

The Glory of Seeking God Acts 17:27-28

We have Paul on the Areopagus preaching to the Athenian council who have assembled to hear about the unknown God. He shows that this God is Creator and therefore in need of nothing. He is the great "I AM," totally sufficient and gloriously satisfied in himself. He created humanity and the world and all that we see, not because he needed something or he was lonely but simply to display his glory. Paul is preaching to an audience that is very religious but is totally unfamiliar with the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore Paul begins to show God from creation or what we call natural revelation. He is the God of all and the only God.

And he shows him not only as Creator but as sustainer. It is incredible how the complex systems of the earth and universe are all kept in a certain balance. If they would not then life could not exist. If the sun was just a little closer than the earth would burn and there would be no life, if it was a little further away it would be too cold to exist. If the moon was a little closer the tides would be massive and cover all the land twice daily. If plant life diminished then the delicate balance of carbon dioxide and oxygen would be disturbed and we would not be able to breath. If the ozone layer was deleted around the earth then every day dust particles would come through the atmosphere like bombs and make life unpredictable and impossible. Who holds all of this together? None other than our God.

And last time we were together we saw that God is not only the caretaker and sustainer of all but he is the God of all history. He is the controller and director in our lives. The time of our lives, the reason why there is a you and me right here right now, all the problems and trials and blessings of life are all there because of the controller and director of the universe. Certainly God is greater and more glorious than they could have ever imagined. The height of these truths is just amazing.

And let me point out a couple things as we begin. One is that Paul has not quoted scripture at all in this sermon. Even though there are many Old Testament passages that he could have turned to he doesn't. Since they are unfamiliar with the Old Testament Scriptures he points out what is available to them and what is evident to them, and that is what is known as General Revelation. And think about the message of creation because it is so evident that only a fool would claim that there is no God. But here is the thing about unredeemed humanity. They can look at a the beauty after the rain and see a rainbow, or they can look at the face of a new born, or the glory of a flower or the majesty of a sunset, and not see God. So God sends people like you and me into their lives to describe to them what they cannot see, so that they might see what is so evident. There is a God greater than you could have ever imagined. Let me tell you what is so evident. Our great hope is through our seeing they would see. What a glorious privilege to really be able to share with spiritually blind people the beauty of seeing none other than the invisible God and their need of him!

The other thing that this passage of Scripture really challenges us with is what are we seeking in our own lives? Every single person that exists is a treasure hunter, and we are seeking for something. Because we are made in the image of God and are made for God that seeking can only be satisfied in Jesus Christ. And here is the incredible thing. We can find the glorious treasure of Christ. We can revel that the God

of the universe and creation came to die for a lowly sinner like me. But here is the epitome of sin, we can turn from that treasure to search and try to find other treasure that we hope will satisfy. And so many people are on a quest for some kind of satisfaction, some kind of joy. Where are you looking? It could be sex, or materialism, or a certain relationship, or reputation. Here is the thing about blindness — often people are not only blinded by not seeing God, but are often blind to what they are truly living for and seeking. So someone who has made an idol of money doesn't realize how much they think about money and what they think it can give them or what they want to buy. A teen who is controlled by acceptance and friends doesn't realize how their treasure is acceptance and they will do things they never thought in order to get that treasure.

Where is your treasure? Here is the amazing thing — God wants us to be treasure hunters, he made us to seek, and he wants us to find satisfaction, and the only place we can truly find the rest and security and joy and satisfaction for our ever searching souls is found in him. Here is my message — seek God with all your heart. There is rest and satisfaction in him. So I want us to see a couple things this morning.

1. We need to realize the whole goal in life. V. 27a.

If you had to think about the goal of life, what would it be? We have stated it over and over through this series of sermons in Acts 17 — and that is the glory of God. We were made as mirrors or reflectors to reflect the very nature of God back to him. We realize we are made in the image of God. We have a moral component that none of creation or the animal world has, therefore a greater capacity to reflect that glory back to him. And regardless of the trials and difficulties of life it really is the most substantial and satisfying life we could ever live. But in order to reflect that glory something has to be done first, and that is we have to find this great God. We need to know him, and the only way to know him is through His Son Jesus Christ. And for us who have found that rest it should create a greater joy and love and desire to seek him further. We want to know this God.

Now read through this verse, and let us see if we can get some light as far as the meaning, **“that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.”** Notice the word “that,” which could be translated “so that.” He is drawing a conclusion on what he has just said. It is the reason God has revealed himself. So think about what he has just said. Because Paul loves to join these phrases and clauses together. We like to bring things to a close but verses 24 and the way through verse 27 are one long sentence. It is divided here for us with a period after verse 25, but it all hangs together. God is creator, and sustainer, and the controller of history. Now here is the thing, why has he created everything, why does he sustain us, why am I living at this point in human history, why has he given me the family I have, why does he have me right here right now? And he is what Paul says, **“that they** (or we and everyone else) **should seek him.”** God has given us the ability to think and comprehend. It is really a blessing, that I can listen and I can discern truth. God has given abundant evidence of who he is that individuals might know him and seek.

Think how every single person knows the Law of God even though they might never have heard the Scriptures. Paul says in Romans 2:14-15, **“ For when Gentiles,**

who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them." We are God's creation. We all know murder is wrong and evil and sinful, the same with stealing, adultery and lying. But where does that law come from? It comes from God. God gives his creation around us and the witness in us that they might seek God. He is not indicating what they will do or what they do, but what they ought to do with this grace lavished on them. Every person should seek God. His strength, wisdom and holiness are constantly on display in us and around us. Again, only the fool would claim there is no God.

Now look how Paul continues, **"and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him."** Now think of this verse, "feel their way" literally means groping. It was a word to describe a blind person seeking to find something. It might be right there but it is out of his grasp. What is that indicating? But notice God's intent is that he might be found. That he might be rejoiced over and that he might be trusted and worshiped. If that were not the case then missions would make no sense. God truly wants to be found. 2 Peter 3:9, **"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."** Why hasn't the Lord come back and brought his end-time promises to fruition? He is not willing that any should perish. Listen to Ezekiel 18:32, These are the words of our Lord, **"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live."** And listen to his passion in Ezekiel 33:11, **"Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"** God's intention is that people would seek him and find him.

Now the whole verse, and this audience before Paul, Paul is indicating even though this is God's moral will and moral intention, that his audience has not found him. And God has both a moral will and a sovereign will. His will is that "thou shalt not kill," yet he ordained the killing or murder of Jesus. God's will as we said last time will always come to pass, but that does not excuse us from our responsibility to not only seek for God but also to find him. Instead of feeling their way to God, listen to what man does with the greatness of this revelation in Romans 1:18-20, think of these verses and all the idols that they have in Athens. They have groped, but in their groping they have wilfully created gods of their own liking and reject the God who is so evident, **"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."** It should amaze us of how loving and gracious God is every single day. It is easy to see the rebellion in the heart of man, and his suppression of that truth, but the anthem of his greatness in creation and life is there every single day. His witness is in the heart of every single person every

single day. That is what makes sin so sinful is God is so so so gracious to every single person who deserves the opposite. Truly every person is without excuse.

But think also think about the sovereign love of God to us as believers. Because he could have left us in a state of groping, and been absolutely justified, but he not only gave us his general revelation which is in us and around us, but he gave his special revelation — the truth of Christ, and then took that revelation and through the Holy Spirit shone it effectively in our hearts and lives so that we believed. Folks, I believe if he has done that for us, then realizing that, glorying in that life he has given, finding God and loving God, which again is the reason why we exist, but should create in us such an awe and love for God. Look at what he has done for people who deserve his wrath. Look at the coming of Christ and how he has created new life so that we believe. That awe where God becomes bigger and bigger, and more gracious and more gracious, is the joy and satisfaction and contentment that everyone on this planet seeks for but can only be found in Christ. **“Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”** Aren’t you amazed and overawed that a blind person like you, a sinner who opposed this knowledge can now sing and celebrate Christ? That love and desire and awe of Christ doesn’t cause us to find life in things, but life in Christ. It creates a joy and desire to want more of him. Be honest, are you finding your satisfaction in him?

But it should also create a heart that wants what God wants. And if his desire is for others to find him, and they are blind, then he sends us to see and make known what they cannot and will not see. We want them, God wants them to see. Think of it, have you ever look at a sunset and sunrise and said to your children, look at the beauty, and they say something like — that’s great mom, really neat dad — with no thought of what they are beholding. God gives believing and seeing parents to see what they cannot see — our awesome Creator, Redeemer God! God gives us blind people so that we might be his glorious witnesses. God desires worshipers. And one of the highest and most glorious ways that we can glorify God and worship him is through making worshipers. Taste and see that the Lord is so good!

2. We need to realize there are no excuses before God. V.27b-28.

It is incredible that how Paul orchestrates this whole sermon. He could have argued through their sinful lifestyle and shown they do things they know are wrong and wrong before God. He could have argued about their intellectual arrogance. And it would have been easy to see. People many times deny the existence of God and think somehow they are deep thinkers when in actuality they are anything but. Where Paul goes is what is so evident in the created world. It is such a strong argument and such a convicting and humbling one when we start to see the truth about Christ.

And here is the thing, people try to suppress that knowledge of God but even the staunchest atheist and agnostic know there is a God and there is a specific God. I read a few atheists, and they will readily admit their hatred of God, even though they say he does not exist. And Paul knows that the God of creation is so close to every person. He is here with us this morning and will be with us as we depart. There is no where in all the earth or all of creation where we can escape his presence. Listen to the praise and delight of the Psalmist as he recognizes the forever present God in Psalm 139:7-12, **“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your**

presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you." And it is a truth that is humbling and profound. There is never a location or situation or place where our God is not present. Everything, every conversation and secret thing is done in the presence of God. There is never any place that we can flee out of presence even though we live many times as if he is not present. Where have you lived this week as if you were all by yourself?

But this knowledge about God's immanence is not just a Christian doctrine but one that is open to all. Paul says to the Athenians something they know at the end of verse 27, **"yet he is actually not far from each one of us."** God isn't hard to find. Why? Because he is here. I do not have to go on a quest to find God or go to some location or temple. And notice that he is near each one of us. Now that is either a glorious comfort or something that is deeply disturbing to you — some kind of truth you want to suppress. But listen to how he goes on to prove his point in verse 28, **"for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'"** Now here is the thing, with the "for" he is giving a reason for saying what he has just said, and the reason is that they believe this. And he could have again quoted scripture here but he actually quotes a couple of Stoic philosophers who taught this very truth. He is not agreeing with these authors on all they teach, but because individuals have the image of God in them and they did grope they do come to some right conclusions about God, but then go on and bend it to fit their liking. Paul is aware of their philosophies. He was educated in Greek studies, and knew what they taught.

He quotes these two authors to show they already believe this or profess this evident truth — **"in him we live and move and have our being."** This is a quotation from Aratus. And the truth is that all of our life and movements are sustained by God. He is present and intimately close or there would be no life. And then he quotes Cleanthes, **"For we are indeed his offspring,"** that he is our Creator and Maker. And therefore our all is to him. And both of these quotes are stepping stones to get to the next verses that call for the Athenians to repent of their idolatry and trust in Christ. There is a day of judgment coming for all who will suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. And it is so apparent in our lives, but also apparent to the ever present God. He not only gave us life to seek for him, find him, and honour him, but he is with us. He truly knows the truth about you and me. There is nothing hidden from the eyes of him in whom we will one day appear before. Romans 2:16 says, **"on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."** What secret things are in our lives? We can hide so much from people around us. We can play certain roles to get people to think we are one way when in reality we are not. But there is no play acting with God. He is ever present, even knowing the very thoughts in our minds and hearts. There is no where we can flee from him.

Now that is convicting. But there is so much grace in this passage. I don't think one of us could even remotely say that we are so thankful and not ashamed of

everything that we have ever said, thought or did. And to think God was there is so convicting. But here is the thing — the ever-present God who controls all things still desires worshipers who will worship in spirit and in truth. The God who knows you and the cost of your sin better than you could ever know has you in his grace right here and right now. He has not given up on you but quite the opposite. He promises extraordinary favour that you do not deserve. In fact you deserve the opposite. And he offers you the grace, forgiveness and perfect righteousness of Christ by simply seeing you sin and believing on Christ. The verdict is in. You are I are guilty. But God is so good. Today is the day of turning from your seeking satisfaction in the gods of this world, and turning from them to where joy, salvation and satisfaction is found, and it is found in Christ and him alone.

And if you are believer in Christ, you know you are not all that you need to be. You know of your sin and failure. And these verses might be convicting but they should be so encouraging. If God is present even during the struggles and failures in your life, then he can truly give the necessary grace to not only live for him, but also live for the glorious purpose of my creation — to find my all, hope, ultimate joy, satisfaction in him and him alone. Where are you searching for that in creation? It will only leave you empty and blind. Come to Christ. There really is abundant and eternal life found in him.