Mission to the Unreached: Part 1

Lesson 10, 4th Quarter December 2, 8, 2021.

Sabbath Afternoon, December 2

Memory Text:

"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands." Acts 17:24

"The city of Athens was the metropolis of heathendom. Here Paul did not meet with ignorant, credulous populace, as at Lystra, but with a people famous for their intellectual culture and taste. Everywhere statues of their gods and of the deified heroes of history and poetry met the eye. Temples and altars to the various deities represented the scholarship and the religious worship of heathen deities. The senses of the people were entranced by the beauty of their temples, the grandeur of their sanctuaries and temples, involving untold expense, reared their massive forms. Inscriptions of arms and deeds of celebrated men were commemorated by sculpture, bronze, and tablet. All these made Athens a mart and emporium of art." AA 233.4

"The apostle was not deceived by that which he saw in this center of learning. His spiritual nature was so alive to the spiritual darkness that covered all that the pride and glory of the riches which will never perish made valuable. In his eyes the pomp and splendor with which he was surrounded. As he saw the magnificence of Athens he realized its seductive power over lovers of art and science, and his mind was deeply impressed with the importance of the work before him." AA 234.2

Sunday, December 5

A Hebrew in Athens

Read Acts 17:1-16. How did Paul wind up in Athens, and how did he respond to what he saw there?

"The unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica, filled with jealousy and hatred of the apostles, and not content with having driven them from their own city, followed Paul and Barnabas and aroused against them the excitable passions of the lower classes, that they might be driven out of the city and be remanded there, the brethren sent him to Athens, accompanied by some of the brethren who had at first accepted the faith." AA 232.3

"In this great city, where idolatry was not worshiped, Paul was oppressed by a feeling of solitude, and he longed for the sympathy and help of his fellow-laborers. But no fainting friendship was concerned, he felt himself to be utterly alone. In his spirits he felt the depression of one who leaves his feelings in the wards, 'Left at Athens alone.' Sometimes 1 S. Obstacles are not always apparently insurmountable presented themselves before him, discouraging his spirit, and he was tempted to attempt to reach the heart of his hearers." AA 233.1

"The great men of Athens were not long in learning of the presence in their city of a singular teacher who was teaching before the people doctrines of a strange nature. Some of these men sought Paul out and entered into conversation with him. Some were skeptics, others were lovers of novelty. Some were interested to ridicule the apostle, and others who was for bewildering him with questions of metaphysics, and these sure people among themselves, 'What will this babbler say?' Others, 'because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.' Said, 'He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods." AA 235.1

"Among those who encountered Paul in the market place were Tarsian philosophers of the Epicurean, and of the Stoics" but they, and all others who came in contact with him, soon saw that he had a store of knowledge even greater than their own. His intellectual power commanded the respect of the learned, while his earnest, logical reasoning and the power of his oratory held the attention of all in his audience. His hearers recognized the fact that he was no novice, but was able to meet all opposition. Some were inclined to regard his strange doctrines as laughable, but others were interested, meeting his opponent on their own ground, matching logic with logic, philosophy with philosophy, eloquence with eloquence." AA 235.2

Monday, December 6

Paul in the Areopagus

Read Acts 17:16-21. What were some of the different things that the pagans in Athens worshiped, and how Paul's speaking and questioning?

"Paul's discourses had attracted much attention to the Sale of Socrates, who, because he was a setter forth of strange gods, had been condemned to drink hemlock. Some thought Paul not to endanger his life in the same way. But the apostle's discourses revealed the existence of the powerful and his unaffected wisdom commanded their respect and attention. Some were inclined to regard him as a mere minstrel of some peculiar ability, and satisfying themselves that he was determined to accomplish his errand among them, they were willing, as, tell his story, they decided to give him a fair hearing. AA 236.1

"They accordingly conducted him to Mars' Hill. This was one of the most sacred spots in Athens. It was the resort of recollections and associations were such as to cause it to be regarded with superstitious veneration. Here the most solemn oaths were administered, and it was believed that that matters connected with religion were often carefully considered by men who aimed to be honest and who set more important moral as well as civil questions. AA 236.2

"Here, away from the noise and bustle of crowded thoroughfares, and the temple of Minerva, where discussions the apostle could be heard without interruption. Around him were gathered the men of Athens, philosophers, scholars and sages of Athens, who were interested to hear "May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, for thou bringest some strange things to our ears: we would know thereof what these things mean." AA 236.3

"In that hour of solemn responsibility, the apostle was calm and self-possessed. His heart was burdened with an earnest desire for the salvation of his hearers. He felt that conviction of the truth of what he was to tell, saying, "Ye men of Athens," he said, "I perceive that in all things ye are superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To the Unknown God. Whom therefore ye worship in ignorance, him declare I unto you." With all their intelligence and scholarship, they were ignorant of the God who created the universe. Yet there were some who were trying to find the right path. They were reaching out toward the Infinite." AA 237.1

Tuesday, December 7

Paul and the Unknown God

Read Acts 17:22, 23. What was Paul doing here in his attempt to reach these people with the gospel?

"With hand outstretched toward the temple crowded with idols, Paul pointed out the sacred altars and spoke of exposed the falsehoods of the religion of the Athenians. The apostle was not ignorant of the prejudice which would be his reasoning. He showed them how familiar with their ways of art, their literature, and their religion. Pointing to their inscription altar, he declared that God could not be likened to forms of man's devising. These green images in marble, and the golden and silver images, represent the glory of Jehovah. He reminded them that these images had no life, they were controlled by human power, and they only when the hands of men moved them; and therefore those who worshiped them were idolaters, and were under the curse they worshipped. AA 237.2

"Paul then recalled to mind of his idolatrous hearers beyond the limits of their false religion to a true view of the Deity, whom they had spoken of as the Unknown God. The God whom he now declared unto them, was independent of everything nothing from human hands to add to His power and glory. AA 237.3

"The people were carried away with admiration for Paul's earnest and logical presentation of the attributes of the true God—of his creative power and the existence of his overruling providence. With earnest and fervid eloquence the apostle declared, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth life, and breath, and all things." The heathen: They were not large enough to contain God, how much less were the temples made by human hands?" AA 238.1

Wednesday, December 8

Introducing a New God

Read Acts 17:24-27. What approach was Paul taking here in an attempt to reach these people?

"In that age of caste, when the rights of men were often disregarded, when the lot of the poor was hard, and the rich and powerful were oppressing the poor, the apostle declared that God had made of one blood all nations of men, that they should dwell on all the face of the earth. Through God all are as one before the Creator, and the Creator every human being owes supreme allegiance. From the apostle's discourse they learned that God is dealing with men, His purpose of grace and mercy runs like a thread of gold, in the hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us." AA 238.2

"Pointing to the noble specimens of manhood about him, which were brought from a period far back in the past, he pointed the infinite God as a Father, whose children they were. He said, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." He divine Ruler had passed lightly over the idolatry of the Athenians. He had not spoken of their sins against God, of their pride of heart, and the expectation that all reverence unto salvation, not only from the poor and humble, but from the proud philosophers and the people who ruled the earth. "Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by the man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead." As Paul spoke of the resurrection from the dead, 'some mocked: others said, We will hear thee again of this matter." AA 239.1

"Thus closed the labors of the apostle at Athens, the center of heathen learning, for the Athenians, clinging persistently to their idolatry, turned from the light of the true religion. When a people are wholly satisfied with their own attainments, little more need be expected of them. Though boasting of learning and refinement, the Athenians were constantly becoming more corrupt and more content with the vague mysteries of idolatry." AA 239.2

Thursday, December 9

Crossing a Line

Read Acts 17:24-34. How does Paul continue his sermon?

"Among those who listened to the words of Paul were some to whose minds the truths presented brought conviction, but they would not humble themselves to acknowledge God and to accept the plan of salvation. No idolatrous worship, no force of argument, can convert the sinner. The power of God alone can apply the truth to the heart. Many who heard the apostle were convinced, carried away by the force of his eloquent appeals, and the message of the cross was to them foolishness. Many they valued their worldly wisdom and their gods than the wisdom that comes from above. AA 239.3

"In their pride of intellect and human wisdom may be found the reasons why the gospel of Christ has made comparatively little success among the Athenians. Christ crucified was to them a stumbling block. The wisdom of God was to them foolishness. Among those who came as disinguished men, extolling their own wisdom, with fall of receiving the light and knowledge that he alone can give. AA 240.1

"Thus Paul met the paganism of his day. His labors in Athens were not wholly in vain. Dionysius, one of the most prominent citizens, and some others, accepted the gospel, and were baptized and themselves fully with the believers." AA 240.2

"Behold I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their forehands. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house." Ezekiel 3:8, 9. "Christ's ministers unto these wonted to be in the world, and to be with men. And go, get thee to them, and speak unto them, and tell them. Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." Ezek. 3:11.

Friday, December 10

Thought

In Christ's day, the Inquisition doubtless assisted both the messengers and their messages for that time. On one hand they found fault with the Jews, the Baptist because his diet consisted of wild honey and locusts (Matt. 3:4). Christ was called a glutton and a wine bibber, and it was said, He hath a devil." Matt. 11:18. On the other hand, because Christ was eating and drinking, they accused Him of being "a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Matt. 11:19. Because of the very word of God, they busingly asked Him: "By what authority, and who gave thee this authority? Christ gave them no answer. "—Testimonies to Ministers, p. 475.

To the doubters of the possibility of a message containing nothing but truth, Christ replied, "Ye are of your father Satan never work in co-partnership. The testimonies either bear the stamp of God or of Satan. Satan cannot work with God, nothing both cannot be in co-operation. Vol. 5, p. 98. "We believe the visions," say the Inspiration- doubters, "but Sister White, and many others, not so much as we do, and we will believe that portion which we think is of God, and will not heed the other." —Testimonies, Vol. 1, p. 234.