

Sharing Jesus With People Who Don't Know Him—Part 1



SABBATH—DECEMBER 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 17:1–16; Acts 17:18–21; Acts 17:22, 23; Acts 17:24–27; Acts 17:24–34.

MEMORY VERSE: “He is the God who made the whole world [the earth] and everything in it. He is the Lord of the land and the sky. He does not live in temples that men build!” (Acts 17:24, ICB).

While Paul was in Athens, he tried to preach about Jesus to the people.

LUKE tells us about Paul's work in Athens, Greece. Luke writes, “So he [Paul] went to the synagogue [Jewish place of worship]. There he talked both with Jews and with Greeks who worshiped God. Each day he spoke with anyone who happened to be in the market place” (Acts 17:17, NIV).

Paul refused to help only his own people, the Jews. God sent Paul to help save other people, too.

Paul also refused to work only with non-Jews who accepted God. They already knew some Bible truth, even if they didn't know Jesus. Their faith and knowledge about God made Paul's work easy.

While Paul was in Athens, he tried to preach about Jesus to the people. Many famous philosophers lived in Athens. Philosophers were people who studied about the meaning of life. Paul wanted to share Jesus with the people in Athens. The beliefs and history of the people in Athens were different from Jewish beliefs and history.

How did Paul try to share Jesus with these people? What can we learn from his story?

A JEW IN ATHENS (Acts 17:1–16)

Read about Paul in Acts 17:1–16. How did Paul end up in Athens? What did he feel about the things he saw there?

Paul “was very upset to see that the city was full of statues of gods” (Acts 17:16, NIV). Paul knew well the history of his people. God warned the Jews many times to stop worshiping statues. Israel’s mistakes upset Paul. So, all the statues Paul saw in Athens made him upset, too. Paul’s heart was filled with love for the people in Athens. Paul wanted to help the Athenians know about Jesus. The people would die in their sins if they did not know Bible truth.

Today, our cities are filled with “statues” of false gods. Maybe these false gods are not the same as the ones Paul saw. We worship gods of entertainment, sports, beauty, money, fashion, and other things. Sad to say, many Christians can walk through a city and not be upset by its false gods. Paul was different. The statues of gods made him upset because He was filled with the Holy Spirit and with love for God. Many Christians in Paul’s day didn’t understand that God wanted His followers to share the Good News with people everywhere. Paul knew that God wanted to save the Athenians along with everyone else. Paul understood that God wanted His followers to share the Good News with people who didn’t know anything about Jesus. These people included the same ones who worshiped statues of gods and the philosophers who filled the streets of Athens. As we saw yesterday, a philosopher is someone who studied about the meaning of life.

Paul went to the marketplace in Athens to meet these statue worshipers and philosophers. Paul knew he couldn’t use the same plan to share Jesus with the non-Jews that he used with the Jews. Jewish beliefs meant nothing to the people that Paul met in the marketplace in Athens. So, Paul needed a brand-new plan.

Today, we often try to share Jesus with people who know nothing about Him, the Bible, or the Christian religion. So, we need a brand-new plan, the same as Paul did. A plan that works fine in Buenos Aires may be useless in Bangkok.

What types of “statues” of false gods are people worshiping in your community? How can you help your community understand that these “gods” are useless?



Paul went to the marketplace in Athens to meet these statue worshipers and philosophers.

PAUL IN THE AREOPAGUS (Acts 17:18–21)

God gave Paul his work. Wherever Paul went, he preached the Good News about Jesus. So, he did the same thing in Athens.

Read Acts 17:18–21. How did the people in the marketplace feel and think about Paul’s preaching and questions?



“The wise men of Athens were amazed as they heard Paul talk.”

Paul told the people in the marketplace about Jesus. The people listened to Paul and became curious about the “strange gods” (Acts 17:18, NLV) that Paul talked about. Then the Athenians took Paul to the Areopagus. The Areopagus was a part of the city where the leaders judged legal problems and religious questions. As far as we know, Paul wasn’t in any trouble. The Athenians wanted Paul to tell them more about this “new idea” that he taught (Acts 17:19, ERV). The Athenian people may have thought Paul’s ideas were very strange. At the same time, they respected Paul’s skills as a thinker and speaker.

Acts 17:21 says that the Athenians spent all their time talking about, and listening to, the latest ideas. Was Luke trying to say that the Athenians were lazy? Of course not! Luke wanted us to understand that the Athenians were excellent thinkers. They loved to argue. Remember, many of the most important and famous thinkers in history were Greek: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Their ideas continue to be studied to this day. For many hundreds of years, Athens was a famous center for thinkers and philosophers. As we saw already, philosophers were people who study the meaning of life. Many of their ideas were very different from Christian teachings. The idea of a Savior who woke up from the dead was very strange to them.

In Athens, Paul expected the Holy Spirit to use his past education to touch the hearts of the Athenian people. Paul learned his knowledge from Gamaliel, a famous Jewish teacher. To Paul’s surprise, the Spirit used the education Paul got on the streets in Athens. What Paul learned about the people and their city helped him more than anything else to share Jesus. “The wise men of Athens were amazed as they heard Paul talk. He showed them that he knew about their works of art, their writings, and their religion.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of Apostles*, page 237, adapted.

PAUL AND THE UNKNOWN GOD (Acts 17:22, 23)

Notice that Paul didn't make the Athenians feel bad about their false religion or their false gods. Paul looked for whatever good he could find in their beliefs. Then he used those things to help the Athenians understand the Good News about Jesus.

Read about Paul's way of sharing the Good News with the Athenian people in Acts 17:22, 23. What things did Paul do to touch their hearts?

"Then Paul stood up in the court and said, 'You men of Athens, I see that you are very religious and worship many gods' " (Acts 17:22, WE). Paul praised the Athenians for being very religious. Yes, they worshiped false gods. But Paul respected and honored their faith because it showed that they cared about spiritual things.

Paul continued, " 'I was going through your city and I saw the things you worship. I found an altar that had these words written on it: "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." You worship a god that you don't know. This [God] is the God I want to tell you about' " (Acts 17:23, ERV). Paul studied the Athenian religion. His words showed that he respected the people. He didn't announce to the Athenian people that he was an expert. (He really was one! He also had the answers for how these people needed to change.) But Paul didn't brag, "Hey, everyone! I'm an expert!" If Paul did that, the Athenians would have paid no attention to him. Paul showed the people that he cared for them and wanted the best for them, too.

Paul explained the "unknown god" (Acts 17:23, ERV) to the Athenians. The Athenians believed in god (in many gods, really). Many people back then didn't believe at all. So, Paul started with that belief and then shared with them more Bible truth. The Athenians built the altar to the unknown god because they wanted to make sure they weren't missing anything in their worship. Paul didn't make fun of the idea of an altar to the unknown god. Paul showed that he respected people who cared enough about spiritual things to go to the effort and expense of worshiping something they didn't know.

How can you, the same as Paul, find ways to share Jesus with people you meet from other religions?



The Athenians built the altar to the unknown god because they wanted to make sure they weren't missing anything in their worship.

INTRODUCING A NEW GOD (Acts 17:24–27)

Paul had the attentions of the thinkers in Athens. So, he told them about the God of heaven.

Read about Paul’s sermon in Acts 17:24–27. What did Paul say to introduce the Athenian people to God?



Paul showed the Athenians that he studied their beliefs.

Paul’s words thrilled the Athenians. The Athenians are the people who lived in Athens. The Athenian people cared enough about spiritual things to build an altar to a god they didn’t know. So, they were excited to learn what Paul had to tell them. Paul’s words were interesting to them. Paul told them about a God who doesn’t live in a temple. This God needs nothing from humans, and He takes care of their needs. The Greeks had many stories about the gods. The Greek gods weren’t very nice to humans. The Athenians couldn’t trust their gods to help them. Their gods were selfish. They often hurt people who worshiped them. So, the Athenians were excited to learn about Paul’s teaching. Paul told them that there was a God who was loving. The Athenians thought this idea was wonderful!

Paul also told the Athenians that the God they didn’t know was Someone that they could know. More than that, God wants people to know who He is!

For sure, Paul’s sermon at the court was much longer than the few words Luke shares in this story. Luke may have wanted to save space in his book. So, he may have told us only the most important parts of Paul’s sermon. When we look at Paul’s sermon and study it more deeply, we can see that his sermon had five parts:

1. Paul first praised the Athenians for their faith and their respect for religion.
2. Next, Paul showed the Athenians that he studied their beliefs. He told them things that he learned and respected about them.
3. Then Paul told the Athenians that he discovered something about their religion that they said that they didn’t understand.
4. After that, Paul told them about God. The Athenians needed to know that God lived and loved them. He is not far away from them.
5. Finally, at the end of his sermon, Paul warns the people not to reject this knowledge about this God they didn’t know.

PAUL'S FINAL WORDS ON MARS' HILL (Acts 17:24–34)

Read Paul's final words to the Athenians in the court on Mars' Hill (Acts 17:24–34). What does Paul say?

Paul uses some famous quotes from Greek writers in his sermon to the Athenian people. These Greek writers say things that agree with Bible truth. Paul uses these quotes to help the Athenian people understand his teachings to them about God. We can learn an important lesson from Paul. When we are trying to teach people about Jesus, we should learn about their beliefs. Then we can find ideas we can both agree about. When we follow this plan, we will learn a powerful way of teaching other people about Jesus.

Do you see that Paul uses ideas that he and the Athenians both agree about so that he can help them understand the Resurrection? The Resurrection is the teaching that Jesus woke up from the dead. Paul wants the Athenians to understand the hope this teaching gives them. What happened when Paul finished teaching about the Resurrection? The Bible tells us that some people made fun of the idea. Some people believed. Other people said they wanted to hear Paul tell them more about the idea. The most important thing for us to learn is that everyone paid attention to Paul's sermon. They wanted to hear what he had to say. That was Paul's hope from the start.

We know that some people will reject the Good News about Jesus. We must do everything possible to help them understand our message. Paul did everything he could to help the Athenians listen to him with hearts open to the God they didn't know. This God loved them and wanted the Athenians to know Him personally. God showed the Athenians mercy for the whole time they knew nothing about Him. But the day was coming when God would judge everyone. The proof for God's future work as Judge was Jesus and His resurrection.

The people heard and understood Paul's message. Now they had to make a choice to reject it or study more about it. Some did study more and followed Jesus (Acts 17:34).

Task #1: Ask God to show you how to share Him with someone you know.

Task #2: How can you share the Good News about Jesus on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and so on)?



What happened when Paul finished teaching about the Resurrection?

The Bible tells us that many people made fun of the idea. But a few people believed.



“Paul’s heart was filled with love for the Athenian people.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Paul’s experience at the court on Mars’ Hill can teach us how to share the Good News about Jesus with people who know nothing about Him. Because of Paul’s success at Mars’ Hill, a small group of people became Christians and started worshiping God in Athens.

“Paul’s words are an example for us who live today. Paul had deep faith in God. He didn’t lose courage when he was lonely and times were hard. In a place where people worshiped false gods and statues, Paul won people to Jesus.

“Paul’s words to the Athenians are the same as a special treasure for the church. The Athenians’ hearts were filled with pride. So, if Paul wasn’t careful, he could have said something to upset the Athenians. What if Paul attacked their gods? Then Paul would have been in danger of dying the same death as Socrates. [Socrates was made to drink poison because of his teachings.] Paul’s heart was filled with love for the Athenian people. Paul carefully showed the Athenians that their gods were false. How did Paul do this? He showed them the God of Heaven. He was the God they didn’t know.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 240, 241, adapted.

Paul got to know the people in Athens. He studied their culture or way of life. He praised their respect for spiritual things. He didn’t upset or insult the people he talked to. Only God could make this miracle happen. This miracle is the “special treasure” Ellen G. White talks about in the quote above. As a church, we need this knowledge. So, we must pay special attention to what Paul did in Athens and learn from him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What’s the first thing we should do when we start work for God in a city? What did Paul do in Athens?
- ② What is the best way to make friends with people who don’t know God?
- ③ What are some of the false gods that people worship today? What should you avoid doing when you start working with people who worship these gods?
- ④ Why didn’t Paul stop preaching after he told the Athenian people that God loved them? Paul told the people that Jesus woke up from the dead. Then some of the people thought Paul was crazy. Should Paul have said that? Yes, or no? Explain your answer.

THE ROAD TO SPAIN, PART 4

When Luis Paiva moved to Spain, he needed to earn a living to support his family. So, he decided to sell fruit to make some money. Luis knew in his heart that God wanted him to work for Him elsewhere. Luis also worried that his new business might get in the way of his working fully for God. Two weeks later, Luis's life fell apart. His business started to fail. His partners cheated him. He got sick and couldn't walk. But Luis didn't want to give up. He asked some Seventh-day Adventists for business advice. One of the men knew that Luis trained to be a pastor and scolded him. The man said, "You shouldn't be selling fruit when God chose you to preach the Good News!" These words cut Luis's heart as if God Himself said them. Luis felt so hopeless. How could he serve as a pastor when he didn't have a church? Luis talked about the problem with his wife. In the end, they decided to go back to Venezuela. Maybe Luis could get better there.

A short time later, Luis got a phone call from a man named Gabriel Diaz. Gabriel was a leader of the Adventist Church in Spain. The church needed a worker to go to Lugo, a city in the northwest part of Spain. Luis was excited about working as a pastor again. At the same time, he told Gabriel that he had terrible health problems. He said, "I can't walk."

Gabriel didn't lose hope. The two men prayed together. Two weeks later, Luis started to walk again. Then he went to Lugo and started a house church. The first Sabbath, only two people showed up. In less than four months, 22 people started coming to the house church every Sabbath. Three of these people were new members who had been baptized. Other people started studying to get ready for baptism. Also, Luis started a Bible study school and another school to teach members how to lead other people to Jesus. Luis also wants to move his church members from the house church to their own church building.

Luis says, "We must win more hearts for Jesus so that we can open our own church. I trust God. I believe He will make this plan happen because we are following His example."

Ellen White wrote, "Only Jesus' plan will give you real success in leading people to Him. The Savior spent time with people. He showed them that He wanted the best for them. Jesus showed people He understood their suffering. Jesus gave them the things they needed. He won their trust. Then He told them, 'Follow Me.'"—*The Ministry of Healing*, page 143, adapted.

Luis never expected to serve God in Spain. Now he is so happy. He says, "I'm here because of God's mercy."

Thanks for your Sabbath School offering that helps support church workers worldwide.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



“‘Follow Me.’”—*Ministry of Healing*, page 143, adapted.

