



Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Series: The Gospel Comes to Athens

Acts 17:16-34

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This text that we are going to look at this morning is a truly fascinating one for a variety of reasons. First, this text is the only extended summary of a sermon by Paul given to an entirely Gentile audience. And for that reason, its construction is entirely different from what we have seen before. In this text we find no direct appeal to the Scriptures as the foundation of his message. Paul does not tell the Athenians to turn to Genesis 1:1 to begin his message; they are utterly ignorant of the Bible. He does not talk about the testimony of the prophets, does not explain Christ as the fulfillment of the Scriptures, does not talk about Him as the one true and eternal King of Israel. And so we have here the only thorough example of engaging a people with the gospel who are lacking a general or even faint understanding of the Bible. It is a scene that would fit in our own increasingly post-Christian culture.

The second thing that stands out in this text is the general contrast in response of the Jews that Paul engaged in the synagogues, which we have seen in the previous texts we have studied, and the response of the Greeks. The Jews who rejected the preaching of the gospel did so because they had their minds made up. When they listened to Paul, as soon as he began to prove from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ, they would become furious and immediately seek to silence him by whatever means necessary. Their cultural and religious pride caused them to respond in fury and with rage. The Greeks in Athens didn't respond that way. They let Paul speak. They always liked to hear some new thing, some new idea. They liked batting around new concepts and theories and they did it with intellectual detachment, treating the matters of spiritual life and death with indifference. Their intellectual pride caused them to respond with detached coldness, with mockery and indifference. But intellectual pride and apathy toward the gospel is just as spiritually deadly as furious rejection of Christ.

Something else that is so interesting in this text is the way that Paul is able to clearly and coherently present eternal truth regardless of the audience to whom he was speaking—even

the big, bad intellectuals in Athens. No matter where he started, Paul could present a reasoned and powerful proclamation of eternal truth centered in the person of Christ.

One thing to remember as we look at this is that what we have before us is not the full text of Paul's address to the Greeks. This is a summary of his message and so for that reason, it may seem that some of the essentials of the gospel are missing, but we can be assured that is not the case. Paul, as we know from what we have seen of his ministry so far, could say with integrity: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Romans 1:16–17, ESV) So let's look at Paul's encounter with the Greek philosophers. Pick it up with me in verse 15.

"Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols." (Acts 17:15–16, ESV) What we gather, here, is that Paul kind of expected to lay low for a while and wait for Silas and Timothy to arrive from Berea, after they had encouraged the church there and set things in order. But that is not what happens. What Paul sees in Athens moves him to action.

Let me just tell you a little about Athens in Greece. Athens was a city on the decline. That is not to say that it was not an important and impressive city. It was, but it was a far cry from what it had once been. Four hundred years prior, it had been one of the greatest city-states in the world. It was the home to world famous philosophers like Demosthenes, Pericles, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle – men still studied today. It had been the world center of music, philosophy, the theatre arts, art, ethics, and medicine. It was the birthplace of Western democracy. It was world-renowned for its architecture. Though by 50 AD, the time of Paul, its glory was fading somewhat, it was still the place in the Roman Empire that people went to debate and discuss ideas.

Being from Tarsus, one of the three great university cities of the Roman Empire, having been educated at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, having been exposed to the Greek classics – he

quotes a couple of Greek philosophers in his message – Paul could have been seduced by the spirit and the philosophy of Athens. But he wasn't. When Paul looked at Athens, he saw a city inundated with idolatry, a city that was aesthetically beautiful and culturally sophisticated, but which was morally corrupt and spiritually enslaved.

What he saw was a city full of idols, full of false gods. The phrase “full of idols” is one word in the Greek – *kateidolos* – a word that doesn't appear anywhere else in the NT or in ancient Greek. It simply means to be swamped in idols, to be drowning in idolatry, to be smothered with idols. It is not that it wasn't beautiful to the eyes – it was. There were countless temples, shrines, statues and altars throughout the city. Situated on the Acropolis, the highest hill in Athens, was the Parthenon, the great temple dedicated to the patron goddess of Athens, Athena. There they had constructed a huge gold and ivory statue of the goddess whose shining spear-point was visible forty miles away. All around the hill on which it was constructed were smaller but just as ornate statues of the Apollo, Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Bacchus, Neptune, Diana and more. All the gods of Olympus were represented and all of them intricately fashioned by the greatest Greek sculptors out of gold, silver, ivory and marble. It was said that in Athens you were more likely to meet a god than to meet a person of flesh and blood. And it was true. There were about 30,000 idols in the city and only 10,000 people when Paul visited there.

Paul would not have been blind to their beauty, but rather than captivate and mesmerize his senses, it provoked his soul. That word, “provoked,” is a complex word. It's a word that means that he was moved to righteous anger and to grief. He was angry – angry that the God-given creativity and skill of the Athenians would be used, not to honor the God the Father, not to honor Christ, but to honor these false deities, these idols. He was moved to jealousy for the glory and the honor of God and of His Christ as he saw human beings, men and women created in the image of God, giving to idols the honor and the glory that were due the One True God alone. He was angry but he was also moved to grief at the spiritual darkness that held the Athenians captive, moved to compassion for these people who did not know Jesus Christ and who were caught in a mire of immorality and spiritual death, moved to compassion for these people who were blind – willingly, yes – but also held under the sway of Satan. What he saw was that despite all of the learning and the culture, in truth, the Athenians were just idolaters who did not know God, and it troubled him deeply. As John Calvin wrote: “Man's mind is a perpetual factory of idols.” And nowhere was that more clearly displayed than in the city of Athens. Paul couldn't just sight-see, couldn't just take a vacation, couldn't simply ignore what he saw all around him.

He was a preacher of the gospel of eternal life. He was a preacher of Jesus Christ, God's Son, whom He had sent in to the world to be the wrath bearer and redeemer of sinful men, women, and children, through faith in Jesus alone. He was struck by the idolatry of Athens, knew that it was soul-damning. He was deeply moved by the lostness of these people and the judgment that they would one day face. He knew they needed a Savior, a Rescuer and that Jesus had come into the world for sinners such as these. When he looked at Athens, he saw something beautiful but empty, something that was impressive from a human standpoint but which would burn up. He saw a people in spiritual darkness in rebellion against God. And he knew that God had acted in His Son Jesus Christ so that "those in darkness could see the great light of Christ" and he knew that he had been sent of God to proclaim the way of reconciliation. He had to do something and he did.

"So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there." (Acts 17:17, ESV) Immediately Paul began to reason in the synagogue, sharing the gospel with the Jews and God-fearers who lived in Athens, seeking to bring them to faith in Christ. But that was just the beginning. Luke doesn't tell us how that went – his focus is on the Athenian Greeks primarily. Paul took the message outside the synagogue and began to reason in the marketplace, to engage people with the message of Christ and while he was there he encountered the two main philosophies of life by which the Athenians lived, the two predominant worldviews in Athens. Look at it.

"Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" – because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection." (Acts 17:18, ESV) Now let me tell you a little about the Epicureans and the Stoics so you get the picture. The Epicureans were followers of the philosophy of Epicurus who taught that the chief goal of life was the maximizing of pleasure – intellectually, spiritually, and physically – and the minimizing of pain. Self-actualization, maximizing your experiences, maximizing yourself, living a life that grabbed all that you could experience, supreme self-interest was the motivating principle for life. They believed in the gods but taught that they did not really involve themselves in human affairs. You could worship the god of your choice, but you shouldn't expect much help from him. They were a convenient pastime and an avenue for personal pleasure so choose whichever one floated your boat. Additionally, they were materialists in the sense that they believed that matter always existed and that this life was all that there is and at death, you simply ceased to exist. There was no afterlife and no judgment. It sounds so very much like the modern human worldview, the dominant view of our society and the goal of human living. This is very much

the dominant mindset on so many of our college campuses, the motivating factor of so many in our bucket-list culture.

The Stoics, on the other hand, as followers of the philosopher Zeno, put a high priority on reason and self-sufficiency. They were pantheists believing that god was in everything and everything was in god – in the rocks and the trees, the streams and the mountains, the spark of god in you and me, in your cat and your dog. So the worship of these multitude of gods and goddesses was encouraged since they represented all of the various aspects of life and of the universe. They taught that the highest virtue was calm reason and unruffled resignation to fate. Your fate is your fate. If someone got married – that was life. If someone died – that was life. If you were ill, that was life. If you found a vast treasure – that was life. Whatever happens, happens. Just a sort of “get through life” kind of thing and then die and join the cosmic consciousness, the oneness of the World-Soul. It would have been very compatible with the New Age philosophies of our days and the multiplicity of various gods. It would be right in line with the treehuggers of our age.

The problem with both of these philosophies is that they make both God and man insignificant. They make life eternally unimportant. They depersonalize and devalue God and humanity made in his image. They make history and eternity worthless and reduce man to the level of animals. That is the problem of all human wisdom apart from the wisdom of God.

Paul reasons with these men and the response is interesting. On one hand, you have some of these philosophers looking down their nose at Paul and saying: “What does this babbler wish to say?” That word “babbling” translates a Greek word that means “seed-picker.” It was a word that originally spoke of birds that would flit around the marketplace grabbing whatever food they could. When applied to people, it was a huge insult, in fact the biggest insult you could hear in intellectual Athens. “Seed-pickers” were people who never had an original thought of their own and who would steal a little knowledge here and there from various sources and then present cobbled together and plagiarized ideas as their own without having a clue what they meant or what they were saying – just parroting things they had no idea about.

Others heard Paul and thought that he was a “preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. Some thought that Paul was preaching about some new

god that they could add to their pantheon, that he was bringing them some new god that they had never heard about. In fact, it seems that some of them were confused taking Jesus to be a new god and the resurrection – the word “anastasis” in the Greek – to be the name of a new goddess.

“And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.”” (Acts 17:19–20, ESV) As a consequence they took Paul to the Areopagus to quiz him and examine what it was that he was teaching and preaching about. The Areopagus was “the hill of Ares,” the Greek god of war. To the Romans it was known as Mars Hill. Here, on this hill just northwest of the Acropolis where the Parthenon was, along with all of the other statues of Athens’ idols, was where the world-famous, supreme philosophical council of Athens met. These so-called “great debaters of the age” would hear what Paul had to say about this new thing.

The “newness” of the teaching can be seen in two things. First, Paul’s preaching about Jesus and His resurrection was a message never heard by them before – completely new. Second, it was a new in the sense that every other religion that has been created by man has a sameness, a similarity, because they are “man-made.” But the message of Christ and His cross is a message that men would never have created. “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:22–24, ESV)

Luke adds this less than flattering evaluation of these wise men: “Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.” (Acts 17:21, ESV) That is a not-so-subtle dig at the smart guys on the hill. All these self-professed smart guys had patrons who supported them and paid for their extravagant lifestyles, so they could spend their days laying around asking if there were any new ideas and then debating them. In other words, what Luke is saying is that these guys did nothing but sit on their backsides philosophizing and waxing eloquent and debating all sorts of things but never coming to any conclusions of merit, never coming to any certain truth, while other people worked for a living. Here was one of the greatest opportunities of Paul’s ministry – to present the gospel to the world famous supreme council of Athens on the Areopagus and

he took it and he completely deconstructed both the worldview of the Epicureans and the Stoics. Check it out. First we see his introduction.

“So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.” (Acts 17:22, ESV) On the surface, it looks like Paul is just making an observation about the fact that the Athenians seemed to have a lot of gods – they were all over the place. But this is not the normal Greek word used for being devout or pious. This is a word that means to be in fear of evil spirits, to be in fear of demons – deisdaimon. Like Paul would later write to the Corinthians, telling them that “what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.” (1 Corinthians 10:20, ESV), so also the Athenians were worshipping demons. But Paul doesn’t stop there. He tells them: “For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:23, ESV) Paul says that in seeing all of the various idols and shrines to all of the gods, he also noticed an altar that was absent any idols, that was not devoted to any of the gods in their pantheon of gods and goddesses, but was erected to the “unknown god.” The history of this altar is fascinating.

600 years before Paul came to Athens, the city was being devastated and decimated by a mysterious plague. The natural assumption was that one of the city’s numerous gods had been offended. The leaders of the city decided to determine which of the gods it was and then offer sacrifices to appease that god. It was an impossible task. There were just too many gods. The city, not knowing what to do, brought in a “god specialist” from the Island of Crete, whose name was Epimenides. Epimenides suggested that a flock of black and white sheep be released at Mars Hill, and each time a sheep laid down in front of an idol, that sheep was to be slain and that god was to be worshiped. But if there was no idol at the place where a sheep sat down, the people were to erect an altar to an unknown god, and then slay the sheep. Almost immediately, as the story goes, the plague began to come to an end. Over the years, the altars were forgotten, and began to deteriorate. But one altar was restored and preserved, in commemoration of the removal of the plague by calling upon the “unknown god.” And so Paul, tells them in essence, “I’m here to tell you who the “unknown god” truly is. And he starts his message.

Before we get to it, let me just point this one thing out. Here is the great difference between polytheism and idolatry and Christianity. Polytheism never has enough gods. There is always room for one more, some new god, some new obsession. But Christianity on the other hand is

a faith which is intolerant of any other gods and here is why: when you have the one true God, revealed in Jesus Christ, the one true God who is holy, all-knowing, all-powerful, steadfast in His love, faithful, merciful and gracious – and I could go on and on – no other god is needed or can be tolerated. Someone who has a full faith in the all-sufficient God needs no other. And the very fact that the Athenians had an altar to the “unknown god” and were always on the lookout for some new philosophy of life demonstrates the inadequacy of their religion. Paul is going to tell the Athenians about the God that eliminates the need for all others. First he says:

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,” (Acts 17:24, ESV) Paul says first, there is only one God, One True God and that God is not the “god of rocks and trees and rivers and mountains” or any other such nonsense, He is the God of heaven and earth – God over all. He made the world; he isn’t part of it. Sorry Stoics, you are wrong. He is the personal creator of the universe and the personal Lord over everything that He has made. Sorry Epicureans, matter is not eternal, God is. And as a result, it is absurd to think that the true God of the universe lives in a temple that you have made with your own hands.

God’s revelation was all around them, as Paul taught in Romans 1: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:19–23, ESV) Then Paul says:

“Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:25, ESV) Not only is God the creator of everything, He sustains it all as well. It is not the job of men to sustain and upkeep God; He is the one who sustains all life and who provides everything you need to live. It is absurd to think that God is dependent on us; it is we who are dependent on Him.

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “ ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “ ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” (Acts 17:26–28, ESV) God is the ruler of the nations and the ruler of all men. He is not some far off and uninvolved God, but has made all of humanity to descend from one man, Adam, whom He created. He has established the allotted periods of and boundaries of all men – that is, history and the geography of all nations and of all individual lives are under His direct control.

God’s purpose in this was so that man would seek God and feel for him and find Him but because of sin, they do not. Sin, because it alienates man from God, reduces him to groping in the dark. But is absurd to blame God for this or to think of Him as far-off, indifferent or unknowable. Quoting one of their own poets, the same Epimenides that we mentioned earlier, Paul says: ‘In him we live and move and have our being’. The point he is making is that God is not far from us, we are far from Him because of our sin. If it weren’t for our sin, there would be no barrier to our knowing Him.

Further he quotes another poet, a guy name Aratus, and says: ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Then Paul says: “Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.” (Acts 17:29, ESV) The point that Paul is making is that we are made in God’s very image and we owe our lives to Him. How foolish to think of God as like gold or ivory or stone which are lifeless in themselves and owe their creation to human creativity and imagination.

John Stott sums all of this up saying: These are powerful arguments. All idolatry, whether ancient or modern, primitive or sophisticated, is inexcusable, whether the images are metal or mental, material objects of worship or unworthy concepts in the mind. For idolatry is the attempt either to localize God, confining Him within limits which we impose, whereas He is the Creator of the universe; or to domesticate God, making Him dependent on us, taming and taping Him, whereas He is the Sustainer of human life; or to alienate God, blaming Him for His distance and His silence, whereas He is the Ruler of nations, and not far from any of us; or to dethrone God, demoting Him to some image of our own contrivance or craft, whereas He is our Father from whom we derive our being. In brief, all idolatry tries to minimize the gulf between the Creator and His creatures, in order to bring Him under our control. More than that, it

actually reverses the respective positions of God and us, so that, instead of our humbly acknowledging that God has created and rules us, we presume to imagine that we can create and rule God. There is no logic in idolatry; it is a perverse, topsy-turvy expression of our human rebellion against God.

And it leads to Paul's last point. God is the judge of the world. "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:30–31, ESV) God overlooked the times of ignorance, patiently enduring the willful ignorance of humanity instead of visiting judgment upon us immediately and He has done it so He might save lost, ignorant sinners through repentance and faith in His Son Jesus Christ. He commands all people everywhere to repent because judgment is coming. There is a day when He will judge the world with complete righteousness and judgment by a man, by the God-man Jesus Christ His Son, whom He has appointed to this. As Jesus said in John 5: "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:22–29, ESV)

And the proof that this is so, Paul says, is because God has raised Jesus from the dead. Here it makes sense that Luke did not record the entirety of Paul's sermon. The resurrection of Christ demands context, right? A resurrection presupposes a death and it is here that Paul would have proclaimed Jesus as the Son of the Living God, as God incarnate, as the final and full revelation of God, and the one who is the Savior of sinners, as the Redeemer of souls, the wrath-bearing, sin-destroying, righteousness providing, forgiveness purchasing, holy Lamb of God, atoning Sacrifice for sin who God raised from the dead, publically declaring Him to be the Son of God and the only Savior. Either that or Paul was going to explain all of this before he was cut off.

“Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.” (Acts 17:32–34, ESV) Some just laughed at Paul. Mocking is the refuge of those who have no answer for the truth, the final tactic for the bested. Others put him off, saying they would hear from him later. But others were saved, including one of the very members of the Athenian supreme council and a woman named Damaris. Even out of the midst of proud fools, God drew some to repentance and faith, and saved some from the judgment to come.

What do we take away from this? First, let me say this. We live in a world that is much like ancient Athens – awash in the idolatry of the gods of pleasure, money, fame, possessions, beauty, people – everyone from celebrities to our own children, intellect and self. Awash in idolatry and filled with variations on the same kinds of philosophies – that God is far off and doesn’t care what we do, or that there are a million different gods, that this life is all there is so grab for all you can get or that this life has no real purpose, man – no real dignity or that man in the measure of everything. Idolatry and philosophy all fall short when compared to reality. And reality is found in the True God alone.

God is not far off and there is only one – the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who made you and everything there is. And although we have sinned against Him and refused to be obedient to Him and honor Him as Holy God, suppressed the truth about Him and deserve His wrath because He is Creator and Lord, He still loves sinners. And He has done all that is necessary to forgive sinners and to be reconciled to us, and to allow us to draw near to Him as Father, by sending His Son Jesus Christ to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus hung on the cross and died paying the penalty for the wrath that we deserve and offering forgiveness and eternal life to all who will repent of their sins and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This life is not about maximizing your fallen humanity or grabbing all the gusto you can; it is not meaningless, and man is not an animal with dignity at all. Jesus said: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3, ESV) And if you now Him, if your trust in Christ, you will need no other gods, no idols at all. You will have the God who is and He is all-sufficient. Jesus is coming in judgment and the only refuge on that day will be found in Him.

Second, living in this world filled with idolatry and empty philosophies, our response cannot be to simply be angry, even righteously so. We have to do something and that something is to do all that we can, in every avenue we can, to dispel the darkness, not hide in fear from it. Like Jesus told us: ““You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14–16, ESV)

A third thing to think about is this. We have no reason to be intimidated by the world or apologetic about the gospel. The gospel does not merely stand up to other philosophies in the world; it blows them all away. We have no reason to be intimidated by anyone who may seem to be intellectually superior to us. We know something they do not know and desperately need to— the truth. And we know someone they do not know and need to know now before the day they stand before Him – Christ the Lord.

One last thing. Since we are immersed in this darkened world with its darkened understanding of the Lord and all of its false wisdom, let’s be sure to keep our doctrine and worship of God pure and undefiled, not shaped by our own understanding but by the truth of God’s Word. Let’s make sure our lives are centered in Him and not on us, poured out for others in the body and in the world for the sake of the gospel, and that our proclamation of the gospel is in line with Paul’s preaching -- the proclamation of a simple, straightforward message of man’s sin and of coming judgment, of Christ’s sacrifice and of salvation for all who would repent and believe? May the gospel shape our worship and our every action, as it did Paul. If we do this, we will be, as Paul wrote the Philippians: “children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.” (Philippians 2:14–17, ESV)

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