



Sermon Notes

Topic: “Becoming the message”

Bible Passage: Acts 17:16-23

Preacher: Ps Sam Toms

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Study Guide Overview

In Acts 17, Paul shows us that sharing Jesus is not simply about having the right answers, but about having the awareness to understand the person in front of us. He walked around Athens, observed carefully, listened to their ideas, understood their worldview and then spoke about Jesus in a way they could understand. Too often we rush to respond, argue, or give Christian answers before we have really listened to the question being asked. Paul reminds us to slow down, look up and pay attention. **Sharing Jesus isn't just knowing what to say; it's caring enough to know who you're saying it to.** The challenge is simple: **God, help me see the people You place in front of me the way You see them.**

Small Group Questions/Discussions

Comfort, Control or Christ? Read Acts 17:16–34 together.

Paul enters Athens and meets people shaped by two major philosophies: **Epicureanism** and **Stoicism**. Both were attempts to answer the same questions people still wrestle with today:

How do I find peace? How do I handle pain? What makes life good?

1. EPICUREANISM — “MAKE LIFE COMFORTABLE”

Epicureans believed the good life was found in pleasure, particularly freedom from unnecessary pain, fear and disturbance. In simple terms: **Avoid pain. Protect your peace. Enjoy life. Seek tranquillity.**

Modern versions might sound like: “Do whatever makes you happy.” “Protect your peace.” “Cut negativity out of your life.” “You deserve to be comfortable.”

There can be wisdom in avoiding unnecessary pain, but comfort can easily become the goal of life.

DISCUSS

- Where do you see this philosophy in our culture?
- When does healthy enjoyment become the pursuit of comfort above everything else?
- What discomfort might God currently be using to grow you?

The Epicurean says: “If my circumstances are good enough, I’ll be okay.”

2. STOICISM — “MAKE YOURSELF STRONG”

Stoicism taught that the good life came through virtue, discipline and self-control. You cannot control everything that happens to you, but you can control your response. Modern versions sound like:

“Toughen up.” | “Control what you can control.” | “Don’t let emotions rule you.” | “Be stronger.” | “You don’t need anyone.”

Again, there is wisdom here. Discipline and resilience matter. But taken too far, it becomes self-sufficiency:



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“If I become strong enough, I can handle life myself.”

DISCUSS

- Where do you see Stoic thinking today?
- Is there an area where you are trying to be strong rather than admitting you need help?
- Can self-reliance sometimes look like maturity while actually keeping us from dependence on God?

The Stoic says: “If I am strong enough , I’ll be okay.”

3. PAUL OFFERS SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Paul doesn’t offer another philosophy. He points them to **God**. Read **Acts 17:24–28** again.

Paul tells them: God **made** us. God **sustains** us. God is **near**. Our lives are **dependent on Him**. “For in him we live and move and have our being.” — Acts 17:28

The Christian answer isn’t: **Make life comfortable enough**. Or: **Make yourself strong enough**.

It is: **Know and trust the God who made you, sustains you and has come near to you.**

4. COMFORT, CONTROL OR CHRIST?

Most of us drift toward one of these two responses when life gets difficult:

Comfort: “God, change my circumstances.” **Control:** “I need to get myself together.”

But Jesus calls us toward something deeper: **Trust. Dependence. Surrender.**

DISCUSS

- Which do you naturally lean toward — comfort or control?
- What happens to your faith when God doesn’t make life comfortable?
- What happens when you discover that you are not strong enough?
- Where is Jesus asking you to trust Him rather than escape or control?

THIS WEEK

Pay attention to the messages around you this week.

Ask: **Is this promising me comfort? Is this promising me control? Am I expecting it to give me something that only God can ultimately provide?**

FINAL QUESTION

Where in your life do you most need to move from comfort or control toward deeper trust in Christ?

PRAY

Jesus, show us where we are building our lives around comfort or control.

Teach us to trust You, depend on You and surrender to You. Amen.