

# To The Unknown God

Acts 17:16-34

## **MEMORY VERSE**

ACTS 17:24

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.

## **WHAT YOU WILL NEED:**

As many small mirrors as half the number of your class, white shoe polish, paper towels, and glass cleaner.

As many blindfolds as half the number of your class and several objects to try to guess blindfolded.

A two-liter bottle, water, food coloring, oil, and dish soap.

## **ATTENTION GRABBER!**

### **May I Help You?**

Divide your class into pairs. Give one child in each pair a small mirror that has been covered with white shoe polish. Give the other child a paper towel. Ask the students if they can see what's in the mirror (the answer of course will be "no"). Go around the room and spray a bit of glass cleaner on each mirror and watch what happens. The children holding the paper towel should try to wipe the mirrors clean.

Ask who cleaned the mirrors. Ask the students who had the paper towels why they wanted to wipe the mirrors. Explain that when we see a need and we have the power to meet it, the natural inclination is to try to do so. Sharing our faith should be like that. **Believers of the truth should share it with those who are deceived.**

## LESSON TIME!

Today's lesson is about Paul's famous sermon on Mar's Hill. We can learn a lot from Paul as he went into a city that wanted to be open minded about all religions and even worshiped many different gods. But the only problem is that none of those gods provided salvation for people. Paul will tell them about the one true God, the "unknown" God. **Believers of the truth should share it with those who are deceived.**

### ACTS 17:16

**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.**

Athens is in Greece, and the Greek people had built their lives around knowledge. They took pride in themselves as great thinkers, open to any and all ideas. Athens was the capital with great monuments, libraries, and universities.

As Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy, he took a walk. Throughout this city Paul saw where this hunger for knowledge had taken the people of Athens. They had become idol worshipers, giving honor to any and all gods, but not the true God.

This verse says that Paul's spirit was provoked within him. Spiritual things are very real and sometimes the Holy Spirit who lives inside every believer may give us discernment or cause us to be concerned about spiritual things that are happening around us. Believers in Jesus should never feel comfortable in an atmosphere that is given over to the worship of false gods.

It probably made Paul sad to see the city of Athens given over to idol worship. Sometimes the Lord might place a city or certain people on our hearts and He will allow us to see them as He sees them. We understand how it breaks His heart to see people separated from Him. When the Holy Spirit does this it places a desire on our hearts to tell them about Jesus. **Believers of the truth should share it with those who are deceived.**

### ACTS 17:17

**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.**

So Paul now does something about what the Holy Spirit revealed to him. Paul was called to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). He could see how slavery to

these idols did not provide answers for the people's questions of life. He reasoned with anyone who would listen, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ everywhere he went. **Believers of the truth will share it with those who are deceived.**

Paul desired to shine the light of Jesus. He shared the gospel in the synagogue (place where the Jews met) and the market place. Everyone had to come there sooner or later to buy fresh food; there was no refrigeration to keep things from going bad in those days. It was a perfect place to share the good news! He found a lot of people and just started sharing.

### **ACTS 17:18-21**

**Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods, because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection."**

**And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?"**

**For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean."**

**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 a place where the city's people and council gathered to hear teachers and lecturers. Paul was given an opportunity to share the gospel. The Greeks at this time had a lot of philosophers. Philosophers are people who share their ideas about the meaning of life, etc. It is all just their opinions and not based on God's eternal Word. There were even some people who did nothing else all day except to talk about new ideas that were coming in.

Now the Greeks were acquainted with people who traveled and made a living sharing their information. Paul, who was dressed as a foreigner, seemed to be bringing a new kind of god, one who died and rose again! Some of the city's great thinkers were present, hearing about this totally new idea. Paul was shining the light of Jesus! What an opportunity to share the gospel! **Believers of the truth will share it with those who are deceived.**

## **ACTS 17:22-23**

**Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;**

**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..."**

Paul saw that religious practices were very important to the people of Athens, but he also knew that the stone ears of an idol could never hear an offering of true love and hope. As he had walked throughout the city, he had found all kinds of idols. There was even an idol to the "unknown" god, just in case they were missing any possible deity. Paul took this opportunity to share with the men of Athens that He knew this "unknown" god. Believers of the truth will share it with those who are deceived.

Sometimes people can be very religious, even talking about God. But the reality is that unless they come to God through faith (belief) in Jesus then their religion and worship is empty. We can be the most religious person in the world and even be sincere in our beliefs, but we can be sincerely wrong. It is important that we share with those who are deceived into thinking that they have eternal life.

It is interesting that Paul used something very familiar to them to help them to understand who God was. He talked about their "unknown" God. They wanted to be so careful not to leave any god out that they had this special idol for the "unknown" god. Paul saw this as a great opportunity to tell them about the God he knew. He is not an unknown God at all, He is a God who has desired for us to know exactly who He is and Paul is there in Athens now to declare Him to the people.

## **Blindman's Bluff**

Have the children in your class form pairs. Blindfold one of the children in each pair and have the other hand him simple objects (try and make them tricky). Let him try and guess what the object is by feeling it, but not seeing it. The child without the blindfold may not give any hints.

After a few guesses allow the blindfolded student to remove his blindfold and see what he was feeling. Ask him to tell what it was like to hold something but not be able to tell what it was. Ask if it would have been helpful to be given some hints.

Explain to the class that when we know the truth about the Lord and salvation through Jesus, we can help those who are “wearing blindfolds”. **Believers of the truth will share it with those who are deceived.**

### **ACTS 17:24-27**

**"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.**

**Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.**

**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 habitation**

**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;"**

Paul first explains that God is the creator of everything. A great place to start! Since God is the creator He is powerful and we as His creation have an obligation to answer to Him. We also learn that God does not dwell in temples made by man's hands. How can a temple contain our almighty God? He is everywhere at all times, not in a building made by men.

He is not worshiped with things made by man either. There are no little carved images that bear his likeness that are to be worshiped. You could not express in an image of wood or metal the greatness of our God. To grope means to stumble around in the dark looking for something. This is what non-believers do. They stumble around in the dark trying to find the one thing that is missing from their lives. That one thing is Jesus Christ. All we need to do is to call out to Him to save us and He will. What nation can say that about their god (Deuteronomy 4:7)?

### **ACTS 17:28-29**

**"...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.'**

**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."**

Paul argued that, even by their own philosophies, men were created in the image of God. He therefore reasoned that God's divine nature could not be captured in temporal things like gold, silver, or stone, or shaped by man's hands. Since we are living and are the offspring of a LIVING God how can He be represented in a LIFELESS image of metal or stone? How can a living being worship something lifeless? It just does not make sense!

### **ACTS 17:30-34**

**"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,**

**"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."**

**And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter."**

**So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.**

Paul reasoned that God may have overlooked man's ignorance in the past, but now the gospel was being preached throughout the entire world and that all men should turn to Christ and turn from their sin and idol worship. To repent means to regret and have sorrow for having done wrong and then to turn away from that wrong. There was no need for them to sacrifice; Jesus already provided the sacrifice when He died at Calvary. While some of the listeners did not believe in the resurrection, others wanted to hear more, and still others decided to follow Paul and become believers in Jesus.

Paul was faithful to share his faith wherever he had the opportunity to do so. He saw the need in Athens, a misguided but very religious community. He saw that they were burdened and weighed down by the false hope offered in idol worship, and was determined to share the truth. **Believers of the truth will share it with those who are deceived.**

Is there anyone you know who is weighed down by false religion. The first thing we need to do is pray for them. Then we should look for opportunities, in love, to share with them the truth of Jesus.

## **Sharing the Faith**

Fill an empty 2-liter bottle about half way with water. Add some food coloring and shake it so it's mixed well (be sure you have the cap). Tell your class that this represents the world. Pour about a half-cup of oil in the bottle. Tell your class that this represents Christians. The children will see that they do not mix. It is only when the non-believer becomes a Christian can we then be unified. It is the Holy Spirit who draws man to God.

Add about two teaspoons of dish soap (representing the Holy Spirit) and show your class how the whole mixture becomes one.

## **PRAYER**

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to learn the truth and share it. If time allows, take prayer requests for others that the children know who need to hear about Jesus. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.