

Children's Church Resources - May 17, 2020

Today's reading comes from the Bible's stories of the travels of Paul the Apostle - you'll learn more about Paul and his travels this summer - stay tuned! This passage comes from the time Paul was in Athens - a famous city in Greece, known for its wise philosophers and poets.

Acts 17:22-31 from the International Children's Bible (ICB)

Then Paul stood before the meeting of the Areopagus. He said, "Men of Athens, I can see that you are very religious in all things. I was going through your city, and I saw the things you worship. I found an altar that had these words written on it: "TO A GOD WHO IS NOT KNOWN." You worship a god that you don't know. This is the God I am telling you about!

He is the God who made the whole world and everything in it. He is the Lord of the land and the sky. He does not live in temples that men build! This God is the One who gives life, breath, and everything else to people. He does not need any help from them. He has everything he needs. God began by making one man. From him came all the different people who live everywhere in the world. He decided exactly when and where they must live.

God wanted them to look for him and perhaps search all around for him and find him. But he is not far from any of us: 'By his power we live and move and exist.' Some of your own poets have said: 'For we are his children.' We are God's children. So, you must not think that God is like something that people imagine or make. He is not like gold, silver, or rock. In the past, people did not understand God, but God ignored this. But now, God tells everyone in the world to change his heart and life. God has decided on a day that he will judge all the world. He will be fair. He will use a man to do this. God chose that man long ago. And God has proved this to everyone by raising that man from death!"

Let's talk about what's happening here:

How many of you have studied Greek and Roman myths in school? (Or maybe, just read the Percy Jackson novels?) If you have, you know how those people had many gods, all in charge of one aspect of the world:

Here's a short list of some you may recognize:

Apollo/Hyperion, the Sun God
Diana/Artemis, the Moon Goddess
Mars/Ares, the God of War
Venus/Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love
Jupiter/Zeus, the God of the Sky

Neptune/Poseidon, the God of the Sea
Pluto/Hades, the God of the Underworld
Ceres/Demeter, the Goddess of Harvest
Juno/Hera, the Goddess of Marriage and Family
Vulcan/Hephaestus, the God of Fire

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That's a LOT of gods and goddesses to remember - and that's just the start!

Imagine having to keep track of all those different gods and goddesses - and remember who you had sacrificed to and who you hadn't yet. You wouldn't want to have any of them angry at you, after all! Greek and Roman gods were cranky things - known to punish those who forgot to pay them their due. And - oh my - what if there was one you didn't even know about? For example, maybe you forgot about:

Morpheus, the God of Dreams; or

Asclepius, the God of Medicine; or even

Koalemos, the God of Stupidity (and no, I'm not making him up!)

It must have been exhausting for Greek people to figure out how to keep all 400+ gods happy! Imagine having to go to 400 temples! Throwing a few coins in here, making a sacrifice there... And, of course, it must have made some people a lot of money to manage all these temples and sacrifices! Some Greek thinkers questioned whether all of these gods and goddesses were really real, including two of the most famous, Plato and Aristotle.

When Paul arrives in Athens, he is shocked to see all the statues to so many gods. But he also sees an altar labeled "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." The Athenians have put it up in case they missed one! And so Paul sees how to explain who God really is, in a way that might not get him in trouble with the authorities. (Paul got in trouble a LOT!.)

Paul goes to a big flat rocky spot in Athens called the Aeropagus. It was used for trials in ancient times, and



for discussing and arguing about important matters. Paul explains to the important thinkers in Athens that this "unknown God" is actually the real God - one not made by humans out of gold or marble, but one that made humans and everything else! He tells them God doesn't need their sacrifices, or for them to build temples for God to live in. God lives everywhere! Instead of sacrifices, Paul tells the Athenians they should try to do what is right, to change their hearts and lives.

He quotes two Greek thinkers, Epimenides and Aratus, to show he's read Greek philosophy, and to make his argument sound better to the philosophers he's talking to.

The Athenians aren't entirely convinced by Paul's arguments, but some of them agree to think about it...

Idol worship seems silly to most of us modern people. Who would worship something made of metal or wood? But we can relate to running around, trying to pay attention to 400+ things...

(I know - I have 10 tabs open in my browser window right now - and all of them are "really important!")

Do you find yourself thinking, "I just need to check on this one more thing, play one more game..."

Are you constantly worried you're missing out on something?

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Just for today, keep a log of how you spend your time.

How much time do you spend with God?

How much time do you spend with your family?

How much time do you spend scrolling through a screen, looking for something interesting?

How much time do you spend worrying about things you can't do anything about?

How much time do you spend doing things you enjoy?

After you've gone through a day marking down how you spend your time, take a look at it.

Are you spending your time the way you want?

Are you spending your time the way God would want you to spend it?

Paul called the people of Athens to change their hearts and lives.

What would you change about how you spend your time?

Let's end our time with prayer.

Dear God,

We are your children. Through your power we live and move and exist.

Help us to ignore some of the hundreds of things that demand our attention each day.

Help us to love you, and love each other,

And to remember that Love is the most important thing we can do today.

Amen.