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### Paul's Great Sermon on Mars' Hill

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PAUL'S GREAT SERMON ON MARS' HILL

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 73  
ACTS 17:26-34

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ACTS 17:26-34 "And 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; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

In this study we will conclude Paul's message on Mars' Hill. We need to keep in mind that Paul had been declaring the gospel in Athens for many weeks. These Athenians were pseudo-intellectuals and had gone on negative signals toward the Word of God and salvation. They had adopted either Epicureanism or Stoicism. Our setting for this sermon we have before us in this study is the Areopagus in the open air courtroom and Paul was before the judges of Athens. He began by saying, "He hath made from the source of one". The word "Blood" is not in the original text. Paul is here giving some of the principles of government that are so important for the survival of a nation. The Greeks had a government which was a pure democracy, possibly the best government in the world at that time. Let us notice carefully what Paul is saying.

"He hath made" refers to the creation of the world and all that is in it, this creation being the work of Jesus Christ. "From One" simply means that all men came from Adam. Adam is the only one man in the human race who was totally created. Even Eve was not totally created, for she was taken from the side of man. Man was created originally in perfection but once sin came, man fell, and as men were born they were not born equal. Equality comes through the second birth, not the first. The word "Blood" does not appear in the original text. The world is divided into nations under three concepts--First, a racial concept; second, they are divided geographically; and third, they are divided linguistically. Without nations there would be no human race. Nations have brought a balance of power to the earth and have made it possible for men to live in peace and continue to exist. Nationalism also makes evangelism and missions possible. Internationalism destroys this concept. So Paul says, "All nations" and this makes human freedom possible. The words "For to dwell" is a present, active infinitive and means the norm or standard for men dwelling in the earth. It simply means that the norm or standard for men dwelling in the earth is the four divine institutions--Volition, Marriage, the Family, and the Nation. These four divine institutions guarantee the perpetuation of the human race. The basis for the function for the entire human race is morality. Morality is not spirituality, and morality is not just for Christians, but morality is for the entire human race. Christianity goes far beyond morality. Christianity is far superior to morality, for Christianity brings every thought and action under the subjection of Christ. Please remember, morality is for the whole human race, not just for Christians. Morality and Christianity are not the same thing at all. The role of morality is to keep the four divine institutions functioning--Volition, Marriage, the Family, and the Nation. When you have morality, then you have a maximum number of nations with law and order--This means a policeman on the corner and a judge on the bench. This affords a norm or standard for stable government so people can live and exist. This is exactly what Paul said to the

people of Athens. In other words, Paul is saying that God's plan for the human race has given them a norm or standard by which they could live and survive. He goes on to say that God "hath determined" and this comes from the Greek word "Horizo" and from this word we get horizon. Paul says that God hath determined "The times" and the word is "Kairos". Now the most common word for time is "Chronos" and from it we get the word "chronology". But the word used here "Kairos" refers to time broken up into periods or dispensations. So Paul is saying that God has broken up history into periods of time, or dispensations so the human race could be protected and survive. These dispensations are as follows--The Age of the Gentiles--The Age of the Jews--The Church Age--The Tribulation--The Millennium--And finally His Eternal Kingdom. So these are the times or periods into which God has divided history. To keep man alive on the earth and to keep nations in balance, God has designed eras and periods of history. History is in the hand of God is what Paul is saying here.

Paul says these dispensations of history were "Afore appointed". Back in eternity past God designed history and drew the plan for time. "Before appointed" is a perfect, passive, participle and this simply means that these dispensations were designed in eternity past and they will exist forever just as God designed them. "Bounds of their habitation" means that God designed nations and drew their boundaries. Man and time and destiny are all in the hands of God. So Paul faces these pseudo-intellectuals and tells them that whether they like it or not, and whether they know it or not, history was designed by God and history is in the hands of God.

ACTS 17:27 "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" Paul is now going to talk about God-consciousness. Paul here states that all normal men reach God-consciousness. If a man goes on positive signals at the point of God-consciousness, God assumes the responsibility of giving the gospel to that man. Then comes gospel hearing and if a man believes he is saved, if he does not believe he is unsaved. But both government and the church should have democracy. There should be no internationalism either in nations or in churches. Both should be separate and free. Then Paul says "That they should seek after The God". Paul is saying that men should have positive volition when they come to God-consciousness. "Seek after The God" simply means to have positive volition at the point of God-consciousness. The "if" here is a fourth class condition and means that Paul wishes they were feeling after God but they are not. The word "feel" means to feel or grope after something in the dark. This simply means God-consciousness. It doesn't imply an understanding of the gospel or Christ. So man cannot find God on his own, he must be given the gospel. We can come to know of the existence of God by reason, by empiricism, or by faith. The words "find him" simply means Paul wishes very much that they could hear the message of salvation. So Paul is saying, "I wish so much that all of you at the point of God-consciousness would go on positive volition and hear the gospel of Christ and believe". Paul is saying, "I wish this were the case, but it is not". You see, Paul saw those 30,000 idols and he realized just how far these people were away from the living God. Positive volition toward Christ always results in salvation. And that is why Paul said, "Though he exists not far from any one of us".

ACTS 17:28 "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." Paul now explained something of the nature and existence of God, "In him we live" means that we get our physical life from God. That "embryo" has mentality and an old sin nature, but only at physical birth is life breathed into that form and then that life receives self-consciousness, emotion, volition, and conscience. This does not occur until physical birth. Back in verse 25 Paul had said, "He giveth to all life and breath". Now this is physical life "We live" means soul and spirit. We move and have our being, and all this comes from God. God gave all these things to the human race. Paul now quoted two of their Stoic poets. The Epicureans and Stoics did not believe in God, and the only God they

believed in was the gods they had created with their own hands. But Paul is here saying, "God created you, and you didn't create God". These two famous Stoic poets to whom Paul referred were very famous poets. They were AEROTOS AND CLEANTHES. Both of these poets in a hymn to Zeus had said that God made the world and all that was in it. So Paul is quoting these famous poets in his message. He used their own systems to show that their religious beliefs were contrary to truth. By what these poets had said the 30,000 idols were proved to be ridiculous.

ACTS 17:29-30 "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" In these verses Paul reached a logical conclusion. Paul said, "Since we are the offspring of God". In other words, God created us and we didn't create God. All this statuary in Athens is a disgrace. This was Paul's conclusion. This idolatry has kept you from God and it is ridiculous. They had concluded that they created God and not God them. This conclusion of Paul brought them face to face with the great sin of idolatry. They had the greatest system of idolatry on the face of the earth, and Paul told them it was keeping them from God.

ACTS 17:30 "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" Let us look closely at this verse, for it is one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. "The time of this ignorance" refers to the time that had transpired between God-consciousness and gospel hearing. This is the time of their ignorance. So many misquote this verse. God has never winked at sin, never has and never will. Well, what is he winking at then? It is referring to that time between God-consciousness and the time of gospel hearing. "To wink at" means that God overlooked it, bore with it, didn't wipe them off the face of the earth because they didn't believe. The winking here is simply a figure showing God's patience in waiting for men to come to him.

ACTS 17:31 "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." If you refuse to repent and believe, then you will be judged according to Revelation 20. They will not be judged for their sins but on the basis of their rejection of Jesus Christ. So Paul now brings them before the cross. But they reject the cross, stand on their own human good and that is why they will be judged. God has given the possibility of faith to all members of the human race, and if they place that faith in Christ then they are saved. And that faith is not in someone who is dead, but it is Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead. The resurrection is to remind us that we have placed our faith in someone who is alive. But you see, the conception of the resurrection cut right across the learning and culture of the Greeks. This completely negated all they had believed for a thousand years, and they just couldn't believe anything like that.

ACTS 17:32-34 "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." Here we have the aftermath of this message on Mars' Hill. Many of them mocked. They were on negative signals and at the point of gospel hearing they mocked, especially the Epicureans. But some went on positive signals and believed. So Paul had some results even in Athens. We read, "And believed" and this is aorist tense and means in a moment of time some of them accepted Christ and were saved. One of the judges of Athens was a man named Dionysius, who was a man of great intellectual achievement. A famous woman named Damaris was also converted.

Paul was at his best in Athens, and he faithfully proclaimed salvation through Jesus Christ. But the Athenians were too engrossed in the gods they had created to believe in the God who created them.