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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1747 ~ Paul Preaches in Athens.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

Before we listen to our *Bible Adventure* drama today, we need to look at the background history of Greece and its capital city, Athens. Between 300 years and 500 years before the time of the Lord Jesus, Athens was the greatest and most important city in the whole Western world. It was also the capital of the Greek Empire. Many famous philosophers lived there and it was here that the idea of democracy was first considered.

In 146 BC, the Romans conquered Athens and extended their authority over all of Greece. But they let Athens remain a free city, because they admired the Greek culture. Thus Athens was one of the main cultural and intellectual centres of the Roman Empire at that time when missionary Paul arrived there. Many famous teachers and philosophers were still coming to Athens to teach and debate.

Paul had not planned to spend time in Athens. However, not to waste time while waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him, Paul began to preach the word of God. The Greeks worshipped many kinds of gods and there were temples and images of these gods everywhere. Paul was distressed to see this great city full of idols and he later wrote in 1st Corinthians, Chapter 10, that the sacrifices of pagans were offered to demons, not to God.

Paul reasoned and argued with the Jews in the synagogue there, as well as people in the marketplace day after day. Some of the philosophers talked to Paul and invited him to speak at the Mars Hill auditorium where important teachers were asked to present their case. The people of Athens spent all their leisure time telling stories or listening to something newer than the last they heard. So they were interested in Paul's talk about a foreign god.

A council of rulers and elders of Athens at that time used to question all new teachers who came to Athens. Thus Paul was brought before this council to explain his new teaching.

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Paul varied his preaching according to his audience. His sermon in Acts, Chapter 17, is the best example of Paul preaching to Greeks and Gentiles, most of whom worshipped the many false gods of the Greek religion.

The residents of Athens were very religious. But neither religion in itself nor the rituals of religion are of any advantage at all to people. Millions today follow a variety of religions and although they are very religious, they're still not saved from their sins. Only through faith in Christ can a person be saved. Religion by itself saves nobody.

The word Paul used for 'religious' means 'superstitious.' The people of Athens believed in objects and events foretelling success or misfortune. They offered sacrifices to demons and not to God. Although they might have been respected as possessing the highest wisdom in the world, they didn't know God or His superior wisdom in all things. In 1st Corinthians, Chapter 1, Paul said: "God in his wisdom made it impossible for people to know him by means of their own wisdom. Instead, by means of the so-called 'foolish' message we preach, God decided to save those who believe."

Among the altars erected to the false gods of Athens, Paul found one with the title: “To the Unknown God”. It seemed that some people of Athens suspected there might be a greater god than all the other gods they worshipped. They had no idea what this god was like and Paul had the opportunity to speak and introduce who He was.

Paul shows us how to teach and witness for Christ. He didn't show contempt for others' religion or mock them for different beliefs. He even quoted from one of the Greeks' own poets so the Greeks would more readily listen to what he had to say. He taught them that this God that they didn't know was the one who created all things and has lordship over everything. He doesn't live in temples built by human hands. He's a Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

Furthermore, this new God whom the Greeks knew nothing about has also set the boundaries of the nations and establishes them. He sets the time for all events and determines the seasons and movements of the earth as well as all the heavenly bodies.

This Creator God doesn't need sacrifices, as He doesn't get hungry or need us to feed Him. Rather, it is us who need to be fed by Him. He gives us more than just food but all the other things needed in life as well. He gives us life and breath. We couldn't exist for one moment without God's life-giving power.

Paul taught the Greeks that all people living on earth descended from one man, Adam, and are therefore equal in God's sight. Before God, there is no difference between high caste and low caste or between slaves and free people. God loved the civilised Greeks and uncivilised people groups living around the Greeks, even if they were despised.

Paul also told them that this God is able to be known. He wants to show people His love, mercy and power, so that they'll seek Him, and reach out and find Him. Paul said that this God isn't far from each one of us. Wherever we go, God is there close to us. Although God is seen in His brilliantly designed creation, we cannot fully know God until we know Jesus Christ, because all of God's character was shown in His Son Jesus Christ when He came to earth in human form.

In John's Gospel, Chapter 1, it says: "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." Jesus also said in John, Chapter 14: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

Well, one wonders what the council members of Athens must have thought about all this, and for good reasons. The council had some members who were Epicurean philosophers who believed there was no meaning in life except to enjoy oneself and remain at ease. This group of philosophers had been established about 300 years before Paul's time.

Another council group called Stoic philosophers had the opposite opinion. They believed that man should be strong and be able to endure pain and hardship. They said that people should not seek after pleasure, but strive for self-control.

Up to this point in his presentation Paul hadn't caused any offense to his listeners. Paul continued on with his message that this Creator God made people and all human beings represent His image. God alone is worthy to receive our worship. How could the Greeks think that idols made by their own hands were worthy of receiving praise? Idols can't speak or hear or actually, do anything at all.

Through ignorance such as idol worship, people dishonour God. But God has been patient and overlooked the times when people didn't know him. "Now," Paul said, "He commands all of them everywhere to turn away from their evil ways. For He has fixed a day in which He will judge the whole world with justice by means of a man he has chosen. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising that man from death!"

Paul was saying that the Lord Jesus will be the Just Judge of the whole earth. If people reject this revelation of God while alive on earth, they'll certainly receive punishment in eternal life. For God 'commands all people everywhere to repent'.

The Greeks didn't believe in the resurrection of the human body. When they heard Paul's teaching about Jesus Christ's resurrection, both groups of philosophers scoffed at him. They called him a 'babbler', which in the Greek language means one who goes around like a bird, picking up tiny bits of knowledge. Others, however, said they hadn't come to a conclusion on the subject and would hear Paul speak again another day.

Many people today say the same thing when they hear a message about repenting. They risk losing eternal life with the Lord Jesus in sinless beautiful heaven, because they're not ready to accept God's word. They say, "I'll think about this later," but a suitable time never comes. Similarly, these council members of Athens preferred seeking the truth instead of believing it and then acting on it. Let us not be like them!

Although Paul wasn't persecuted in Athens, his preaching there wasn't very successful. Only a few people believed his words and nothing was mentioned in the New Testament that a church was established in that city of idols.

Have you ever wondered why some people reject the offer of a lifetime – to be with Jesus in heaven for ever? Were those people of Athens too entrenched in their system of life that they didn't want to change? Didn't they understand that they had inherited a sinful nature from Adam and they could not in any way get rid of it themselves? Should Paul have performed some miracles to demonstrate that he was indeed sent to them by the God of heaven?

The decision to accept or reject the Lord Jesus as Saviour is the most important life decision of all. There are many different reasons for rejecting Christ but there are generally 4 different groups.

Firstly, some people don't think they need a Saviour. They consider themselves to be 'basically good' and don't realise that they're sinners who cannot come to God on their own terms. In John's Gospel, Chapter 14, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Those who reject Christ won't be able to stand before God and successfully plead their own case of being suitable for heaven on their own merits.

Secondly, the fear of persecution or social rejection deters some people from receiving Christ as Saviour. In John, Chapter 12, it says: "Many Jewish authorities believed in Jesus; but because of the Pharisees they did not talk about it openly, so as not to be expelled from the synagogue. They loved human approval rather than the approval of God." These leaders wouldn't confess Christ because they were more concerned about their status among their peers than doing God's will.

Thirdly, for some people, the things the present world has to offer are more appealing than eternal things. A very rich young man ran up to Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus told him, he went away sad because he wasn't willing to let go of his earthly possessions to gain an eternal relationship with Jesus. We all have to remember that the things we have and see here on the earth are just temporary, but unseen things are eternal.

Fourthly, many people resist the Holy Spirit's attempts to draw them to faith in Christ. They want to remain in charge of their own decisions and plans for life. Stephen, a leader in the early church, told those who were about to murder him, that they always resisted the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers had done.

For whatever reasons why people reject Jesus Christ, their rejection has devastating eternal consequences. In Acts, Chapter 4, Verse 12, it says: "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Those who reject Him and refuse to believe that Jesus is the only way to God, face an eternity in the 'outer darkness' of hell where there will be weeping, great sorrow and grinding of teeth in anger and pain.

We are now living in a season that appears close to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ back to earth, and we're told to "watch and pray." May everyone be ready to meet Him when He comes without warning!

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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