

Senior Pastor, Kevin Flannery

Series: *The Word of God Continues to Spread and Flourish*

Sermon Title: *Making the Unknown God Known – Acts 17:16-34*

Big Idea: **God summons the world to repent because Jesus is risen.**

Fall Term – Week 2 of 12



Opening Prayer & Icebreaker: If you could instantly master any skill, what would it be? How were you moved by the opening video of The Blessing song around the globe?

Read and Reflect on Acts 17:16-34

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) ²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. ²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' ^[a] As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' ²⁹ "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." ³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Sermon and Scripture Application Discussion:

God Confronts Our Substitutes (vs. 16–21)

1. **Paul's Holy Distress.** Paul was "greatly distressed" to see a city full of idols. What does holy distress look like today in our culture? How can we avoid slipping into pride or irritation instead?
2. **Gospel in the Marketplace (vs. 17)** Paul reasoned in the synagogue and the marketplace. What does this passage reveal about the gospel's relevance beyond the walls of the church and into the ordinary rhythms of life? Where is your "marketplace" right now?
3. **Engaging Worldviews (vs. 18-21)** The Epicureans pursued pleasure, the Stoics pursued self-mastery. Where do you see these same philosophies today? Which one do you feel most tempted by?

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God Reveals Himself and Our Purpose (vv.22–29)

4. An Unknown God Made Known (vs. 22-23) Paul used the altar “To an Unknown God” as a bridge for gospel conversation. What “altars to the unknown” do you see in our culture today? How could they open doors for talking about Jesus?

5. God the Creator and Giver (vs. 24-25) Paul describes God as Creator, Lord, self-sufficient, and the Giver of life. Which of these truths feels most relevant to your life situation this week, whether as a challenge or a source of comfort? Why?

6. God’s Nearness and Purpose (vs. 26-27) Paul says God determines our times and places “so that we would seek him... though he is not far.” How does this reshape the way you think about your own life and your friends who don’t yet know Him?

7. Identifying our Idols. Tim Keller used to say that “an idol is anything you look to for the meaning, security, or salvation that only God can give.” The test is your deepest fear. What, if threatened, makes you anxious, defensive, or despairing? Follow that thread and you will often find an altar. Discuss.

God Summons the World to Repent Because Jesus Is Risen (vv. 30–34)

8. A Call to Repentance (vs. 30-31) Paul says God now commands all people everywhere to repent. How would you explain repentance to a friend? Where might God be inviting you to “turn around” right now?

9. Mixed Responses to the Gospel (vs. 32-34) Some sneered, some stalled, and some believed. Why is it important to expect mixed responses when we share Jesus? Which response do you most often encounter in your relationships?

Closing Prayer:

Lord, expose the subtle altars in our lives and turn my heart back to You as the Giver of life and breath and everything else. Jesus, thank You that You are risen and near—help me share Your truth with calmness, courage, and love in my marketplace this week.

Faith in Action:

- ESL Snacks – Sign up with your community group on the COS website under Global Outreach at this link here: [Global Outreach: ESL Hospitality: Fall Term 2025](#)
- September 23, 6:30 PM, Alpha, Welcome Center
- September 28, 6:00 PM, Loving the Poor Prayer Meeting, Conference Room and Virtual
- October 19, 11:45 AM, Concerts of Prayer for New Partnership in India, F101