**Unstoppable: The Gospel Goes Ivy League**

Small Group Discussion Guide

Acts 17:16-34

**Warm-up:**

* If you were dropped off in Manhattan or Boston (you can pick) with one week of free time, what would you do?
* Today we see what Paul does when he is waiting in a major city, and what he does is instructive for how we approach our culture with the good news about Jesus as well.

Open with **prayer** (ask for the Holy Spirit to lead your discussion of God’s word)

**Read** Acts 17:16-34

**Discuss**

1. What do you know about the cultural and religious climate of Athens in the 1st-century AD?
   1. For reference, Pastor Josh described it this way: “In terms of culture, Athens was in Paul’s day like Boston and New York rolled into one, only with every Ivy League school and Oxford and Cambridge there as well. It was the cultural and intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world. It was the epicenter of the arts, of literature, of philosophy, and of architecture.”
   2. John Stott, referencing several ancient historians, describes the religious climate this way: “There were innumerable temples, shrines, statues, and altars. In the Parthenon stood a huge gold and ivory statue of Athena, ‘whose gleaming spear-point was visible forty miles away.’ The whole Greek pantheon was there, all the gods of Olympus. And they were beautiful. They were made not only of stone and brass, but of gold, silver, ivory and marble, and they had been elegantly fashioned by the finest Greek sculptors.”
   3. Do you see any similarities between the climate in Athens and where we live on Long Island?
   4. What disturbed Paul when we was touring Athens? (See v.16) Why do you think this observation bothered him so? (See Romans 1:25)
   5. Application: One way to define idolatry is to see it as turning good things into ultimate things; or try to place something else or someone else into a place in your life meant only for God. Thinking back over your life, can you see seasons when you made “idols” out of someone or something else?
2. Pastor Josh stated on Sunday that like Paul, **we need to observe our culture’s pursuit of ultimate answers**. In other words, we need to pay attention to the ways that people are seeking to answer the big questions of life.
   1. In vv. 22-23, we learn more about what Paul had observed while sightseeing. What had he noticed?
   2. How does Paul’s observation of Athenian culture give him the opportunity to preach the gospel message? How does he reference contemporary cultural voices when he preaches? (See v. 23 and 28).
   3. What are some timeless questions that all people ask?
   4. Have everyone answer the following question. What is your favorite song or movie that has come out in the last five years, and why?
   5. After everyone has answered the previous question, pick one song or movie that was named, and do the following exercise: how does this song/film express some universal need, question, or longing? How does Jesus meet that need?
3. Paul’s reaction to the idolatry that he observes is interesting. He goes to the marketplace to reason, or dialogue, with people of influence.
   1. On Sunday, Pastor Josh explained that Christians often have one of two extreme reactions to cultural trends. One extreme is to capitulate, or let go of any biblical standards; and the other is to attack the culture and retreat from it out of fear. Do you tend to lean one way or the other?
   2. How does Paul’s response to the idolatry he observes in Athens differ from these two extreme reactions (see vv. 17-18)? Why do you think Paul was so intent on dialoguing with people about the good news of Jesus in this setting?
   3. Pastor Josh said that like Paul, **we need to engage people in dialogue rather than retreat in fear**.
   4. Going back to the song or film named in question 2e, how would your knowledge of that song or film enable you to engage people in dialogue about ultimate things, rather than retreat in fear?
   5. In your current circles, what influence has God given you where you can have meaningful dialogue with people who are hungry for the good news of Jesus?
4. Paul’s discussion with the leading thinkers of Athens moves them to invite him to come and speak further at the famous council known as “The Areopagus.”
   1. What aspect of Paul’s message seemed to be the primary catalyst for their invitation? (See vv. 18-19) Why was this element so unique and thought-provoking?
   2. How would you describe Paul’s tone toward the council in vv. 22-31?
   3. How does Paul use what he’s observed of Athenian culture’s pursuit of ultimate things as an opportunity to connect them with the gospel message?
   4. Pastor Josh claimed that we too **must take every opportunity to show people how God has offered what they’re seeking.**
   5. What two major points does Paul make about God in his speech, before giving a concluding challenge? (Leaders: Paul first establishes that God is much greater than they have imagined, in vv. 24-26; secondly, he argues that this great God wants to be known and has made himself available to them, in vv. 27-28).
   6. How would you summarize Paul’s concluding challenge (see vv. 29-31)? What is the “proof” that Paul’s message is true? (See 31b)
   7. Paul seems to be cut off before he can finish his speech (see v. 32). What issue created resistance? How is this issue still the lynchpin of our message today? What results did Paul’s message produce? (See v. 34)
5. Concluding discussion:
   1. Do you think you have given God the place of ultimate worth in your own life? Have you embraced his offer to come and dwell in you, through faith in Jesus? Is there anything hindering you from giving yourself entirely to him?
   2. How do you feel about being culturally observant and engaged for the sake of having opportunities to show people that what they long for is found in Jesus? Does this intimidate or excite you (or something else altogether)? In general, how do you think we (TVC) are doing at this?

**Pray**: Share with one another your needs. Pray for one another and for our church, that we may engage our culture with the gospel in winsome, compelling ways.