

SERMON

When I was a kid I used to imagine myself being a professional football player winning the Super Bowl for my team in February. And then in October I'd hit a grand slam to help my baseball team win the World Series. During the summer I'd be busy acting in all the coolest movies of all time.

Well it didn't take long for those dreams to be crushed. I realized quickly enough that I was horrible at all the sports. And although I once brought the house down with a one liner as a 7-year-old in a church play, I never got another acting break after that.

It didn't take long for me to realize that the professionals exist in a league of their own.

I think many of us think of men like the Apostle Paul in the same way. We see this guy who travels around speaking the Gospel with apparent ease wherever he goes and we tell ourselves we could never do that. This guy a professional in a league of his own.

Here's the thing about professionals . . .

- We sometimes look at them downstream, marveling in their incredible abilities and we imagine that they just kind of arrived with those abilities.
- The truth is, if you go upstream you'll realize that we can't do what they do because we don't practice like they practice, we don't eat like they eat, we don't exercise like they exercise, and we don't study like

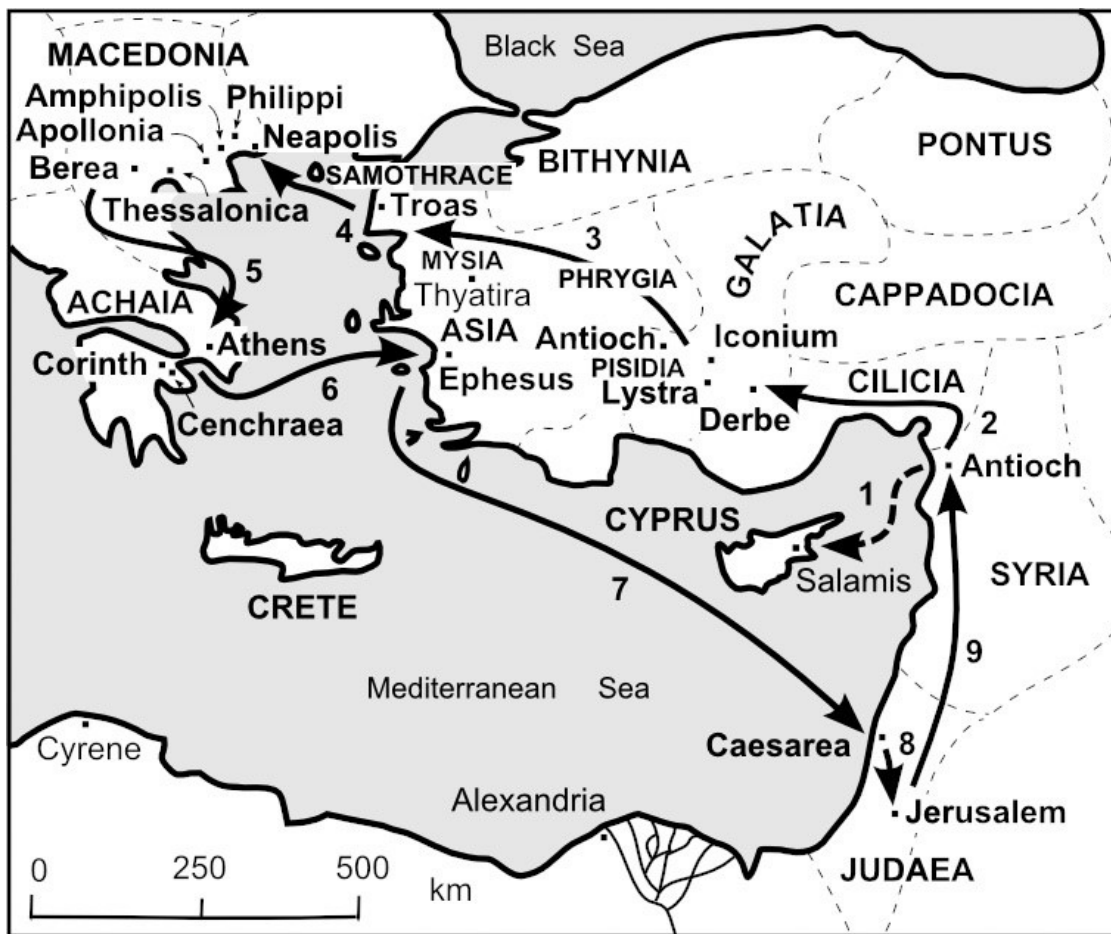
they study. Perhaps most importantly, we haven't devoted the years that they devoted to honing their craft.

The same is true of the Apostle Paul . . .

- Downstream we see this incredible evangelist ◦
Evangelism = telling unbelievers the Good News about Jesus
- Upstream you'll see a guy with many of the same gifts and resources we have (if not less) but a guy with incredible devotion.

Turn to Acts 17:16

Left Silas and Timothy in Berea and sailed to Athens



• In the city of Athens we'll see an example of evangelism in Ultra HD. But we'll also have an opportunity to go upstream of his evangelism and observe what's happened behind the scenes to get him to that point. • And I hope In doing so to encourage you that if you're a follower of Jesus you have everything you need to follow Paul's example.

We don't evangelize like Paul because we don't go like Paul. We don't go like Paul because we don't feel like Paul. We don't feel like Paul because we don't see like Paul. We don't see like Paul because we don't believe like Paul.

1) What Paul Believed

- Before we look at anything Paul did, we need to recognize Paul's deeply-held beliefs that underpinned his actions...
- Ask yourself: do I truly believe this?

Every human deserves God's righteous punishment for sin

- Verse 31—"...He commands all people everywhere to repent..."
- What about the innocent tribesman somewhere? Sure, but there are none innocent anywhere!
Romans 3:10, 23 —"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"
- Do you really believe that every person everywhere who's ever lived or ever will live deserves the righteous wrath of God? If you don't, you'll never evangelize like Paul did.

We are rescued by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone

- Verse 18—"...preaching Jesus and the resurrection..." ◦ Paul has the same Gospel message everywhere He goes!
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 —"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you

received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,”

- Do you really believe that we can only be rescued through the work of Jesus? If you don't, you'll never evangelize like Paul did.

This Good News is spread by human messengers

This is why Paul doesn't stop, despite opposition!

- Romans 10:13-14 —“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”
- The Gospel came to you so it could go through you to someone else!
- Do you really believe that God has ordained human messengers—including you—to spread the Good News? If you don't, you'll never evangelize like Paul did.

If we want to evangelize like Paul, we need to believe like Paul. But we also need to see like Paul.

2) What Paul Saw

- At this point the city of Athens is about 500 years past it's prime, but it was still one of the most important cities in the entire Roman Empire.
 - About 30,000 people
 - Philosophical center of the ancient world
 - Home of the world's most famous university
 - Home of famous playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides
 - Home of famous historian Thucydides
 - Philosophers Plato, Socrates, Aristotle

But that's not what Paul saw...

- **Read verse 16**
 - Idols in Athens . . .
 - The city's most famous statue was a 40-foot high gold/ivory statue of the goddess Athena
 - Every public building was dedicated to a god
 - Some who visited Athens in that day said it was easier to find a god than a person.
 - Historian Pliny said that the city of Rhodes had 73,000 statues with "no fewer" in Athens
 - Temples dedicated to Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite, Apollo, Ares, Hephaestus, the Mother of the gods, Nike, the twelve gods, the mystery religions, the emperor, etc.
- "A forest of idols" (Wycherley)

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- Paul saw that way because he truly believed what he believed. His wasn't a Sunday faith.
- What do you see when you see your world?

- Idols in America . . . Super
 - Bowl
 - Sports in general
 - Netflix
 - Politics
 - Gaming
 - Social Media
 - Celebrity culture
 - Relationships
 - Ministry

• "The human heart is an idol factory" -- John Calvin
 Why don't we see? For me: too busy being entertained.

If we want to evangelize like Paul, we need to believe like Paul and see like Paul. But we also need to feel like Paul.

3) What Paul Felt

- Read verse 16
 - Explanation—not anger, but anguish
 - How we know: the way he presents the Gospel—
 - In 1 Cor. 10:20 Paul states that the idols are really demons in disguise. But he doesn't lead with that now does he?
 - Ministry of truth vs. ministry of tears

- What do you feel when you're confronted with the desperate condition of the world around you?
- Spurgeon -- "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for."
- Why don't we feel this way? Because we have forgotten where we've come from.
 - All those examples of idolatry? We're guilty of them too!
 - 1 John 5:21— "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."
 - And yet God has compassion on us!!! BECAUSE of who we are!!!
 - Psalms 103:13-14 —"As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust."

If we want to evangelize like Paul, we need to believe like Paul, see like Paul, and feel like Paul. But we also need to go like Paul.

4) Where Paul Went

- Read verses 17-18

Synagogue Ministry—ministering to people that think they're the people of God

- Could be Jews, like in Paul's case
- Could be cultural Christians today

Marketplace Ministry—ministering to people that don't claim to believe in God or be His people

The point: Paul went to them!!!!

- Not event-driven evangelism

Paul deliberately chose to preach the Gospel in the synagogue and the marketplace, but in God's providence he's going to be given a wider audience . . .

- Read verses 18-21
 - Epicureans and Stoics—two most influential philosophies of their time
 - Epicureans—YOLO, if it feels good, do it!
 - Stoics—que sera sera, grin and bear it because there's nothing you can do about it anyways
 - Josephus writes that Athenians would punish by death anyone who introduced a foreign god without first receiving government approval
 - Socrates, perhaps the greatest philosopher of all time, was tried and executed for that very reason in Athens 400 years before

If we want to evangelize like Paul, we need to believe like Paul, see like Paul, feel like Paul, and go like Paul. But finally we need to speak like Paul.

5) What Paul Said

- Most likely a summary—Areopagus speeches often lasted for 2-3 hours (plus in Acts 20 Paul will preach past midnight and a man will fall asleep and fall out of a second story window)
- There's a lot we could say about Paul's speech, but I want to focus on four main ingredients:

The Gospel Truth About God

Read vv. 22-25

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- Paul doesn't try to make a complex argument for creation, because creation itself is the greatest argument!
 - Psalms 19:1 —“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”
 - A persecuted Christian was being threatened by men who didn't want villagers to know about God. They threatened to tear down his church building so people wouldn't know about God any longer. He said, “You can pull down our steeples, but you can't pull down the stars.”

The Gospel Truth About Man

- Even though God reveals Himself in creation, we don't believe! • Read vv. 26-29
 - Feel—word used by Greek poet Homer to describe the groping of drunk and blinded cyclops trying to feel his way out of a cave

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Point: We're not finding God on our own! ◦ This is why instead of worshiping the true God, we worship idols!

- **Romans 1:18-23** —“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 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.”

The Gospel Truth About Christ

- He's a sinless Judge (v. 31a)
- He's a resurrected Savior (v. 31b)
- 500 years earlier at the grand opening of the Areopagus, it was said during a play by Aeschylus “when a man dies, and his blood is spilled on the ground, there is no resurrection.”
 - Obviously He didn't need to rise unless He died, and Paul is clear elsewhere that Jesus died a sinners' death in our place

The Only Gospel Response

- Read verse 30
- Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin
- Swimming pool illustration

Final Word to Christians:

If you can remember God, Man Christ, Response than you can share the Gospel like Paul. But will we? That may depend on where we go, what we feel, what we see, and what we truly believe.

Final Word to Non-Christians:

How They Responded . . .

Verses 32-34

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- Some mocked
- Some procrastinated
 - Procrastination is not neutrality!
- Some believed

Two weeks ago, at around 12:45 PM most of us were probably sitting down to eat lunch with our families. For most of us it was just another normal Sunday. Not so for the family of one of the greatest athletes of all time, retired professional basketball player Kobe Bryant. While we were sitting down to eat a sandwich firefighters were responding to reports that Bryant's helicopter had crashed into the side of a mountain in Calabasas, California. Neither Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gianna, six family friends and the pilot survived the crash. What certainly started as a normal day ended in unspeakable tragedy.

Now I don't say that to scare you. I really don't. But the truth is life is short. Please, don't presume on the patience of God. If you're a Christian, get serious about telling others about Jesus. And if you're not a Christian, don't leave here today until you know Him.