



Sermon Text: Acts 17:16-21

Sermon Date: July 22, 2018

In our text Paul arrived in the famed city of Athens. In this unguarded moment of total anonymity, Paul reveals the passion of his heart. We discover a man who was captured by God's glory and consumed with love for other people.

WHAT PAUL SAW

While Athens would have been a glorious city, Paul was not struck by the city's beauty or brilliance, but by its spiritual brokenness. It was a city "full of idols." Luke appears to invent a word to describe the idolatry of Athens. It wasn't just that the city was full of idols, but that it was buried beneath them. Athens was drowning in idolatry. There were more idols in the city than there were people. While we can scoff at superstitious Athens, there are idols all around us too. An idol can be anything (often good things) that we elevate to the place of God in our lives. Do we see them? Do we see our world like Paul saw Athens?

WHAT PAUL FELT

Luke tells us that Paul's spirit was provoked within him when he saw this city drowning in idols. Paul felt what God feels when He sees idolatry. In the Old Testament, idolatry always 'provoked' the Lord. Idolatry provokes God because He deserves our exclusive allegiance. As our Creator and Redeemer, He should be the center of our worship and He is rightly jealous when we give our hearts to anything else. In seeing Athens, Paul is righteously indignant that lifeless idols are receiving the glory God deserves. But his indignation was seasoned with brokenhearted compassion which propelled him to reason with the citizens instead of simply screaming at them. We too must feel what Paul felt—indignation and compassion. Tim Keller says that if we are not indignant at the idolatry around us, we will not have the courage to do what Paul did. If we are only indignant, however, we will not have the gentleness to do what Paul did.

WHAT PAUL DID

Captured by God's glory and consumed with godly compassion, Paul was propelled out into Athens to share the gospel. He shared the gospel with religious Jews in the synagogue, everyday pagans in the marketplace, and the cultural elites on Mars Hill. He shared the gospel with anyone and everyone, going to where they were and varying his methods to minister to them effectively. But this wasn't easy. Paul was mocked by some and misunderstood by others. Are we willing to be regarded as fools in today's marketplaces because our love for God and people propels us to evangelize? Have we begun to idolize our own reputations?

THE KEY: A CROSS-SHAPED LIFE

How can we grow more faithful in our evangelism? How can we grow jealousy for God's glory and compassionate for lost souls? The key is to live with our eyes, hearts, and actions radically shaped by the Cross. The Cross shows us God's startling holiness, His hatred of idolatry, His passion for His own glory. And the Cross shows us God's surprising love, His matchless mercy, and His compassion on idolaters. The Cross shows us that Jesus didn't lash out at sinners, but took lashes for them. He didn't raise his fists to condemn, but spread His hands to be condemned so that He could forgive. It is only at the Cross that we discover a God who is righteously indignant and mercifully compassionate. Like Paul, those who stare at the Cross are radically shaped by it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. What are some idols that are prevalent within our society?
3. Which is your natural tendency, a ministry of truth (indignation) or a ministry of tears (compassion)? Why is it essential that we have both? What happens when we only have one or the other?