

New Year: On Purpose
a Theology of 'the point'
Acts 17:16-34

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

** Paul **noticed** the spiritual condition of the people around him.
He 'reasoned' with them. (dialogue - discussion)

Matthew 9:9-13 (Jesus noticed)

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9:9-13

— Everything someone else does makes sense to them.

— People liked Jesus who were not like Jesus at all.

Introduce Prayer Time

Music

Sermon Part 2

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18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be

advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (vs. 8)

Acts 17:8 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?”

Epicureanism

- **Goal:** Attain *ataraxia* (tranquility) by maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain.
- **Method:** Simple living, friendship, avoiding anxiety, conquering fear (especially of death and gods).
- **Core Beliefs:** The universe is atoms; gods are distant and don't interfere; pleasure is the highest good, but lasting pleasure comes from needs being met simply, not excess.

Stoicism

- **Goal:** Achieve *eudaimonia* (flourishing) through virtue and living rationally.
- **Method:** Cultivating virtues (wisdom, justice, courage, temperance), self-control, duty, accepting fate, and fulfilling one's role in the cosmos.
- **Core Beliefs:** A divine, rational order (*logos*) governs all; everything happens for a reason; humans find purpose by aligning with this reason; emotions arise from faulty judgments.

Key Differences

- **Highest Good:** Epicureans: Pleasure (absence of pain); Stoics: Virtue.
- **Gods:** Epicureans: Indifferent; Stoics: Gods were active and involved.
- **Society:** Epicureans: Withdrawal; Stoics: Engagement and duty.

19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” 21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

The Areopagus

**Paul's interaction occurred both “at” the Areopagus and “in front of” the Areopagus. However, the term *Areopagus* used here in Acts chapter 17 refers primarily to the group of Athenian leaders and thinkers who met on the hill. they were a group of testaments academicians and lawyers - deciding policy, court cases and procedures for everyday life.

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

The gods of the Romans

**The Romans worshipped more than 300 gods.
and... they even had one more ‘unknown’ god - just to be sure.

24 “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 human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

29 “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 human design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 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 everyone by raising him from the dead.”

Romans 1:21-23

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being
and birds and animals and reptiles.

32 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." 33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. Acts 17:16 -34

**Even the smartest of people have an awareness that there is 'something' more.

**Which way are you nudging?