

A LANDMARK SERMON

Acts 17

When citing great sermons of the Bible, most would speak of Jesus' revolutionary Sermon on the Mount or Peter's first gospel message at Pentecost. But another message recorded in Acts 17 by Paul at Athens marks a turning point in the spread of the church. Paul invades the very center of culture and education to talk with the great thinkers of the day. He notices a temple to the Unknown God, among the many shrines to the various "gods." Then he declares that he is there to present that message of the unknown God, the real true God, maker of heaven and earth. This marks the penetrating influence of the idea of monotheism into that Greek world. In the message, Paul tells us that not all religious thinking is truth. God created all things and sent his Son, Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ to pay for our sins that God will no longer overlook. He called the people to do what all of us must do when we hear that message, Repent!

When Paul reached the point about Jesus' death then resurrection, the people were startled at such an assertion. But the evidence is strong he said, Christ arose. Jesus is who He said he was and the Messiah the apostles were to declare to the world. The reaction of those people of Athens is similar to what we see today—The Bible says, some mocked and left; some were interested and wanted to hear more; some accepted, repented and joined in accepting Christ as Savior and Lord.

The ancient Greeks obviously loved building monuments, temples to their Gods. In our culture we like to build memorials to our great past leaders. My many trips to Washington, remind me of our way of remembering people. This episode should also be an illustration to us that as Paul says, Our Lord doesn't need temples made of stone. But His memorial is our dedication to meeting him around the Lord's table each first day of the week, where the church remembers Jesus' death for our sins. And we note of course that human memorials are erected to honor the dead, our living memorial of the partaking together of the loaf and cup, represents a remembrance of death, yes, but as Paul says, Jesus is alive, because he rose again and we show forth His death around His table til He comes again.