



Thru God's Eye: Life in the REAL World

Opening Eyes Helping Others Discover Life in the REAL World

Crossroads, November 6, 2011 - Mark Bickel



TEACHING NOTES

Intro: (excerpts from "Life After God" by Douglas Coupland) {10 min.}

1. **"Life after God" excerpts of people's lives ... without God**
 - i. *(use excerpts or summarize Children, Pills - pages 271-275)*
 - ii. *(Summarize 7 friends, read excerpts from Stacey - pages 286-291)*
 - iii. *Read Narrator Story - Pages 309-310, option page 311, then 313*
 - iv. I do not want my life, or yours to end up here
 - v. Notice moments of deeper reflection ... we can be there to ask the good questions and to listen, to walk with people when their worldview no longer works
 - vi. **(personal example: "Dan" at Drexel** – share how his answers fail, then life collapse)
2. **"Life After God" conclusion ... God is what is missing**
 - vii. *Read Conclusion - Page 359*
 - viii. Non-Christian, looking at life, concludes the missing piece is God
3. **"Life After God" application ... float away**
 - ix. *Summarize End - float away - Pages 357-358, 260*
 - x. Real choice for people – when see need for God, will they turn to God, repent, adopt a new worldview, be adopted into a new family... or let the moment pass and go on floating through life
 - xi. **(personal example: "Dan" at Drexel** – did not give gospel, drink instead)
4. **Challenge**
 - xii. Maybe **you identify with some of the people here** ... what you need is God ... Today is the day of salvation ... will you see come to God or decide to float away and leave God behind?
 - xiii. Maybe you have wondered **how to bring up God with people around you** ... know that everyone, those who are bottoming out, those living the American dream, and the 99% in the middle ... all of us have a God-shaped void that only Christ can fill, so there are connection points in every persons life ... and key times in each person's life when the Spirit is working to reveal the need for God in more direct ways
 - xiv. **Are you praying for and looking for those opportunities?** Will you be ready and willing to offer an answer for the hope that is within you? Or will you miss it like I did?
 - xv. What I want to do tonight is look into the Scriptures for principles to help us introduce people to the true God ... LOTS of different approaches within New Testament, but there is one particular example of Paul sharing the Gospel with unbelievers with many similarities to our those we meet today.

PRAY

Opening Eyes

Page 1

Paul Shares Gospel in Athens - Acts 17:16-34 (20-25 min.)

READ ACTS 17:16-34

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

""In him we live and move and have our being";

as even some of your own poets have said, ""For we are indeed his offspring.'"

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

- **Sees with God's Eyes:**

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, **his spirit was provoked** within him as he saw that the **city was full of idols**.

- Not standing around idle, or enamored by the great city of Athens
- Instead, notices that city was full of Idols ... and gets upset about that
- So goes and does something about it!
- What? Complain? Smash Idols? Outlaw Idols? ... NO, goes and talks with the people!

- **Talks to everyone – Devout and Pagan alike:**

17 So he reasoned in the **synagogue** with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the **marketplace** every day with those who happened to be there.

- Notice Paul reasons with people in both the synagogue and the marketplace, both the devout, religious people of his day, as well as the common people in the marketplace. Since we are in Athens, a major Greek and Roman city, outside of the area of the Jewish people who had the OT, that means the people in the marketplace likely know very little if anything about the God of the Bible, they are true pagans who not only follow other God's, but who also know nothing more than rumors about God or Jesus.

- **Talks to the “post-modern, Tolerant, Pluralists “ of His day**

18 Some of the **Epicurean and Stoic philosophers** also conversed with him.

{note: I am indebted to D.A. Carson who's exegesis of this passage at Next 2011 was instrumental in my understanding of this passage and in motivating me to do this entire Worldview series}

- **Pluralistic World**
 - Lots of different gods, each city had gods for various functions of life (war, prosperity, sea, sun, rain, fertility...)
 - Romans when they conquered people actually mixed gods – some of roman god's put in city, some of local god's sent to temples in Rome ... make them interdependent, also make it hard to tell who gods would support in uprising, thus help suppress uprising
 - In this passage, epicureans and stoics are both pantheists, BUT very different – one sees gods weaving together larger story of life, other sees gods as smaller than atoms hiding out of site...
- **Post-modern, relativistic Beliefs**
 - While in some ways very different beliefs from post-moderns of today, in some key ways also very similar ... a key flows from the above, namely relativistic believe system
 - Philosophers conversed with each other, and wanted to add Paul to the discussion ... general belief in the market place of ideas, where it is more important to talk about and consider different beliefs than to pick and live out of some particular religion
- **Tolerant and Non-Exclusive**
 - Tolerance of other beliefs was a central belief of their culture, like ours
 - Now tolerance can mean 2 things
 - 50 years ago it meant you and I could have very different beliefs and I could respect your right to believe as you do, even though you are stupid to believe that and I would argue viperously that you are wrong and need to change ... but even as I did that I respect your right to believe and talk about falsehood.
 - Today it means not just that we disagree, but that we should not judge each other, should not argue for our belief, but rather should fully accept both as valid ... even if they are directly contradictory!
 - In Roman society they were likely between the two – they may argue vigorously in their discussions on truth, but at the end of the day no one would claim they are exclusively correct ... Each tribe has their own gods, and they are each true for them
 - The most controversial aspect of early Christianity was not that it was anew religion or even its claim to resurrection ... it is it's claim that it's God is the God of all people, and that Jesus is the only way to the one true God ... That exclusivity was the real problem!

- **Biblically Illiterate ... But Interested in New things**

And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "**He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities**"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. **19** And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "**May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?**" **20** For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." **21** Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would **spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.**

- **Biblically Illiterate**

- Heard rumors of people talking about a guy named Jesus being resurrected ... but don't really know the story ... and have no idea how that fits into this new religion
 - Again, D.A. Carson notes that
 - 50 years ago in America most people came from a Christian tradition, even Atheists were "Christian Atheists", meaning the God they did not believe in was the God of the Bible
 - Today most not even know Bible has 2 testaments. Do not know what it says about God or Jesus

- **Interested in New Things**

- In a good way – ready and willing to hear about this new Christian things
 - In bad way – people want ears tickled, something new and different to talk about ... not something tried and true to believe in and act on ... rather something new to discuss!

- **Observing the Culture, and Starting Where People Are**

22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, **I perceive that in every way you are very religious.** **23** For as I passed along and **observed the objects of your worship**, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.'

- **Observe Objects of Worship**

- Not sit at home or in synagogue and discuss culture around them ... walk around the city, into their places of worship, observing their objects of Worship

- **Starting Where People Are**

- Sees they are religious, and starts by observing that ... in a positive way
 - Today religion not looked highly upon, but spirituality is ... so maybe for us it is noting a persons desire to be spiritual and observing how they go about that

- **Tell them about the God they are really looking for**

What therefore you worship as unknown, **this I proclaim to you.**

- **People looking for God, but not have any idea who He is**

- So Paul declares God to them

- **The Self-existing, Creating, Sustaining and Ruling God**

24 The God **who made the world** and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does **not live in temples** made by man, **25** nor is he served by human hands, **as though he needed anything**, since he himself **gives to all mankind life** and breath and everything.

- **Who is the true God?**

- Creator - not just of some things, but everything!
 - Lord – of heaven and earth – not just one of many gods, but the ruler and lord of all
 - Not live in temple – far greater than idol in a temple ... even Solomon when he built the temple of the God of Israel said in I Kings 8:27
27"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!
 - Aseity – God is both self-existent, and in need of nothing ... was not lonely, or in need ... thus also means we can not bargain with him – give him something he needs to get what we need
 - Sustainer – our very life and breath come from God

- **God of All**

26 And **he made** from one man **every nation** of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

- **Made Every Nation**

- Notice this is not the Jewish God, or God of Bible or Christians alone ... Claims to have made every person on earth, and set the boundaries of every nation!
 - Thus He has a claim on every human being, whether they realize it or want it or not

- **Imminent God ... To Be Worshipped by All**

27 **that they should seek God**, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually **not far from each one of us**, **28** for "'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "'For we are indeed his offspring.'

- **Imminent God**

- Not far from each one – God not far off, removed ... or deaf or dumb ... near to us

- **To Be Worshipped by All**

- All men should seek God
 - You can imagine Paul here launching into Romans 1-3 ... all know of God, but chose not to worship Him as God ..
 - Note: Not start with 10 commandments and our sins of omission and commission ... fine to do that, Jesus himself uses that ... But these are people who do not know commands, and so Paul starts with God of creation that deserves their worship

- **Not the God of our Imagination**

29 Being then God's offspring, we **ought not to think that the divine being is like gold** or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

- **Not Idol**

- Not able to be cast as an idol
 - Romans 1 – we worship and serve created rather than creator
 - Today not make carved idols so much ... but we all want to make God in our image, make Him out to be and act like we want him too ... God of our imagination
 - {story – Drexel sociology prof – Romans 3 /9 - “that is not the God I met”}

- **Repent, Judgment Coming**

30 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** in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

- **Call to Repent**

- There was a time when God mostly worked with Israel ... still occasionally saved others, and always desired to ... but there was a time when most of the world had not heard of God ... they knew him from creation, but more detailed Word of God had not come to them
 - That time is no more ... now Christ has come, died and been raised ... and Word of Him is going to the ends of the earth
 - Thus not it is the time God is calling all people everywhere to repent
 - Note from last week: one answer to all the “what about people who have not heard about Jesus” question is “the more important question is what will you do now that you have heard about Jesus” – Athens can no longer claim ignorance, neither can you

- **Judgment Coming**

- There will be a day of judgment for all men
 - Date has been fixed (not told to us, but none the less fixed) – i.e. you don't want to delay and risk that day arriving and you not being ready
 - And who will be the judge? That very Jesus who we crucified and God raised from the dead!

- **The Heart of the Gospel – the Death and Resurrection of Jesus**

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead

18because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

- **The Resurrection**

- Now he comes to the heart if the Gospel – the resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - Notice in verse 18 that is the part of his previous preaching that raised questions
 - Throughout Acts each sermon is unique, but each has a few common elements – Jesus having been wrongly killed, and Jesus rising from the dead are two elements common to each ... along with the need to repent and believe
 - Wherever we connect with people to begin, and whichever path through Scripture to their heart we take, the heart of the message is always the death and resurrection of Christ
 - That is the point of the gospel, the purpose of the gospel, the power of the gospel...

- **The People Respond In Three Ways**

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, **some mocked**. But **others said, "We will hear you again about this."** **33** So Paul went out from their midst. **34** But **some men joined him and believed**, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

- **Paul's preaching demanded, and got, a response**
 - Some Mock
 - Some want to hear more
 - Some believe ... and act!
 - Note on middle category: can be good or bad, healthy if there is a desire to know more and you are not yet convinced but willing to look deeper, dangerous if you just want to keep asking questions and discussing so you do not need to make a decision

Conclusions / Practical Applications (5 min.)

- Understand the culture we live in – a “life after God” where people for the most part do not know God, or know about Jesus or the Bible
- Understand what God says about People – deep down they really do know there is a God, and that there really is a God shaped vacuum in the heart and life that only God can fill ... look for opportunities
- Be observant – notice the idols, the unknown Gods of this particular town
- Be Broken – as you do, allow God to break your heart for the people
- Speak up – declare to them the God they do not know
- Start where they are – In each city Jesus and Paul start different places, acknowledging good things they see, and confronting specific issues they see
- Bring it back to God – If they claim Christianity, take them to the Bible, and to the law, and show them the true God of the Bible and how they have fallen short ... If they are unchurched show them the God of the universe who created all, and how they are worshiping falsely ... From wherever you start take them to God, show them the glory and majesty of God
- Give them the Bad News – show how we each have turned from God
- Give them the Good News – Show them Jesus, and his death for them and resurrection promises for eternity
- Call them to repent and believe
- Expect some will mock, some with question, but some will believe
- And it may not happen in one sitting, or all from you ... some plant, some water, some harvest
- But God has promised his Word will never go out void!

Pray

Recommended Listening

2011 NEXT Worldview Conference Audio (free at www.thisisnext.org under Resources)

God on the World: The Bible's Framework for a Christian Worldview - Jeff Purswell

Think or Believe? The Role of Reason in the Life of Faith - Scott Oliphint

The Gospel and the Postmodern Mind - D.A. Carson

The Reality of Truth in a World of Relativism - R.C. Sproul

Who am I? Humanity in the Eyes of the World and the Christian - Kevin DeYoung

Breakout - Science & Faith - Vern Poythress

Breakout - The New Atheists - Nathan Sasser

Breakout - Can We Trust Our Bibles? - Peter Williams

Breakout - Jesus and Other Religions - Kevin DeYoung

NEXT WEEK: Seeing God in Mongolia ... Global Outreach Conference