

Today is the Day of Repentance
Acts 17:29-30

We have been looking for a number of weeks the sermon of Paul to the Areopagus council in Athens. They wanted to know if he was preaching some foreign God that was not authorized in Athens. And what he preaches is the one true God who is Creator of all. He is the One who is sovereign. The reason why we have life is because of him. And the handprint of this God is all around us. Man is without excuse.

And just before his call and appeal, he ends off the main body of his sermon in verse 29. Look what he says, **“Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.”** This really is the conclusion of all that he has said about the thousands of idols that inhabit the streets of Athens. We are God’s offspring, which basically means we are God’s creation. We are his production. The reason why there is a you or me is because of God. We are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. Psalm 139:13-14, **“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.”** We often look at what we do not have, maybe we have a different shape or look or not as smart or whatever, but here is the thing — we are the direct production of God. God has made us unique from every other person who has ever existed. He is our designer and creator.

So think of how absurd idolatry is. They make the idol of gold or silver or wood. They create the uncreated God through their own imagination. It is absurd isn’t it. You do not have to travel very far in Windsor to see examples of this all around us. People have idols and images in their yards — depictions of deities that have no power and are lifeless. They are the very imaginations of people — or another way of saying it is they are the production or creation of people. Here is the problem — they have no power. They cannot move or respond because they are our production. And people ask them to do what they cannot do.

Now idolatry is still so alive and well, because people ask the creation to do what only the Creator can do, and that is to satisfy our souls. If only I had . . . And we look to the creation to satisfy us. We do not recognize God is the great satisfier of our souls. He is all that we ever need. We are complete in him. People look to money and things and looks and sex and relationships to fill that goal. All of us are idolaters. It is the epitome of sin. It is not whether we are worshiping or not, but what we are worshiping — who are we worshiping? We were made for God and to find our rest, security, our all in him. Idolatry is the epitome of sin. There are none who seek God, we all wandered away after our own lusts. And what are you wandering away after? What are you seeking to fill that void that only God can fill? Where is your heart? What are you constantly thinking about and longing for? Creation is given as one grand picture and evidence of our great Creator and our dependance of him, and we have taken that picture and made it God. It is made that we might seek God with all our heart. He creates, us, sustains us, ordains that we would hear him to seek him.

So, you can imagine, here is this council, and here are all these idols that many of them prized and Paul says this is none other than an affront to God. This is not what

you ought to do. And then he begins in verse 29 his appeal or his call — what you ought to do with all that Paul has just preached. And let me say a couple of things about this section before we begin to look at it. One is in every sermon we should ask that question — what does God want me to do with this sermon? How does God want me to respond to this text and these truths about him? I think a lot of times we take in information but not personally. The Bible is God's word, and the preaching of God's word is not just giving or relaying information but is meant to be transformative. Where is God calling you to change today? What needs to be put off, what habits of grace need to be put on?

The second thing we see in this passage, which is so clear, is we are all accountable to God, and there is a day where we will appear before Christ to give an account for what we have done in this life, for the opportunities he has given us — whether in business, or raising children, being his witness in the world, or our activity in the church of Christ. Do you recognize that you will one day appear before the judge of all the universe in all his power and majesty, and that judge is none other than Jesus Christ? Don't put off trusting him today. Today really is the day of repentance, not only for the unbeliever but also for the believer. There is an urgency in the text. We are closer than we ever have been before of coming into the very presence of not only our Lord and Saviour but the great judge of all the universe. Please, don't be glib about this. Nothing could be more serious and sobering. I want us to see two things about this call in verse 30 that I hope will help with the urgency of the hour and respond and turn to Christ. There really is total forgiveness and so much life in him.

1. We see the urgency through understanding God's patience. V. 30a.

One of the great virtues of Christianity and one of the great signs that we are growing in the image of Christ is patience. Our God, our Lord, our Jesus is a patient God. We know that and we praise him for that. Life would be so different if he wasn't. We on the other hand are not. We often lose our patience as we like to say. We blame the person or situation. We might blow up at our spouse or children, and we often point to what they said or did, but the truth is we chose to lose our cool and not be patient. And in a moment of reflection, I think the Spirit of God working through his Word convicts us of our lack of patience, and therefore the lack of love and care for those we profess to love and care. Impatience and anger doesn't represent Christ.

And why do we say our anger and impatience does not reflect him? Because think if our God was impatient. Think if at the moment we blew it again and sinned and he responded impatiently, would any of us be here today realizing who our sin is ultimately against? And the answer to that question is no. But God is not only patient willing that none should perish, but all should come to repentant faith in Christ, but also he is patient with us wanting that process of being changed into the image of Christ to be complete in us. He truly wants and desires for us to have that mature love and be transformed, and for that he is so patient, even though we deserve the exact opposite. God would be absolutely just if he judged us this week for the things that we have done, or severely disciplined us for the selfish decisions we made. His patience is suppose to create in us not a licence to sin but a desire to follow such a God of such immense grace and love. We are drawn toward a God who is so patient.

So look at the beginning of this verse again, **“The times of ignorance God overlooked.”** Now what does this mean? It does not mean that God just didn’t care about sin or that he just turned his back on sin in the past. Sin has always been defiling. Sin is against God, and sin always has consequences even in our personal lives. There are natural consequences that are built into sin, and often we suffer the consequences for those various sins in our lives. It means this — God has let them go unpunished. He has let them go without the punishment that their sins deserved. But any time the gospel is preached, there is a necessity for any and all who hear to respond to that message in repentant faith in Jesus Christ.

And there are a couple of things I want to point out about this phrase, **“times of ignorance.”** One is the necessity of us being the verbal witnesses of Jesus Christ. There is enough knowledge in creation where people know God is all-powerful and all-wise and majestic and glorious and Creator, but there is not enough revelation to save him. People cannot know about Christ — his perfect life and his substitutionary death and his resurrection — and the call to trust in him alone for salvation. They are ignorant of that. Therefore God calls believers to go into all the world to preach and herald Christ. People cannot come to Christ by just observing our lives and watching the wind blow through the trees. We as his redeemed people are called to give the message. Romans 10:17, **“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”** There needs to be a hearing. Your unsaved relatives, friends, neighbours, children cannot know Christ without that hearing. Are we willing to articulate the truths of Jesus Christ? Are we willing to make him known? People are ignorant. Certainly they do not want to know, but they cannot know without hearing. God brought the Athenians there to hear the word, God brings people into our lives to hear.

The second thing is that preaching on sin is always loving, bold, and brave. Isn’t it true? Paul issues this command because of the sins of the Athenians. Think of how condemning this is. Think how humbling a call this is toward these educated men who prided themselves in all their philosophies and schools of learning. You, with all your thoughts and imaginations about God, all your learning and education are ignorant. By trusting in yourself you are no closer to God, in fact, you are farther away, in fact, you deserve his eternal judgment for the revelation you have suppressed and denied. People pride themselves in saying, “this is what I think God is like.” But we don’t care in the end what you and I think, it tells a lot about you and the God you created but tells nothing about God, but what God has revealed about himself. This is so bold and brave of Paul, but also loving. Intellectual pride along with every other sin and every other pride in self deserves God’s eternal judgment. The natural person thinks that they are good enough, but we are not. That is why we have the call here to trust in another.

But think of that phrase “times of ignorance,” because there is a sense that even after we come to Christ we live in “times of ignorance.” We make so many excuses for sin in our lives and a lack of devotion and passion for Christ. But God in his love exposes those areas of ignorance in our lives. It might be areas of lust where we trust in lust to provide what only God can provide. We make excuses — the struggles in marriage, or the struggles with being single — no one else is being hurt. But then we hear preached Ephesians 5:3, **“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”**

There is not a sliver of it to be in our lives. We knew this but now it becomes so evident. It might be the words you said to your spouse, and you replay them over and over and rationalize why they were necessary, why they were loving or whatever, then you read or hear preached Galatians 5:19-21, **“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”** This was the work of the flesh and not the work of God. I acted more like a citizen of this world rather than a citizen of heaven.

We rationalize sin and we become willfully ignorant. Then comes the preacher, and he takes the text, and we are exposed. Our pride and ungodly excuses are exposed. And there are only two responses to that. One is to get angry at the preacher, or angry at God, or just angry all together. You can imagine how many of these men would have responded to Paul telling them that they were ignorant, and willfully ignorant with anger. Where are you struggling and suppressing, and where do you keep denying what God has said? The other response is to realize the ability to see your sin and call it sin, and see the gravity of that sin is none other than the grace of God. God through his Spirit and his preached word cuts through all those excuses and ignorance to show us our sin. And here is the amazing thing about any and all sin that our Lord shows us — there is always grace for that sin. There is always the grace of forgiveness and transformation — but for that forgiveness and transformation to take place, we first have to see our sin. If God is showing you your pride, waywardness, your inquiries today — you are being graced by Him. So what do we do with this grace of God? And he tells us in the second part of the verse.

2. We see the urgency of the response to God’s call. V. 30b.

Again, what a bold and loving call to all those who are listening to Paul at this time. There is something you need to do with these truths. You need to recognize the validity of these teachings. They see something of the character and Lordship of God in creation, but now they have been given the greater revelation and that of his Son, so there is something they need to do. There is a response. And that response is two-fold, and you cannot have one without the other. Both of these are held together, and when one is preached and taught the other is assumed and stands right beside it. One side is repentance. The call here is to turn from trusting their philosophies of Epicuriosis or Stoicism, or the Sophistry. The call is to turn from their own imaginations of God, to turn from their pride and arrogance and sin, and trusting in their own knowledge and righteousness. Those sins should be repulsive in our sight that we have trusted God in this way, on our own terms. So repentance is a change in the deepest recesses of our heart that leads to a change of direction and thinking about sin and God.

And what goes hand and hand with that is faith or trust in another. If you are a believer in Christ you know the truth of both of these together. There is a turning away and a turning to. We see our sin and we are now repulsed by it, we do not want to walk any longer in that ignorance. But our trust is not in ourselves but in Christ who came and lived that perfect life and died that substitutionary death. The call is away from sin and to Christ. Often we want to emphasize trusting Christ without the call to

repentance. People do not realize the cost and the enormity of their sin problem so they trust Christ for all sorts of problems in their life but not is why Christ came, and that is ultimately to take care of our sin and the eternal judgment of God against sin.

So look at the end of verse 30 again, “**but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.**” Look at those words, “but now.” It is contrast to the times of ignorance. It speaks of urgency. Right now! It is not that those who lived in ignorance and never heard the gospel would not be judged. They will be judged by what they know, what is evident of God in the grace of creation. But the urgency here is a greater privilege, a greater revelation and knowledge has been given them and that is the knowledge of not only their sin but the knowledge of Christ that we call the good news of Jesus Christ. Think of it, it is not because we are more worthy or greater than others, but it is simply because of God’s grace that you have this knowledge of Jesus Christ. You have been so blessed and graced today, so don’t put off your response to he gospel. To put it off is just to add to rebellion and guilt, because in putting it off, you are disobeying God. The call is now. You know you are a sinner. You know what your sin deserves. And you know that God in love sent Christ to die for a sinner like you. You need to respond — this moment, this hour, this day.

And you something of the significance of the urgency because the gospel, the good news of what God has done through Jesus Christ to save sinners, is not an invitation. It is a command by none other than God himself. You have this knowledge and revelation and Paul says, “**and now he commands.**” The “he” here is not Paul or any other preacher, but it is none other than God. To not respond is just to add sin to sin. And you might be making excuses of why you shouldn’t respond, or how your circumstances are unique or this call is for most people but not all people. The gospel is good for that person because he really needs Christ, but not me. Listen to what Paul says, “**and now he commands all people everywhere.**” This takes in you and me. It takes in our geographical location. It takes in our history and circumstances. The call, the summons, the command is for all people in every place. Don’t try to escape from this call and command because you cannot.

And the call is given in two words right at the end of the verse, “**to repent.**” That is the call — realize your sin and and your need; realize that Christ is the only answer and trust in him. I plead with you. This is the greatest need for every person. Today is the day of repentance. Today is the day of salvation. Maybe you feel that urgency and conviction, maybe you feel that conflict inside of yourself whether to come or not. That is God’s Spirit working inside of you. Don’t deny him. Please come. Please respond to the summons of this God of such love that has you in this place to hear this text of Scripture this morning. You are being graced. Your are being loved. And know this, because so many think they can control when they come to Christ, to delay is to deny Christ, and all you are doing is hardening your heart. The grace that is offered to you today may not be present in the future. Oh, sinner — repent and trust in Christ!

And we also realize in Christianity the constant call in our lives is repentance and faith. This is not a one time activity but once we come to Christ this is the means of our sanctification. God opens our eyes to see sin more and more in our lives. His Word through his Spirit cuts us open and lays us bear. We realize our sin. And the call for us as believers is not to resist what is evident to you and certainly to God but to come

clean. But here is the amazing thing about repentance — it is not just that we feel sorry for our sin. It is not that we just live in remorse, but we realize that we have not only been graced by seeing our sin, but there is grace to turn from sin. There is grace to trust in one who has the grace to help us to change.

So often, and we all know this, God will put us into situations to show us our hearts. He will put us in trials or temptations or even suffering to expose what is in our suffering. Our anger, lust, or frustration was always there. There just was not the situation where we could see it. God in his grace and love puts us in situation where we would never choose to be in to allow us to see our sin that we would never see, in order to bring us to this place where we would repent and trust in Jesus for forgiveness and change in our lives. Our problem is that we have this internal lawyer inside of us that says my behaviour, words, and actions were justified. And maybe we are making those excuses right now. Maybe we are resisting the glorious change that God wants to bring in your life. Know this, it is humbling to admit we are wrong and we have sinned, but God is not showing us our sin to wreck our lives, but to give us life and grace. My plea is to stop resisting. God is so gracious. Today is the day to come clean, trust him. The grace that is in Christ is always so much greater and deeper than any of our sin. He really can bring change in our lives.

So the Word of Christ has been preached this morning. So often we never seek to apply it to our own lives and struggles. How about this morning where is God calling you to repentance and change? Know if you are seeing your sin, you are being graced, not with just the grace of seeing but the grace of transformation.