

Mission

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Preacher: Andrew Lawrence

[0 : 00] I just want to start by saying thank you for your prayers for my trip to America, North America and Canada.

I'll perhaps reflect at another time on that. But just to say it went incredibly well and there was such a sense of God being with us and encountering us.

It was truly a wonderful time together. And so grateful for your prayers and support for that. Sorry, I forgot my clicker. Thank you.

And it's so good to be back. Love being back. Right, this morning we are going to do something slightly different. In that you may think, oh, that looks normal. Acts devoted to God. Each other mission it is.

But we're going to jump, I don't know, ten chapters roughly. And we're going to dive into Acts 17. The reason for that will come apparent as I take us through this.

[1 : 01] So in a moment we're going to read from Acts 17, 22 to 29. Before we do that, I just want to make a quick sort of explanatory comments just about the passage we're going to go into.

Because we're breaking into the passage. And basically what's happened, or the story up to the point where we're going to go into it, is Paul has gone to Athens. He's waiting in Athens for Silas and Timothy to join him.

And in Athens he has a look around the city and sees what's going on. And one of the things he sees is how many idols and gods there are in Athens.

And even one idol to an unknown god or the unknown god. And so he decides to bring a challenge to the people.

He speaks out basically about Jesus. And he's drawn into a meeting of the Areopagus. I'm very used to pronouncing words. You can probably pronounce it better.

[2 : 08] But basically that's a council. It's a council of city elders effectively. It happens on a rocky hill in Athens, which has got the same name, Areopagus.

And he's called into this governing council of Athens to basically explain what he's up to. And that's where we're going to break into the passage. So if you've got your Bible with you, or if you want to read on the screen, we're going to start Acts 17, 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. 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're ignorant of the very thing you worship. And this is what I'm 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's not served by human hands as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

[3 : 21] 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. We'll go back one there. Father, as we consider your word, we want to recognise your God.

And we submit ourselves to your word. And we surrender ourselves to you. And our great desire, God, is you are glorified.

[4 : 23] Your kingdom comes. Your will is done. In Jesus' most precious name. Amen. So work in our hearts, we ask, Lord God. Help us to see what you're doing. Help us to engage with what you're doing.

In our lives and in the lives of each other. Even our life as a church together. In Jesus' most precious, holy and wonderful name. Amen.

Amen. So here we have this passage. I just want to draw a few very simple points from the passage, which hopefully will help us just to engage with it. The first one is this.

Paul recognises the Athenian culture. And he highlights the ridiculous nature of their beliefs. And in the context, when we think about mission, which, by the way, please let's not think of mission as something a few people do.

We're all called to mission. Without exception. That is to demonstrate the good news, to bring the good news of the kingdom of God to wherever we are. Paul here highlights the ridiculous nature of their beliefs.

[5 : 29] Their superstition. Well, just in case we've offended a God, we'll have an idol to an unknown God. Because then surely that covers any other ones which we've forgotten, didn't realise. Do you know what?

I think it's not that dissimilar to our context today. It feels like to me there are so many idols in the world today.

We may not call them gods. But that's what they are. Whether they be celebrity culture. Whether it be the pursuit of capitalism, the capitalistic dream, the money, the possessions, the house, the whatever.

Whether it be the status we have on Facebook, the number of likes or followers we have. It may not be Facebook, it may be Instagram or whatever else you like. There's so many there.

It's hard to see the truth. So we need to just pause and remember that there is absolute truth. And we need to be able to speak that truth to our culture today.

[6 : 33] I'd like to just make a very quick comment about that as well. You may or may not be aware of this, but there are quite a lot of reports in the press at the moment, particularly the Christian press, around what's being dubbed the quiet revival.

Has anybody come across that phrase? A few of us come? Yeah, okay. So quite a few of us. Fundamentally what it seems to be referring to is there is a stirring and a longing for God in our land, which is resulting particularly in men in their 20s getting saved.

And what seems to be going on here is Gen Z and millennials have got a deep sense of purposelessness. And a deep sense of surely there's more.

And they're going looking. And they're not after some made up truth. They're after something which has value, which has integrity or wholeness to it.

And that's the gospel. Real truth. Now of course it's not just that generation. It's not just young men. It's young women as well. But it does seem to be particularly going on in the Gen Z millennial type age band, by the way.

[7 : 53] If you don't know what that is, that's the sort of... I'll get this wrong. I won't be completely right. But those born in the late 90s through to the early noughties, somewhere around there, even a bit further apart, mid-late noughties.

And I find that so exciting. We've always been told to compromise the truth so much.

You've got to make your message more palatable. You've got to make your message this. You've got to do this. You've got to do that. You've got to do the other. And yet, in places where truth is being proclaimed, people are meeting Jesus.

And meeting Jesus in numbers we have not seen in our nation for a very, very long time. Now it's dubbed the Quiet Revival because it's not got a lot of profile on that sort of stuff.

It just seems to be happening. Churches with bigger numbers of people gathering than ever before. A bit like us on Easter Sunday. In fact, one of the articles you'll find us referred to in that article as a church.

[8 : 56] People stepping in and wanting to find out, asking questions. Let's recognise the culture we're in today. The world we're in today. Let's recognise what God may be doing amongst us or is doing amongst us.

Amongst the people we work with. Amongst the people we live amongst. Amongst our neighbours. Amongst our friends. Let's recognise what's going on. Let's draw close to God.

Let's be ready to speak into the culture that he's put us in. That others will come to know and enjoy Jesus. And find his grace and mercy and be saved.

Amen. Amen. Amen. The second thing Paul does is he explains the simple truths of the Gospel. Now that says verse 24 to 28.

Which is how I was going when I created the PowerPoint. Or when Sandy created the PowerPoint for me. I'm actually going to go a bit further. But I just want to sort of look at the passage. If you've got your Bible, you may want to have it open in front of you.

[9 : 58] But yeah. If we want to see an explanation of the Gospel. How about this? Verse 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.

Okay. That's just verse 24. In other words. What's his message? Well God's made this earth. That's a key one for starters. And if we're thinking about how we communicate with others.

Let's remember. We start with God made the world. And he's not earth based. Because that's what he says here. Everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth.

But he does not live in temples built by human hands. In other words. God's not restricted in any way. He is God. He's the great I am.

And he gets to choose and decide what he does. Not us. And he doesn't need anything. So it goes on. It says. And he's not served by human hands. As if he needs anything.

[11 : 00] God doesn't need anything at all. But he chooses. He wants. He desires us. Because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

From one man he made every nation of men. That they should inhabit the earth. From one man. Adam. There is a creation story. That's a wonderful story.

Let's not be shy of it. Let's engage with it. It's an amazing story. There is a meta narrative. As many people. In the postmodern era of 20 years ago.

25 years ago I suppose now. Hey there's a big story. There's a big story. And God is involved in that big story. And he wants to draw us into his big story. His story of salvation.

His story of his love. And he determined the time set for them. And the exact places where they should live. I'm going to come back to that in a minute.

[11 : 59] God did this so that men would seek him. And perhaps reach out for him. And find him. Though he is not far from each one of us. God is here. And he's close. If you don't yet know God.

You can today. That's the truth of the gospel. He's near and he desires. Each and every one of us. To come into the fullness of a relationship with him. Him who made us.

Him who sustains us. Him who loves us. That we've been singing about this morning. We get to enjoy him. For in him we live and move.

And have our being. As some of your poets have said. We're his offspring. We're his offspring. Wow.

He made us. We're his children. And in him. We get to live life to the full. Jesus says. John 10.10. I've come that you may have life. And life in all its fullness.

[12 : 59] We get to be his children. Now this is a bit where I'm going. Slightly off piece. Because it doesn't say this up there. But I decided I'd go on. Therefore since we are God's offspring.

We should not think the divine being is like gold or silver or stone. An image made by man's design and skill. No way. God's real and living. In the past God overlooked such ignorance.

But now he commands all people everywhere to repent. That is such a sobering sentence. He's not going to overlook ignorance.

He commands all people everywhere to repent. Wow. Wow. Wow. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

That's Jesus. There's a day coming. That the whole world will be judged. Where are you going to stand in that point in time?

[14 : 08] Where are we going to stand at that point in time? Part of his sheep? Or separated out like a goat? He's given proof to this.

To all men. By raising Jesus from the dead. By raising him from the dead. When they'd heard about the resurrection of the dead. Some of them sneered. But others said. We want to hear you again on this subject.

And at that Paul left the council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysus. A member of the Arab Marcus. And a woman named Damaris. And a number of

others.

People when they hear the gospel story. The truth of the gospel. With a question. With a challenge. What are you going to do about it?

People get saved. Let's be ready to share the gospel story. With people we work with. People we play with. People we live with.

[15:06] People we live near. Our neighbours. Our friends. Our work colleagues. Let's be ready to share it. You may think. Well that's not quite how I share it. That's fine. Find a way of sharing it.

Find a way of communicating it. Let's look for those opportunities. God gives us. Now. I want to go back to the verse. I skipped over verse 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.

Now this is a comment about the nations. But. Of course the nations are made up of people. It's about.

A comment also. About us. From one man. From one man. Jesus. Or from Adam rather. He made all the nations. That they should inhabit the whole earth.

[16:05] Yeah. That's what we're called to. That's a reflection. Of the Genesis. Of Genesis. The promise to be given. To go forth and fill the earth. For the glory of God. And he marked out their appointed times.

In history. And the boundaries. Of their lands. Wow. What's that mean? He marked out their appointed times.

In history. And the boundaries. Of their lands. I want us to just consider this for a moment. While it is about the nations. It's also about us. And we see that. This is also reflected.

In lots of. The canon of scripture. Where the stories of Joseph. Or Esther. Or Moses. Or Abraham. Or of Paul getting called to the Macedonians. God has a plan for each of us to live in.

He will call. And there are particular seasons in our lives. Where he'll call us to a particular place. Or a particular people. Or to a particular activity. And. We also need to recognize.

[16:59] He has a time frame within that. And he gives us a season. Now sometimes that season can be very long. And sometimes that season can be very short. But we just need to recognize. Actually God does that.

I wonder. Do we recognize that? Do we recognize we only have a season?

A season on earth for sure. We've all got a lifespan. But do we recognize that God's set out that plan? God's set out that time scale.

Actually God has a time plan for our lives. That there will be different seasons. Of different things happening. I mean. We all know some of those.

You know. When you have family. And babies. And people say. Oh don't worry. It's only for a season. Well don't worry. But enjoy. It is for a season. Yes. Or maybe.

[18:00] When you're newly married. Or maybe as we get older. It's a season. It's a season. Do we recognize God gives us a season? But also. That season may result in us being in different places.

That God can take us to different places. So long as we're prepared to hear him. And be obedient. Psalm 16.

Verses 5 and 6. Actually I will turn to it. Otherwise I'm going to misquote it. It says this. Lord you have signed me my portion and my cup. In other words. You have given me a framework for my life. You have made my lot. Or my purpose secure. In other words you hold my future. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Surely I have a delightful inheritance.

As we submit ourselves to God. Do we know that? Can we trust God with that? Can we trust him that he has assigned us a portion and a cup.

[19:02] He has a plan for us to walk in. There will be a timescale within that. That he makes us secure. That he puts boundary lines around us. To put us in pleasant places for his glory and honour.

If we are prepared to recognise it. It feels like to me. That we also need to recognise he can uproot us. If he's boss. If he's in control. That means that times and seasons he can uproot us.

A bit like Tim and Helen went through. They were happily living in Birmingham. Well actually Nottingham originally as students. And they get married in Nottingham. And they have a season in Nottingham.

And Tim's an elder in the church there. And then God gets hold of their hearts and says. Hey how about being part of a church planting team in Birmingham. And off they go to Birmingham for a season.

Help plant a church there. A church which is demonstrating something of the gospel. Of good news of God. The kingdom of God coming. And then he starts stirring them again. Sometimes God can use difficult circumstances to stir our hearts.

[20 : 06] And he stirred them. Said it's time to move on again. And then they start. Oh where? What are you saying God? And in God's providence and grace. We get to have them come to us in autumn for a season.

That's wonderful. We're so thrilled to have them. As part of us. But you know. That works both ways. Sometimes it can also be that God stirs something in people's hearts.

And it's time to move on. And that we need to recognise can be painful. It can be painful for the people. It can be painful for those who are staying behind.

It can be painful for those who are going. But we need to recognise God's hand in this. God determines where we live. God determines our times.

Now you're probably starting to think. Oh where are you going here Andrew? Well. I need to tell you some news. Vinnie and Diana have been amongst us as a church for just over two years.

[21 : 16] And what I'm just about to share is a result of a very fast changing situation. And ideally we would love to have been able to share this earlier. But circumstances didn't allow.

But Vinnie and Diana they came to us just over two years ago. After a tough and quite damaging period of former church life.

And during this time through fellowship and conversation with us. They've found healing. As well as seeing a fresh vision for churches like us. A grace church.

Church with the word and spirit. We've loved having these guys amongst us. In fact we've loved having them amongst us so much. Over recent time we've been talking with Vinnie about possibly recognising him as an elder.

And we're hoping we would be in the place to welcome Vinnie into eldership in the not too distant future. However. Alongside that we've also been aware that Vinnie and Diana have been having some visa problems.

[22 : 18] And over the last nine months. Which is one reason why we've held back on potentially raising or recognising Vinnie as an elder. And sadly the clarity which we were hoping for and praying for.

That they'd have a long term visa here in the UK. Which was very much their desire as well as ours. Has not materialised. And instead what we're going to have to do is say goodbye to Vinnie and Diana.

They need to leave the UK. Yeah. And this is hard for us. It's hard for them too. But such is the quality of what God has done in them.

And is doing in them. That with surrender and prayer. They are now feeling and have been discussing with us a sense that God has met them in this.

And it's talking to them about relocating to North Portugal. Where we already have two commissioned churches. One in a city called Penafiel.

[23 : 20] Or a town called Penafiel. One in Oporto. Which is the second biggest city in Portugal. And the area they feel they've been called to. Has been on our church's heart.

Our Portuguese church's heart. For over ten years. To see a church planted in. But they haven't had the right leaders. And so Vinnie and Diana are now therefore exploring, planting a commissioned church.

In the area around Braga. That's the third largest city in Portugal. In the north of Portugal. With help from us. And also our Portuguese church team. Which is known as the Juntos team.

In fact, I think. There we go. There's a picture of Vinnie and Diana. Yeah. Yanni and Yasmin. And that's North Portugal. Porto Penafiel. Braga's further north.

They're roughly about 45 minutes to an hour apart. Something like that. Vinnie and Diana have actually lived in Braga before.

[24 : 18] In their past. And having got to know us as a church. And a family of churches. Want to replicate our vision and values. By planting a church there. Their aim is to soon relocate.

With a view to planting a church in next autumn. Autumn 26. But before that they want to build strong relationships. With our two churches in Penafiel and Oporto.

As well as local ones. They want to gather a team for this plant. No final decisions have yet been made. But the situation is looking very positive. As elders and trustees.

We believe this to be a God plan. And whilst gutted. To be losing Vinnie and Diana. We're delighted.

They will take a part of Harvest Church. And plant a grace filled word and spirit church. In the Braga district. The reality for this is Diana and Yasmin will be leaving the UK a week tomorrow.

[25 : 26] 2nd of June. Vinnie and Yanni will be staying on for a couple of months. They'll be here until early August. So that Yanni can finish her school year and attend New Day.

Because we feel this is a God thing. We want to support them in every possible way.

That's pastorally. And prayer support. As well as apostolic help. Church planting help. All those things.

And that's not just us. It will also be the Juntos team in Portugal. Portugal. We also want to support them financially. So next week.

Next Sunday. We're going to take up an offering. And the aim of the offering is this. It's to support Vinnie and Diana in their transition back to Portugal. And in the early stages of planting a new church.

[26 : 26] So we'll take the offering next Sunday. My hope is it will be a substantial amount. It would be great if it was £10,000 or more. You may go, oh, goodness me, that's a lot.

Well, church planting costs. And we will channel it through our international mission fund. So the accounts, et cetera, will be our international mission fund accounts for it to go through.

And by doing that, yeah, we would love to support them. We are gutted they're going to go. But we're also excited.

And I'm hoping for many of us what will feel like, oh, pain and heartache. We can also see something here. We've had the privilege of having these wonderful folk amongst us for a few years.

A couple of years. They've been such a blessing to us. We also want to bless them now. As they pursue God in this next season of their lives.

[27 : 33] And we pray that as a result of this step, many lives will come under the power of the gospel. People will be one to Jesus. And a vibrant, healthy church will be established there in Portugal.

These guys have been part of so many teams in church life. They're going to be working their way out of those. They've already started to work their way out of those.

There's going to need to be a few changes we'll need to make. However, let's keep our eyes on Jesus. This feels like we sense it is a God-engineered situation. Thank you.