came to the Lord for healing. He just told them, when he found out that that was all they wanted, go your way and show yourselves to the priest. You see the Lord was carrying out the Law. And the leper that was cleansed had to go to the priest for confirmation, it was the priest's word that let him go out of that position of being an exile, an outcast. It was the word of the Lord; as they were going, they were cleansed. It was the word that the Lord silently spoke, he didn't speak it, just ordered it, issued it, as they were going they were cleansed.

And the other instance is when he fed the 5000 on one occasion, and the 4000 on the other. He is there taking the loaves and the fishes, and breaking them up, and as he does it, they are multiplied. And 5000 and 4000 men, it says, besides women and children, are fed, and so fed, that they want to make him king. This is the kind of Messiah they wanted, you see, a Messiah that could feed them, but he had been feeding them all the time. All through their history, all through the desert, and all through the years thereafter, until his coming, he was showing his creatorial power, through his hands.

Well the next verse goes on, it's not only that God has created man, that man is responsible to him in that way, but he says in verse 25, the last part of it, "seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" What a startling thing to say. We might say we owe our life to him, if he's the creator we certainly owe our life to him, but how about our breath? That goes beyond life, doesn't it? We may have life one moment and die the next, but the breath is what continues that life, it sustains that life, it filters out the poison from the system, it purifies the blood. And then "all things," that "all things" has been interpreted to mean that everything we have comes from God, but this really means all men. I hesitate to say that everything unconverted, unbelieving man has comes from God. What about the things he

gets by stealing, by crookedness, by deception, by sin, what about those? Does God give him that? I doubt it. No, I rather think not.

But in confirmation of this wonderful statement of God in preservation we have the word the apostle wrote to Timothy his son in the faith. He says in I Timothy 4:10 “we trust in the living God, who is the savior of all men.” Now that’s a mistranslation there. God would like to be the savior of all men, he’s provided that for man, but he certainly is not the savior of man, he’s the savior of all them that believe. But the word for savior there is the preserver of all men. That’s the marvelous thing, and I believe that’s what will shut men’s mouths at the great white throne. They think that God is going to balance their good deeds with their bad, why he’s been preserving them all their lives, preserving them in their sin and their unbelief, not that he’s responsible for that. That’s their responsibility.

There are plenty of verses that show that God is preserving man, Where did the apostle get that thought from? It’s the 42nd chapter of Isaiah. And there we have in the fifth verse “Thus saith God the LORD,” God Jehovah, “he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath to the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein.” This confirms what the apostle says, doesn’t it. And this is the Lord’s own words; the apostle is just repeating the thought in different words. And we know that God in his preservation is upholding all things by the word of his power. Not only that he has created the world, created this earth, in all its beauty, and in some of its ruin too. Originally it was perfect; God made the heavens and the earth, I believe, that was in perfection. But sin has come in and defiled this world, so that it is now the world of the god of this world, Satan.

So God in sovereignty is the next statement that he makes, “He has made of one blood,” or of one man, “all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;” That speaks of God in sovereignty. God is sovereign in this world, he does what he will, and Daniel 4:34 is a verse that confirms this. I referred before to Nebuchadnezzar as one of the prime, prize examples of the Old Testament of the kind of man God can save, if they will acknowledge him. This is what Nebuchadnezzar has to say, after his sickness, his depravity, almost living as an animal, “I blessed the most High, and praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing:” That’s something for a man to say, isn’t it. All the inhabitants of the earth, and he was the foremost man upon the earth. He had most power of all men. Of him it was said that “whom he will he saved, and whom he would he slew alive.” An autocratic despot, and no one else perhaps in all the earth could that be said of. “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: none can stay his hand.” This is what the apostle was telling the Athenians, God is sovereign.

But there was a purpose in that. What was the purpose? I’ve already alluded to it; God is sovereign so that men should seek him. Did they? I’m sorry to have to say no. Psalm 14, and repeated in Psalm 53, tells us “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the race of men, to see if there were any that did seek him” [Psalm 14:2]. and he had to render this verdict: “there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” God was good, but he couldn’t find any goodness on the earth.

And so, we have the wonderful answer in the gospel, when men didn't seek him and he could only find evil, no good, he sent his son. And that beloved Son of his said that he came to seek and to save, that which was lost. What a beautiful answer. If men wouldn't seek God, he'd send his Son to seek them, to seek and to save them. Save them from the wreck and ruin that they had brought in from their rebellion, from the doom that they were awaiting, the doom they were going on to.

The next few verses, I won't read them, but it's God in patience, God overlooked, instead of winked at, God overlooked man's evil, their idolatry, their rebellion against him, their not seeking him, he overlooked that, for centuries, from the time the statement was made in the 14th Psalm, for a thousand years or more, God overlooked man's sin. And then he sent the savior. And that's the expression in the end of the 30th verse, "And the times of this ignorance" not knowing God, "God overlooked; but now he commands all men every where to repent." You see this is the new law. This is God's demand now. If men could never fulfill the law, here is a law they can fulfill, but how few do it. The same resistance to God in the Old Testament is visible in the New, and up to the present time. Men will not repent, men will not turn from their evil ways, men will not seek God, although he has sought them. Men will not seek God.

And I imagine the apostle, knowing the hearts of his hearers, knowing their continuing resistance to this, he could see that these wise men, these men of learning, they were not giving up their ideas. They were filled with them. So with increasing resistance, he brings the message to the close. He says, "God commands all men every where to repent, because he has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained." They knew who he was speaking of; they heard of Jesus and the resurrection. "by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all, in having raised that person from among the dead."

I'd like to call your attention to the world, "God will judge the world in righteousness" God has every reason to judge through his son, and he's the one that will do the judging. It will be a man that judges men, it will be a perfect man, it will be one man that God says he had found his delight in. It will be the one man who has died for all men, who has made a sacrifice for them, that they might not perish. We heard that this morning, John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish," "Should not perish," that's the heart of that verse. Men dwell upon the love of God, the wonderfulness of it, the magnificence of it, that God could love a human race that has so disgraced him, that is so far from him, as these men were, idolators. Thinking that by paying reverence to God in beautiful idols, in beautiful images, in beautiful statues, that that would satisfy God. No, God has provided something better for man.

Judging the world in righteousness, he might well judge them in his wrath, in his displeasure, in his hatred for sin. But because they persisted in their sin, against them as sinners, God is just going to judge men in righteousness. You hear that once in a while, men say I want justice, if God judges me in justice I'll be satisfied. Well, there's only one place for those who demand justice from God because they have repudiated the fact that God has provided a way of salvation for them. That's the greatest insult that you can offer God, is to either neglect it, as most men do, or reject it, as a perhaps lesser amount do, or even worse, despise it. It can be either one of those three. How much wiser it would be for man to realize that he is not one with God, that God's displeasure is upon him, that God sent his son to save man from his sin.

Now the thing that raises the hackles of men more than any other thing, just mention the word hell, and yet they believe in it because they use it so often. And the name of Jesus Christ is bandied about, and the name of God is hated, and used by many, and hardly a sentence goes by without it. And God goes on in his patience with all of this. And so my last words this morning, are that your greatest wisdom would be to accept the truth of what the apostle is saying here...

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