

Eighty years ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The church stands not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village."

We are going to read about the apostle Paul's travel to ancient Athens. Through his experience, we're going to see that we are shaped by how we see the world. My hope for you is that as we read about Paul's experience, you would evaluate how you see the world and would say "yes" to a Jesus-centric way of the world. And by doing so, you would become a person who speaks hope in the middle of the village.

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 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. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling 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. vv.16-18

Paul was with Timothy, Silas, and Berea but had to leave alone for Athens due to persecution. As he waited for Timothy and Silas to join him, Paul walked through Athens, and his spirit was upset. Athens was a city filled with idols - statues in honor of various deities. To live in Athens was to live in the midst of a particular way of seeing the world. For Paul, a worldview forms who one becomes.

What did Paul do with his disruption of spirit? He found ways to tell a different story. He went to places where people gathered together. He began in the synagogue and spoke a different story to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. (God-fearing Gentiles were people spiritually interested in the Jewish religion, but not fully committed.) To these groups, Paul tells a different type of story that they desperately needed to hear.

Paul then goes to the marketplace. We don't have a great example in American culture but imagine a place where people gathered on certain days to purchase goods and interact. In this gathering place were two groups of philosophers: Epicurean and the Stoics. The Epicureans believed the aim of life was pleasure derived from avoiding pain, and life was governed by chance. Stoics disagreed, believing that the aim of life was virtue, and a fixed providence governed life. To these groups, Paul tells a different type of story that they desperately needed to hear. Here's the story that he told them. That Creator God has done something unique in Jesus. He was dead, and now he has been raised to life. This story brings everything together.

So, Paul observes that how he sees the world is in conflict with their worldview. He speaks to spiritually interested people with a story that has something to say about how the world works. He speaks into the collision of worldview with the Jesus story. How do people respond? They want to hear more.

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? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) vv.19-21

Paul is invited to the Areopagus (Greek for Mars Hill). The Areopagus was a council that oversaw cultural influences in Athens, including visiting lecturers. Why? I think because they understood that a worldview shapes who we become.

To understand how a worldview shapes who you become, it's important to understand what a worldview is and its impact on you. A worldview is the lens through which you see how the world works. It is not what you see, but rather how you see it. We all have a worldview - a way in which we see the world. You have felt your worldview most strongly when you encounter a worldview different than your own. For example, you become aware of your worldview when you travel to different cultures. In certain parts of Africa or South America, to be "on time" for a meeting could mean being one to two hours after the specified time. Or consider politics. In certain countries, the private life of a politician is considered just that - private and irrelevant to their leadership. In other cultures, private and public lives are seen as interconnected.

Whatever the situation, here's the thing I want you to know about worldview. Your worldview shapes who you become. How you see the world informs your formation. Several years ago, Hilary went on a trip. She left for the airport while I was at work, and, when I came home, I found a surprise. Our apartment was covered in sticky notes. Each sticky note was a task for me to do - fold the towels, empty the dishwasher, and tasks like that. When I walked in that door and saw the notes, I had a choice of how to see the situation. I could see the notes as burdens on my time, passive-aggressive statements. If I chose to see the notes through that lens, I would see Hilary as bossy, my marriage as unfair, and myself as a victim. Or I could see the notes as opportunities to participate in our relationship and taking care of our home. How you see the world shapes who you become.

I think that's why Paul's spirit was upset. He believed that idols aren't neutral. To live in ancient Athens, in a city filled with gods, meant to see

the world a certain way. And it meant to be influenced in a certain way. Paul had a different story. He believed that to say yes to the Jesus story forms you into the person you are created to be.

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. 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 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. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 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. 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. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

"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. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 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." vv.22-31

Paul told that story - the story he had been sharing in the synagogue and the marketplace - to the Mars Hill council. This is the story that mattered most to Paul, the story that Paul believed would form human beings into who they were created by God to be. Notice that Paul's telling of the Jesus story answers central questions of the human experience. Who are we? We are created in the image of God and have intrinsic value. Where are we? We live in a good, beautiful world that doesn't work as it should but is moving toward renewal. What's wrong? There is something in human beings that needs to be made right that need to turn a new direction. As Paul put, it's like we're searching in the dark. What's the solution? The resurrection of Jesus.

Notice also that Paul spoke from their worldview. He observed the statue to an unknown god. He was familiar with their philosophy (poetry). Paul spoke from their worldview in a way that was for them. It's as if he said, "I can speak to what you are looking for." If people know that you are for them more than you desire to inform them, they are more likely to listen to you. That was Paul's desire in Athens. In the synagogue,

the marketplace, and Mars Hill, Paul's desire was for people to say "yes" to the Jesus-centric worldview.

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." At that, Paul left the Council. 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. vv.32-34

Not everyone says "yes" to Paul and his Jesus-centric worldview. Some rejected it. Some remained undecided. But some believed. Everybody had a chance to hear the story of Jesus. This is what Paul wants more than anything else - for people to hear and respond to the worldview of Jesus. And that is what I want for you today.

As theologians came along later in history, the Jesus worldview was structured around four elements: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

Creation: God created all things out of nothing. Humans are uniquely created in the image of God, placed in a garden and given dominion under God to rule. The world was made for human flourishing, a place that we could live in joy in the presence of our Maker, worshiping God by loving Him and one another forever.

Fall: Adam and Eve rejected God's rule over them. We call this, "the fall," and because they represented all of humanity, their action affects us too. We have, through our attitudes and actions, become idolaters. This rebellion results in physical and spiritual death.

Redemption: Thankfully, the loving Creator who rightly shows Himself to be wrathful toward our sin is determined to redeem the world and rescue fallen sinners. At the center of this plan is God's Son, Jesus, the Messiah, who through his death and resurrection, will restore His people.

Restoration: The story doesn't end with redemption. God has promised to renew the whole world. The restoration of all things will take place in two ways. Christ will return to judge sin and evil, and He'll usher in righteousness and peace. God will purge this world of evil once and for all and usher in a new heaven and new earth.

This is my hope for you - that you would say "yes" to Jesus. We all have a worldview. Each of us is being formed by how we choose to view the world. What is the lens through which you see the world? Who will you be a year from now? Five years from now? William Barclay, a Bible commentator, put it this way, "The first step to the Christian life is simply to give Jesus Christ a chance to be heard." Will you hear and respond to Jesus today?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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