

"GOD SPOKE TO ME ON MAR'S HILL"

Text: Acts 17:22

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Thank you again for making a dream come true. I had always dreamed of going to Athens--to Athens the chief city of ancient Attica and the Capital of modern Greece. Historians believe that the history of Athens goes back as early, as 3,000 B.C. About 1600 B.C. an early King by the name of Crecoops founded the ancient district of Attica and established a center at Athens. King Crecoops enacted laws of marriage and property, initiated the burial of the dead and taught Athenians to raise olive trees and produce olive oil.

King Crecoops named the city Athens after Athena, the Greek Goddess of Wisdom. Athena was the legendary Virgin Daughter of the chief Greek God, Zeus. The worship of Athena was carried along by the Romans, even when they called her Minerva, the Virgin daughter of the corresponding chief Greek God, Jupiter.

Pericles, the great statesman, who lived 499-429 B.C., inspired the building of the Parthenon, the Temple to Athena. As you see the ruins of this great Temple, you are amazed and wonder how they could build such a superb structure. History also reveals that once there was a 40-foot high statue to Athena, made of gold and ivory. It was said that the helmet of Athena on that statue could be seen for miles and miles. The time of Pericles was known as the Golden Age of Greece, or the Age of Pericles.

My dream of visiting Athens was not because of Pericles or even such great philosophers as Socrates and Plato. I wanted to visit Athens because the Apostle Paul went to Athens. I remembered that he had preached in the Synagogue in Athens, and then had gone to the Agora, or Market Place and had told the wondrous story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Philosophers had then invited Paul up on the Hill of Areopagus, not far from the Parthenon, the Temple to Athena. All of this area was called the Acropolis, "the city high".

What a thrill it was when our tour of the Bible Lands took us to Athens. After we visited the area of the Parthenon, our group climbed the Areopagus Hill, 370 feet high. As we climbed the steps cut in the South East side of the rocky hill and saw the remains of rock-hewn benches on the top. I was reminded that on this hill the ancient "Council of the Areopagites" met. I remembered that Pausanians stated that there were two stones on the Aropagus; one stone was called the Stone of Outrage and the other the Stone of Ruthlessness, on which the accused and the accusers respectively stood. The thing that thrilled me, however, was the realization that Paul had preached on this hill. The Athenian Philosophers had invited him up to Mar's Hill as they said in effect: "You have told us such strange things- Tell us more what these strange things mean." Paul proceeded to preach the tremendous sermon, which is recorded in Acts 17.

That same night of the day we climbed Mar's Hill, Mrs. Rich and our son, Jay, accompanied me as we made a private night tour back to Mars Hill. The three of us went back to the area of the Acropolis, and once more we climbed back up on Mar's Hill. What a breath-taking panorama of twinkling lights as the modern City of Athens stretched out below us. For a long time we sat on Mar's Hill. It was then that God spoke to me.

It seemed that God was saying: "It is not enough to be religious. When Paul stood on Mar's Hill he could see evidence all ground him that the Athenians were religious. Perhaps more than 30,000 altars and statues of Greek Gods' could be seen in Athens. Someone has called attention to the sneering remark of Petronius that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man. Paul reminded the Athenians that with all their worship of unworthy gods, they had missed the reality of the one true God who is "The maker and master of the universe", the Lord of all nations, and the indwelling Spirit of those who truly worshipped Him.

I thought of the two schools of philosophy, founded at Athens, I thought of Stoicism, which taught that virtue is the only good, and vice the only evil. They taught their followers to be indifferent to pain and pleasure, to success and misfortune, and by their own self-will to achieve life. I thought of the Epicureans, the rank materialists of their day who taught that happiness was the only end of life, and that man should "eat, drink and be merry" for tomorrow he dies.

Then God spoke to me and said, "modern man still has the idolatry of Athens. Man has deified the forces of nature, and has deified man's vices and virtues. Man still bows down to two altars, the self-righteousness of Stoicism and the pleasure-made abandonment of Epicureanism.

I realized on Mar's Hill that our world still possesses the painful ignorance that Paul pointed out. As we visited so many new places on our tour I realized how ignorant the masses of people were of God and His Supreme Revelation in His Son, Jesus Christ. Men were ignorant of His death, His burial, His resurrection, His readiness to forgive repentant sinners, His Second Coming, His judgment on those who reject His grace.

Yes;" God spoke to me on Mar's Hill. The same God of whom Paul preached on Mar's Hill. As we study the 11th Chapter of Acts and Find that Paul preached about:

1-THE GOD WHO CREATES

2- THE GOD WHO RULES IN HISTORY

3-THE GOD WHO JUDGES

I. THE GOD WHO CREATES is set forth as ue3od that Made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshiped with men's hands as though he had needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. (Acts 17:24,25)

How wrong both the Stoics and Epicureans were to think of an absentee God. How mistaken anyone would be to be satisfied with a gold or silver shrine. The God who is the divine Creator is too much alive to dwell in a thing like that. He once dwelt in a person who was both Son of Man and Son of God, and that living Image of God, His Son, is the only image worthy of serious devotion.

Dr. Hobbs, in pointing out that there should be no conflict between true science and true religion calls attention to the misguided scientist who declared, "Truth is the best that we know at the moment". Surely, there will always be a problem when science thinks that the truth of the Bible must always be adjusted to the best that science knows at the moment. I am convinced that the Bible does not have to chase after the Scientist and adjust to all his theories. The greatest Scientists I have known are those who have come back to the Blesses Book. At a time when man is often tempted to bow down before the altar of theoretical science, we need to hold up a God who is behind this universe, who upholds it by the power of His Son, and who has made His Son the one "For Whom all things are".

II. THE GOD WHO RULES IN HISTORY is expressed by Paul as the God who hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation. (Verse 26).

As I stood on Marts Hill-I had the conviction that no nation has ever made its appearance separated from the purpose of God. On our trip we were reminded over and over again of the nations, which rose, reached their zenith, and then fell into the graveyard of civilizations.

Someone has said that the expression of Paul in his sermon here: "For in him we live, and move and have our being" is the figure of a pre-natal child who lives, moves and has it's being in the body of its mother. So nations live, move and have their being under the control of God. Up on Mar's Hill I realized that the glory of Greece had departed. As R.G. Lee once expressed it, "the glory of Greece was now a piece of molded bread in the garbage can of history." This happens whenever a nation rejects God.

God spoke to me on Mar's Kill as I thought of our beloved America. Surely God has conceived America in His great divine purpose. How tragic it will be if America forgets the divine rock from whence hewn! It seemed to me that God was saying: "Your towers of steel and stone can become like the ghostly ruins of the Acropolis on Athens or the crumpling Coliseum of Rome unless you return to Me, for blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."

The hope of America is not in our armies or armament. When France fell in 1941 that nation boasted the largest army in the world and the third largest Navy. Any nation may well consider the observation of Arnold Toynbee that of the 21 world civilizations, 19 have fallen, and that none of them were murdered, but all committed suicide.

III. THE GOD WHO WILL JUDGE THE WORLD is set forth by Paul: "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man who He hath ordained; where He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead. (verse 31)

Surely we need to remember that God will judge not only nations but also individuals, and He will judge in His Son. The real God of the Universe, who in the fullness of time manifested His glory on Jesus Christ, shall by His Son judge the universe, and by none other shall we be saved.

What happened when Paul preached on Mar's Hill? The audience split into three groups. As I speak to you, I am sure that similar reactions may be taking place in this congregation.

1. Some scoffed and ridiculed the Apostle Paul. Perhaps someone either in this audience or in our radio audience is sneering. Perhaps someone is saying: "It can't happen in America." Perhaps there may be someone hearing this message who is facing eternity with flippancy.
2. Some procrastinated. They wanted to postpone their decision until a later time. They wanted to hear more at some more convenient time. Yet we have no record that they ever heard Paul preach again. Perhaps there may be someone in this congregation who is saying: "Don't ask me to decide now. Some other time, but not now!" You have no guarantee that when you leave this church you will ever have another opportunity to decide. The message of the Word of God is that NOW is the day of salvation.
3. Some, Thank God, believed. Among those who did believe were Dionysius, possibly a prominent member of the Court of the Areopagites. Another who apparently believed was a woman named Damasis. (verse 34). You may be an important person like Dionysius, or an obscure person like Damaris, but in either case I pray that you will repent of your sins, accept Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and become a follower of Christ.

Today you stand on Mar's Hill. Do not be a scoffer or a procrastinator, but be a believer. You will, if you truly let God speak to your heart!