

Trusting in God's Promises

Speaker: Domenic Ruso

Sometimes, unexpected things happen and they are opportunities for us to trust God. When unexpected things happen in our lives, we realize we're not always ready to change or welcome change or the changes around us.

What does it mean to trust in God's promises in changing times?

What happens when we encounter change? When we think of change, we have these romantic ideas of how everything was great. It is normal to have a sense of loss or grief in times of change.

Acts 17 talks about Paul's visit to Athens to meet with church leaders. Paul was distressed to have found that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned with them, to have a dialogue with them in the synagogue. Different groups of people are present, Jews (Torah Observers), Greeks (Curious/Spiritual God fearers) and others (Elites/Philosophers), to debate with Paul.

From the book, *Leaving Christianity*, we quote "The research shows that many youth and young adults haven't even been exposed to Christianity... The result is a religious landscape that we have never seen before."

God's Promise #1: God has more wisdom than we will ever need for this time.

This shift in time is about dealing with people who are very much in a secular culture. "Secular" is our kids and grandchildren, the people we love who are wrestling with God and faith, who haven't trusted the Bible as God's word yet.

God will give us wisdom on how to connect with a generation that is wondering about God.

God's Promise #2: God promises to lead His church in new ways.

In vv. 18-19, Paul is preaching the good news of Jesus, which leads him to a meeting with the Areopagus (the Gatekeepers who decide which religions will be worshipped). Christians are called to lead change alongside God.

God's Promise #3: God promises that there will be people who want to hear more of His Good News.

Do not be distracted or overwhelmed by the people who mock us because there are people in the midst who are interested in hearing more about God. He equips us to listen, to be present, and to be aware of those who are still wondering about the story of Jesus.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 says, "Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask such questions."

It warns us not to romanticize the past. This will only hinder us from receiving the new ways God wants us to do now.

THE WORD (NIV)

Acts 17:16-21

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

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sermon study guide

IN – PURSUE RELATIONSHIP

1. When was the last time you tried something new? What was it?
2. How do you react to change? Do you tend to resist it or embrace it? Elaborate.

UP – PURSUE GOD

3. Read Acts 17:16-21. Describe Paul's situation and the different people he met with. Ancient gods were fearfully worshiped to avoid their wrath. What things that inspire fear in us today can become idols that inhibit our trust in God? How do you reason with others about idols?
4. Read Acts 17:22-34. What lessons or wisdom regarding sharing the gospel can you draw from the things Paul said at the Areopagus? How did people respond?

OUT – PURSUE MISSION

5. The Areopagus was where the Athenian high court met. They were the city's religious gatekeepers, determining which 'gods' were allowed. Do you have any 'gatekeepers' in your life? How might you emulate Paul in your extended family, workplace, or wherever you share Jesus?
6. Share an example of when you used curiosity and dialogue to connect with someone in a spiritual conversation. Why are these qualities important?
7. Domenic Ruso spoke of tapping into the infinite wisdom of God and trusting in His promises. How might we lead and serve in new ways to positively affect the culture around us?

For Personal Reflection / Prayer:

Pray this prayer each day this week and take time to listen for God's response.

"Lord, expose any idols I may have in my heart. Help me to take things that distress me and turn them into opportunities to share the gospel. Equip me to lead positive change and help me not to waste energy complaining about negative change. Which of Your promises do I need to cling to?"

THE WORD (NIV) cont'd.

Acts 17:22-34

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

²⁹ "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

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