

THE ONE RELIGION WHICH SATISFIES
Acts 17:16-34

Paul, the earnest Christian and gospel preacher, was in the great and wonderful city of Athens, the capital of Greece. Athens had long been a great center for literature, art, culture, sculpture, philosophy, and religion. It was a vast museum of learning, sculpture, and art. There the great masterpieces of the greatest masters were to be seen. Paul's day was four hundred years after its golden age, and although it has experienced a sad decline, it was still the artistic and intellectual center of the civilized world. Although this great city was on the road to degeneracy, the Athenians lived on the glories of the past, both in art and philosophy.

Paul was waiting in Athens for his companions. While doing so, he surveyed the city. He observed many idols on the streets, in the parks, on the buildings, in the temples, in the magnificent acropolis, and in the homes. There were more than 30,000 gods in the city. Petronius started the witticism that it was easier to find a god than to find a man in Athens. Paul was deeply impressed by what he saw. His soul was stirred. His spirit was provoked within him.

Paul could not remain silent any longer. Having an eager zeal to do something for the salvation of these people, he went to work and reasoned with all classes, with whomever happened along and would stop to listen. He encountered the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers and others who spent their time largely in telling or hearing some new thing. Considering Paul to be a quack, they sneered at him and called him a "babbler," which means a "picker-up of seeds." As applied to Paul, it means, "What would this picker-up of seeds, this chatterer, this empty talker, this ignoramus, wish to say if he could get enough words to get off an idea?"

Paul perceived that they were very religious. He believed that since God had made man incurably religious He surely would have for him a religion which would satisfy. Their altar to the unknown god was evidence of their as yet unsatisfied search. Paul asserted that this one religion which satisfies was through the man whom God had ordained whereof He had given assurance unto all men in that He had raised Him from the dead. Paul's sermon in the midst of the Areopagus, or of the court, was "a masterpiece of real eloquence on the greatest of themes." (Robertson). It was really a commendation of the gospel to the hungry hearts of the Greeks by proving it to be the fulfilment of their age-long yearning after God.

The one religion which satisfies is the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ or Christianity. This one religion which satisfies does various things for us. Among these things are the following:

1. It Awakens and Enlists the Mind.

God's Word is a Light to him who would be his best mentally. God bids us come and reason together with Him. The greatest thinkers of the world have sought to know the mind of God and to think His thoughts after Him. A teacher of Philosophy said that if heaven meant nothing other than being with the world's worthiest, he would not miss it by a hair's breadth for all the gold in the world. The old Negro preacher, John Jasper, in one of his sermons pictured a receiving line in heaven and became ecstatic in the joyous prospect of going down that line and of shaking hands with the greatest men and women of every age of the world's history. Clearest understanding comes to the one who hears and believes and loves and obeys the truth.

Let us place over our study or office or kitchen door George Washington Carver's sign, "God's Little Workshop," and as we enter let us say with him, "Speak to me, Lord. I am listening."

We can never know anything fully until we have it in its relation to Christ Jesus. "Without Him was not anything made that hath been made." "In Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through Him and unto Him. And He is before all things and in Him all things consist." All realms of fact and thought are included in the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

2. It Gives a New Nature.

The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ gives that birth from above, that changed heart, enabling us to testify gladly of our love for the things which we once hated and of our hatred for the things which we once loved. The Athenians seemed to be seeking after God, if haply they might find Him, and yet how near He was to each of them.

It is not surprising that the children of this world do the bidding of their Master. There is only one explanation for your desire and mine to be with the people of God. Why do we feel as David expressed it, "I would rather." Tell me what you would rather do, and I will tell you what you are. New life can come only from a new heart, and this, said Jesus, is only from above. We cannot grow the lilies of heaven until we get the bulbs from God. "His servants ye are to whom ye yield yourselves to obey." "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me," says the Saviour. If any man will have the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Missionary Dan Crawford tells of taking some African natives to see the many evidences of English progress and prosperity. Having seen and admired the modern inventions and the great buildings and wealth, one of the natives said, "To be better off is not necessarily to be better." How truly has someone said that depravity is dangerous in proportion as it is wise and learned! Arthur Brisbane once pictured religion as a great towering mountain, and science as a small stone at its base. On one side he placed an inset of a laboratory with a chemist eagerly working through his microscope and on the other a mother kneeling in prayer beside the bed of her children. Science, said Brisbane, may make us more comfortable physically here for a few years, but religion has to do with man at his best and highest, both for time and for eternity.

3. It Offers the Best Investment for Every Gift Which God Has Bestowed Upon Us.

Within the sacred circle of the new life in Christ we develop and devote our talents to the highest and will use them in the most beneficent and far-reaching service. Paul, who stood there in Athens and preached, was soon to be a prisoner before the great Emperor, Nero, and would be put to death by order of the Roman ruler. How different were the two men! How great Nero seemed to be, and how helpless the prisoner to escape Nero's power! Today we name our dogs Nero, but we honor our boys by giving them the name of Paul. Did you ever know of a boy named Nero or of a dog named Paul?

There are two increasing wonders to me. One is that God should ever love me enough to save me, and the other is that He should ever trust me enough to use me. How amazing is the grace which saves and how amazing is the sin and the ignorance which rebels against God's mercy and which refuses the Divine call to life and heritage and service with the Son of God.

Compare Paul, the preacher and writer with Nero, the ruler and profligate. Compare Martin Luther's life and influence with the wreck and ruin of poor Voltaire. Compare the Jukes and their descendants with the Edwards family with its preachers and educators and authors and statesmen. Compare Dwight L. Moody and his wonderful life and ministry and death with poor deluded and disappointed Robert Ingersoll. How different our Baptist life and work and history would be if there had not been put into it such names as Carey, Judson, Spurgeon, Broadus, Mullins, Frost, Willingham, Carroll, Sampey, Robertson, Dement, Truett, Scarborough, and others.

4. It Grows Dearer With the Advancing Years.

We certainly would not cling to a religion which became less and less attractive. We want a faith which is dearer to those who are mature than to those who are immature. We want a house which will not fall when beset by winds and storms and floods. Since choices are necessary in life, we certainly are not ready to accept that which is passing in exchange for that which is abiding. Joshua said to the people that he and his house were not willing to choose Baal instead of Jehovah. Moses, by faith, chose rather to share ill treatment with his people, the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Jesus, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross and despised the shame. We do well when we bring to the attention of the lost man that it is not so much what he gives up to be saved, but rather the innumerable and incalculable values which he gives up in order to be lost. The cheap and tawdry ten-cent ring will grow cheaper and more repulsive the longer it is worn, but the wonderful diamond grows brighter and more beautiful with the years. How distressing it was when the young wife who had no Saviour said to her distressed husband, "Oh, William, I do not know where I am going, but it is all dark."

In this state a woman said to her young pastor, "There is one thing you need." He replied, "To which one do you refer?" She said, "You need a great sorrow, that you may know how to sympathize with me and others." Since that time he has had the sorrow. He has learned what she meant, and he has found that God's promised supply of grace has not failed to meet the needs of His children.

5. It Stands the Supreme Tests of Death and of Eternity.

Paul, the great apostle, preached the resurrection in Athens. The philosophers mocked. Their religion offered no such victory. How hopeless are those who face death with no promise of the future! When the time came to depart, Paul could say, "The time of my unmooring is at hand, and henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." Not only was Paul unafraid but he could say that he was ready to depart, which was far better.

He could exclaim, "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." So it has been through the centuries and so it has been in your experience and mine. Some of us have seen God's saints going out triumphantly as did Moody who said, "Is this death? Why, this is glorious! Earth is receding! Heaven is opening! This is my coronation day!"

One of our good pastors said to his preacher friends as death from cancer drew near, that the blessings of God were all Jesus had promised they would be. A good Christian woman sent for the pastor, and he hurried to her sick bed with words of comfort and strength. Before he could tell them to her she said that she did not send for him to receive help but to have him see God's promises made real in the triumph over death. Another good Christian woman, in talking to her pastor about her funeral, asked that there be no gloomy tones and shedding of tears. She asked that someone sing, "Open the Gates of the Temple", and that the triumphant scriptures be read. She was going to her Father's house where there would be no tears, no sin, no separation.

Thank God for a religion which stands the test of death and eternity!

The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the one and only religion that satisfied, is available to all mankind and is adequate for all mankind. It is not provincial. It is world wide. Whosoever will may come and take the water of life freely; old and young, rich and poor, learned and illiterate, white and black and red and brown and yellow — to any and to all, anywhere, in any clime, in any age, under all conditions, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Light. How all-inclusive is the assurance which the Saviour gives when He says, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." "He that believeth on Him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." As Dr. J. M. Frost set forth in one of his books, John Jasper, the Negro tobacco-stemmer, and Edward Everett Hale, Jr., the cultured and learned New England thinker, and Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee of the Pharisees, were all saved by the same gift of grace through Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. He is the same Saviour today and will save each and everyone who will believe on Him.