

Acts 17:16-34

When the World Stabs You in the Heart

We left off last time seeing Paul move from Thessalonica where he was run out of town - came to Berea

A) Berea was a bright spot - Loved the word - they studied the word

B) Blessed in Berea until some came from Thessalonica to stir up the people in Berea.

C) Bereans got Paul out of town - Brought him by sea to Athens

D) While in Athens Paul sees the need and sends for Timothy and Silas to come -

1) they stayed in Berea to disciple the new believers

Now if today: Paul would send a text - hey guys I need you hear in Athens - Smiley face emoji couple of hand claps

A) Those days personal messenger - one to get there - wait for them to come

B) It would have taken weeks maybe even a month for them to arrive

C) So what does Paul do while he is waiting for his friends to arrive? Pick it up in V.16

¹⁶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

A) Provoked = being poked by something sharp - irritated - think sucker punch - stab in the heart.

B) Have you ever been sucker punched?

1) Jr. year of High School Basketball practice - Screen - Gut punch - **Are you kidding me** - Older guys thinking take their spot

C) Now Those were literal sucker punches

But sometimes life has a way of stabbing you in the gut - News you never wanted to hear.

A) This past week I got a text from a friend in Oregon notifying me that a young Pastor I was getting to know - really liked

B) Sharp guy, good teacher - great mind - amazing Potential -

1) he had just become the pastor of this great church - A little over a year ago-

C) He had to step down - Committed Adultery

1) Text was a Stab in the gut -

D) Grief in my inner most being - immediately thought of his precious wife and kids - the pain

1) Her parents whom I know personally

His mom who just last year had lost her husband suddenly - now this

A) My heart has been in pain now for over a week.

B) I reached out to his wife's dad on Thanksgiving - praying for your family

I think about 5 years ago November 19 - 2018

A) It was early in the morning - I had just woke up - sitting in bed when I received a call from my sister in law Sheri

B) I assumed she was calling to wish me happy birthday - but thought it was odd she was calling so early.

1) Did she want to be the first one

C) Hello - **Hear her crying uncontrollably on the other end of the phone - she can barely talk**

1) Her 22 year old son - my nephew Anthony was just taken from us in an auto accident

D) That just rocks your world! - The worst kind of stab in the heart!

1) You never get over that - even harder for my bro, his wife, his daughter

E) Me personally I have not celebrated my birthday on my birthday ever sense -

1) probably never will - just never feels right

I share those stories to give you a sense of what Paul was experiencing when he came into Athens

A) He was provoked in his heart - He sees what is going on in Athens and his heart is stabbed -

B) Deep Pain and irritation

C)But provoked also carries the idea of an ANGER arising - **The irritation turns into an Anger**

D)And that Anger and irritation move you to do something.

E)Consider what does Paul do in Athens? - But first I want to answer this question -

1)What caused the provoking in Paul?- 3 things

#1 All the idols - V.16 when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

A)Athens idols everywhere you went - shrines to this god and that god

B)Easier to find an idol in Athens than a man

C)Worshipped Mammon - - **Money worshippers - easy to spot**

1)They were the people who were all about their appearance and their stuff.

D)They were loaded and wanted everyone to know - Dressed to the tee all the time.

Worshipped the god Mars - Chief of the gods - Greeks called him Zeus

A)When Rome conquered Greece they adopted many of their gods but gave them new names

B)Those who worshipped Mars were the fighters - MMA guys - muscle shirts - jogger pants

C)Bacchus - Party god - Drunkards - Frat boys out of control

D)Venus the Sex god - Seduction - Prostitutes hung out

So Paul was provoked by all the idols

A)The 2nd thing that provoked Paul - what they worshipped affected their behavior

B)There is a saying you become like what you worship.

C)Paul sees all the idols and then he sees their behavior - the Athenians were given to things that don't satisfy

D)Their idolatry was perpetuating an emptiness, a loneliness and a recklessness in the fabric of their culture.

E)Paul could see all of that - and he was provoked in his spirit

3rd thing that Provoked Paul is he knew what happened in Athens didn't stay in Athens

A)Athens was the epicenter for Idolatry and Philosophy

B)And Athens was spreading their decadence and immorality all over the Roman empire

C)This provoked Paul - Athens was having a negative impact on the entire world -

1)Including his nation and people Israel

See The Romans were building cities all over Israel -with the city came their immorality and idolatry

A)Example - Beit She'an - Massive city - Hippodrome chariot races - theater

B)Imagine living in a little village - in comes the construction crews - Buildings going up streets -

C)Build a massive temple to their god on the hill over looking the city

Beit She'an was the capital of what was known as the Decapolis - 10 cities

A)Deca =10 - polis cities - 10 cities

B)The Romans built these ten massive cities all over the region of Israel

1)Caesarea Philippi - Caesarea Maritime

C)Everywhere they built they brought their influence with them -

D)All of it originated in Athens

1)Athens was invading the culture and turning people away from the true and living God

E)Paul was Provoked

What gets you provoked?

A)When you see godless ideologies infiltrating our society/ schools -does it get you provoked -

B) That sharp stab in your heart? Watch or read the evening news? - Heart sick - turns to Anger

C) When we see our world becoming more and more - anti-God - more and more against Jesus
1) More and more evil - wicked - immoral

D) IT SHOULD CAUSE US TO BE PROVOKED?

The Question is what are we going to do about? What did Paul do?

A) Did Paul retreat - did he move into a monastery - to isolate himself from the world?

B) No Paul understood the commission from Jesus himself in John 17 prayer -
1) To be in the world but not of the world.

C) He didn't retreat - He didn't isolate - he dove in.

¹⁷ Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. **End of V.18 he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.**

What did Paul do? He talked to as many people as possible about Jesus

A) He followed his normal custom - he went into the Synagogue -

B) To talk to those who were following Judaism

C) But he also went into the market place

D) Picture in my mind - Local coffee shop - standing in line - starts up a conversation - what is good here?

E) You new in town - Yea - why here - On a mission? Tell people about the person who changed my life.

Paul looked to move the conversation to Jesus and the Resurrection

A) When the NT authors wrote about the or spoke about the Resurrection -

B) They were not only talking about the fact that Jesus rose from the dead

1) The word Resurrection speaks of the reality that there is life after death

C) Paul being Provoked in his heart - preaches Jesus 1) and the reality that there is more to life - than this life - There is something after this

D) Eternal life - or eternal Death

So Paul is sharing - and watch what happens
¹⁸ Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?"

A) Babbling - that major insult to a preacher - thankfully I have never been accused on babbling

B) England once - Brilliant = good - polite

C) So the Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers accused Paul of babbling

D) Who were these guys

The Epicureans and Stoics represented the 2 popular Philosophies of the day in the Roman World

A) These two philosophies are still very much alive in our day and age - **Just have different names**

B) Epicureans today - foodies - those who have a high taste in food

C) Stoics today - think of someone with controlled emotions - they don't ever get riled -

1) Something great happens - how are you feeling? - Good.

Something bad happens - how are you doing - good

Nick name for Eddie Hill - Steady Eddie

A) Never gets riled - Happy Stoic - always positive - emotions never waver

B) One time talking on the phone - he said I am so mad right now - I said - stay right there - I am coming over - I want to see you mad.

C) That is what we think of when we hear the names Epicureans and Stoics today

But in Paul's day it was different - These two philosophies represented the two dominant world views in that culture

A) They continue to be two dominant world views in our day - we just have given them different names

B) Epicurus was a Greek Philosopher who believed that the two most important things in life were

1) **personal happiness and pleasure**

C) Now you could see how that philosophy could lead someone down a road of a wild party lifestyle.

Well Epicurus thought that through and realized that if someone was only living for pleasure

A) They were going to end up drunk in the gutter or destitute and that would not be happiness

B) So he put some reasonable boundaries in his life - but his overall theme was seeking tranquility and good vibes

C) Treat others right - enjoy life - pursue experiences and pleasure - but just don't go overboard.

1) Live for the moment - live for experiences

D) That is the way that a lot of people approach life today.

1) They live for the moment with no thought of their eternal destiny

Now Epicurus developed this philosophy because of his view of where we come from and where we are going.

A) Where did he think we came from? Epicurus believed in something called Atomism - ATOM

B) ATOMISM believes that man was not created by a higher being - that we would call God.

C) Atomism believes that all life came into being as Atoms converged together

Sounds a bit like Darwinism - Darwin's view of Origins. - Random

A) Darwin didn't come up with that view -

B) Philosophers were espousing that view long before Darwin came along

C) So Epicurus bought into this view of Origins - Atomism -

1) which meant we don't come from a creator - a higher being

D) So that was his view of where we came from - and that affected his view of where we are going

No creator = no judgment

A) Epicurus believed that we would never have to stand before an eternal judge and answer for your life.

B) This life is all we get so live life to the fullest and enjoy it

C) So that was the Philosophy of the Epicureans

1) Predominant Philosophy in Paul's day and it is still a popular Philosophy in our day.

The Stoics however were different - they were the Moralists of their day.

A) They developed their own guide for what was right and wrong

B) They believed in a Supreme being and established a standard for what would make you right in the eyes of that Supreme being

C) So they sought to live by this standard that made them think they were better than everyone else

1) who didn't live by their standard.

That is also a popular Philosophy today

A) People love to create their own standard of good and bad.

B) A lot of people today think - they are going to heaven as long as their good outweighs their bad.

C) Guys that might be how it works with Santa Claus but that is not how it works with God

D) If you could get into heaven by your good works - Jesus would not have had to come and die on the cross

So in Athens there were these two predominant Philosophies - and those Philosophies still exist today.

A) So Paul shows up and sees what is going on in Athens - sees people caught up in this idolatrous lifestyle -

B) Others who are trying so hard to be Moral - and what does he do?

C) He preaches Jesus and the Resurrection -

D) The Stoics and the Epicureans - accuse him of babbling - but V.18b

Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?" ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." ²¹ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

The Areopagus was known as the god MT. also known as Mars Hill

A) The MT of the Chief god

B) It was at this Hill they would gather to talk philosophy -

C) V.21 the Athenians prided themselves in being free thinkers and forward thinkers -

1) let's consider this new thing

D) Gave place to espouse and consider on Mars Hill - for people to espouse their beliefs

1) So they give Paul and opportunity to speak

²² Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; (**common ground- spiritual belief's....**) So Paul declares "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; ²³ for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.

Now Paul is going to proceed to tell them 4 things about God

#1 God is the creator V.24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

A) I can picture the Epicureans stiffening as he is talking - because they don't believe in a Creator God.

²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.

B) Now Paul says something really interesting here - **V.26 We all come from the same blood -**

1) **we are all the same in other words**

C) That flies in the face of most Religious Philosophies -

1) Most religions draw a line in the sand that separates good people from bad people

D) Religion says if you adhere to this standard and way of belief you are a good person and you will be accepted

1) If you don't you are a bad person/ not accepted

Politics today basically does the same thing - Both the left and the right

A) You believe like us - you are good - and if you don't you are bad.

B) Christianity doesn't do that! The Bible doesn't do that

C) The Bible says that we all come from the same blood - that all of us are bad - we are all sinners

Romans 3:10 There are none who are righteous

A) Righteous think perfect - No one is perfect - only God - so that would make all of us unrighteous

Romans 3:23 -All have sinned and fallen Short of the glory of God

B) We all need to be saved - we all need a savior -

1) God made a way for unrighteous people to be declared righteous - the Cross of JESUS

C) Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God made a way for us to be reconciled to God ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21

D) Jesus became sin filled so that sin filled people could become sin free

1) God treated Jesus as if he lived my life - so he could treat me as if I had lived his life

So Paul is declaring a really important truth - apart from Jesus we are all the same in God's eyes. Same Blood

A) How do you think that made the Stoics feel -

B) Paul are you trying to tell me that I am the same as that guy in the gutter been worshipping Baucis all night? - **I don't think so**

C) Can you sense the tension starting to rise. - Paul is being an equal opportunity offender.

I sense that sometimes here in this room

A) I will see some of you start to tense up. - Getting uncomfortable - checking your watch

B) Others of you are smiling - you know what is happening - you are sitting next to that person who is getting uncomfortable

C) You know why they are getting uncomfortable - the Holy Spirit is working -

D) You really need to pray in that moment - break through

So Paul says first that God is the Creator - he has created us all the same - sinners in need of a savior.

A) Notice again in V.26 he has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.

B) God has put boundaries around our lives - he has boxed us in - the next verse tells us why.

²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

C) Here we see the 2nd thing that Paul tells us about God -

1) God wants us to know Him - He created us to know Him

God puts boundaries around our lives - he brings us to a place of feeling boxed in - to get us to the end of ourselves.

A) So that we might seek Him - story of many here

B) For those of you who have been saved a while do you remember what that felt like -

1) Boxed in - end of yourself

C) The world was closing in on you - felt lost and helpless

D) Cried out to God - God does that so that we might seek Him - our text puts it this way - that we **might grope for Him**

CSB - **reach out and find Him**

ESV **they might feel their way toward Him and find Him**

Are you in that Place today - Boxed in - the end of yourself - the end of your rope - SUICIDE --

A) **KNOW THIS:** God is near to you/ God is not far from you He is near -

B) He is at the door of your heart - knocking - open

C) Listen you don't have to climb a mountain to find God -

1) you don't have to follow a set of rules and rituals to find God

D) You just need to reach out to Him - cry out to Him

⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:9-10

E) It is that simple - Your life today.

But you know God still puts boundaries around our lives after we come to Jesus -

A) He still allows us to have moments - **BOXED IN**

B)He does that still - boxed in - end of ourselves

1)so that we will cry out to him and experience his power in our weakness

C)Paul the apostle found himself in that place - illness an infirmity of some sort -

1)oppressed him –

D)He prayed and prayed that the Lord would take it away -

1)Jesus said no Paul I am not going to do that

In the midst of your infirmity you are going to discover that my Grace is sufficient for you

A)And that my Power, my strength is made perfect in your weakness - 2 Corinthians 12:9

B)I love this verse: Notice Jesus didn't say - My strength is survived in weakness

C)He isn't saying - You are great when you are strong - but just adequate when you are weak!

D)No He says My strength is made perfect in weakness

Amplified: My strength is fulfilled and complete in your weakness

A)Kenneth Wuest the Greek Scholar -

“My power is moment by moment coming to its full energy and complete operation in the sphere of weakness”

B)That Revelation led Paul to respond in this way:

Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. ¹⁰ So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

C)The first few times you are boxed in and find yourself at the end of yourself

1)that is not the natural or initial response

D)More like the Children of Israel at the Red Sea - Boxed in - Pharaoh coming -

1)**Moses has led us here to die! - What doing God?**

E)But after seeing God show up a few times and show his power - and part the Red Sea -

1)work miracles

F)You learn to respond in that way: I wonder what God is going to do this time? -

1)How show up this time - Exciting

So Paul tells them that God is their Creator

A)2nd He tells them that God is near to us and wants us to know Him

B)The 3rd thing Paul tells them about God is found V.28-29

²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' ²⁹ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

3rd thing You cannot shape God into the image you want him to be. -

A)They were totally doing this with all their idols My grandkids play with playdough - shapes and sizes - cool

A)God is not like Play do - make him into the image you want him to be

B)But People try to make God into what they want him to be - like ordering a Latte at the coffee shop

C)Less Holiness, more Mercy,

D)I want my God to be loving and accepting of everyone and not judgmental at all.

True God loves everyone!

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son - John 3:16a

A)He loved the World - everyone in it - Sent Jesus to bring Salvation to humans

B)But God doesn't accept everyone - John 3:16b - That whosoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life.

C)He loves everyone - he accepts those who believe in Jesus

¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. John 3:17

So God cannot be shaped by us into the image that we want him to be -

A)But he is seeking to Shape us into the image of Jesus

²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.

B)Paul is essentially saying - Listen God doesn't exist for us - we exist for him

C)True living happens when you realize - it is in him that you live and move and have your being

D)So God is our Creator

1. God wants us to Know Him
2. We cannot shape God into our image - He wants to shape us into his image

4th We are all going to stand before God one day and give an account for our lives

³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

A)We are all going to give an account to God one day!

Hebrews 9:27 ²⁷ And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.

B)Stand before God and answer - what did you do with my Son?

1)Reject for believe - No neutral ground

C)Can't ignore that - Like Gravity - I don't believe in Gravity - Jump off the building - find out it is true

D)Your feelings don't change the truth

The Epicurean - I don't believe we are going to be judged by God

A)You will die find out you are wrong - no matter how sincere you are in your beliefs

B)Stoic -I believe my good works will get me to heaven - You die and find out you were wrong

³² And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this *matter*." ³³ So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴ However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

C)Athens was full of Naysayers -they died - found out - Paul was right

There is one time in the Bible where God lets Hell Speak - rich man who died goes to hell -

A)Please let me go back and warn my family - avoid this place

B)Party is on I will save you a seat - no - this is terrible - I don't want them to end up here.

C)God doesn't let us go back - TODAY IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

Pray:

There is another time in the NT where this word Provoked is used.

²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Stir up = Provoke - Let's provoke stab each other in love to be in fellowship

A)To love one another - love the lost -

B)Good works - Showing Jesus love and sharing the gospel

Amen!