

Sermon for May 10, 2026 - Easter 6

Acts 17:22-31 (EHV)

Theme: The truth about...

- 1) God
- 2) Humanity
- 3) Jesus

²² Then Paul stood up in front of the council of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way. ²³ For as I was walking around and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar on which had been inscribed, ‘To an unknown god.’ Now what you worship as unknown—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 made with hands. ²⁵ Neither is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, since he himself gives all people life and breath and everything they have. ²⁶ From one man, he made every nation of mankind to live over the entire face of the earth. He determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live. ²⁷ He did this so they would seek God and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘Indeed, we are also 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 formed by human skill and planning. ³⁰ Although God overlooked the times of ignorance, he is now commanding all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he appointed. He provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

We live in an area, surrounded by people from diverse backgrounds, who serve a diversity of gods, and whose ethics and morality often contradicts the Bible’s. Our society celebrates this plurality, encouraging each person to find their personal truth and live by it.

Ironically, the more our society encourages this, the more confused many people become. They long for real purpose and meaning in life - for a connection with God they sense exists, but they don’t know where to find Him.

Dear Christian, the people around you are often more spiritually burdened than they let on. They long for a connection with the true God, but they know little or nothing about Him. And you have more than a message to make them feel better. You have the truth that saves their souls.

So when the LORD gives you opportunities, how can you reach out with the Gospel of Christ? Let us listen as the Apostle Paul shows us the way. Simply tell people the truth the Holy Spirit has revealed in Scripture: **the truth about...** 1) God, 2) Humanity, and 3) Jesus.

Part One: The truth about... God.

Our sermon text finds the Apostle Paul in Athens, one of the intellectual centres of the ancient world. Luke tells us that as Paul walked around the city, he saw idol after idol and temple after temple. The sight of all this idolatry distressed Paul so deeply that he worked all the harder to share the Gospel - both in the synagogue and in the marketplace - with anyone who would listen.

Some philosophers heard Paul preach. They thought his message sounded strange and new, so they brought him to the Areopagus, the council that oversaw the city's public life and religion, to explain his teaching more fully.

²² Then Paul stood up in front of the council of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way. ²³ For as I was walking around and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar on which had been inscribed, 'To an unknown god.' Now what you worship as unknown—this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

The Athenians were clearly "spiritual." A Roman writer once joked that in Athens you could more easily meet a god than a man.¹ They knew that life involved more than the physical world as they kept searching for truth, purpose, and peace. But the altar "to an unknown god" exposed the emptiness of their idolatry. Despite their many gods, their deepest spiritual longing remained unmet. They still felt there was another god out there – a god they did not know.

We see something similar today. Many in our country say, "I am not religious, but I am spiritual." I believe them. Just because people are not in church on Sunday does not mean that they are not searching. And what is their search for meaning, truth, and happiness if not a search - however confused - for God?

The problem is that they look in all the wrong places. They search for god in nature, money, success, science, leisure, or in the supposed goodness of the human spirit. These idols might soothe their restless hearts for a time, but they never give lasting peace. Deep down, people know that there is something more. That "something more" is their "unknown god."

Paul continues:

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Neither is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, since he himself gives all people life and breath and everything they have.

All human ideas about God are foolish when compared to the truth. People imagine God who fits in a statue or a temple – a god who is moved by human gifts or efforts. But the Bible reveals the one true God, who is not limited by time, space, or anything else. God is God. He made the universe and everything in it. He does whatever he pleases and answers to no one. By nature, *God is spirit,*ⁱⁱ with neither a face or form.

Who is God? As Paul points out, He is not some picture, statue, or object in a temple. He is not simply the combined forces of nature, nor an impersonal law of karma working toward some vague nirvana. And He certainly isn't money, fame, science, or the "spirit of humanity."

The truth about God is far greater than the human mind can grasp. And yet He reveals Himself clearly in Scripture. The LORD made and still rules over all things in our vast universe. He is not some cold force or distant law. The Bible describes Him as personal, holy, and just. Most wonderfully, it says: *God is love.*ⁱⁱⁱ He cared so deeply for the creatures who rebelled against Him that He was willing to offer the ultimate sacrifice to save them from the consequences of their sins. He gave His only-begotten Son, who willingly offered Himself on the cross for us.

And that leads us to consider the truth about humanity.

Part Two: The truth about humanity.

St. Paul says:

26 From one man, he made every nation of mankind to live over the entire face of the earth. He determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live. 27 He did this so they would seek God and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'Indeed, we are also his offspring.'

We are not accidents of evolution. Every human being that has ever lived, or will live, is a son or daughter of Adam. We all come from that one man. And with our human life, we have also inherited his fallen nature – the sinful nature he acquired when he rebelled against God’s command in the Garden of Eden.

This inherited corruption runs deep. We don’t just become sinners when we do bad things. We are born with hearts curved in on themselves. By nature, we run away from God and toward ourselves. The wages of this self-centred rebellion is everlasting death.

But God does not want anyone lost to hell forever. Despite our corrupt natures, He loves each of us personally and desires our salvation. Therefore, He didn’t just scatter people across the earth in some random way. Paul tells us God “*determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live.*” In other words, He placed each person in a particular time and place for a purpose: that they might seek Him.

Scripture says that God *wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*^{iv} Even though salvation comes only through faith in the Gospel of Christ, God has always desired the salvation of all people in every nation and every place. Even heathen poets could sense that in the one true God alone, “we live and move and have our being,” and that “we are His offspring.”

Ever since the fall into sin, humanity’s purpose has been to seek the true God. We grope around like people in total darkness, yet He has never been far from anyone. The LORD allows Himself to be found in Scripture - the very Word He has entrusted to His church and commanded us to share with the world.

At this point, someone might ask: "But what about the people who lived in places where the Gospel has not been preached, or where it is actively suppressed by the government? How can you say God wants them saved, when it seems like He's not even giving them a chance to hear?"

That is a heartfelt question, especially since some of you have come from places where the Bible was not taught, or where the church was persecuted. Still, God's desire is clear: He truly wants all to be saved. The proof is that He sent His Son not only to pay for the sins of those who would believe, but for the sins of the whole world, including those who would reject Him.

Here's the truth: no matter where a person is born, God wants them to reach out for Him. If they do not, it is not God's fault for deciding when and where they should live. It is the result of human sin and rebellion, as the Scriptures say:

His invisible characteristics—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, because they are understood from the things he made. As a result, people are without excuse, because, even though they knew God, they did not honor him or give him thanks as God. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless heart was darkened.^v

God has written a longing for Himself into every human heart. Sadly, many try to smother that longing through sinful pleasures, by inventing false gods, or by denying His existence altogether. In doing so, they refuse to be found by the true God, who so mercifully desires that they know the truth about Him.

And the heart of that truth is this: what we could never do for ourselves, God has done for us in His Son. That leads us to the truth about Jesus.

Part Three: The truth about Jesus.

Paul says:

Since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and planning.

If God is the almighty Creator and LORD, far greater than anything we can imagine, then it is foolish to think we can reduce Him to an image or control Him with rituals. We cannot appease Him with offerings of our own making. We cannot earn His favour or climb our way up to Him.

³⁰ *Although God overlooked the times of ignorance, he is now commanding all people everywhere to repent,* ³¹ *because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he appointed. He provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.*

Notice how Paul ends his sermon: He does not end with a moral lesson or a vague philosophical idea. He ends with a fact: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is the hinge on which everything turns. The resurrection is God's own public declaration that Jesus is exactly who

Scripture says He is: the Son of God, Lord of life, and the appointed Judge of all. Jesus' resurrection is God's guarantee that sin has been paid for, death defeated, and that He has reconciled humanity to Himself through Christ's sacrifice.

A day of judgment is coming when all people will clearly see that the LORD was never far from them and that He truly desired their salvation. Sadly, many will have refused to be found, forgiven, and saved.

But those who trust in Jesus – God's only begotten Son, who kept God's law perfectly in our place, died for our sins, and who rose again to show that every sin is forgiven – they will enjoy everlasting life with God in the perfect paradise He will reveal on the Last Day.

Paul's point is this: repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, and you will be saved.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: all religions are not the same, as many people like to claim. Every man-made religion says, "Do more. Try harder. Climb up to God. If you are good enough, you can appease Him and save yourself."

The Gospel of Christ says the opposite: "You cannot do it. You are too sinful, and God is too holy. But *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*^{vi} It is finished. God has come down to you in Jesus. Therefore, repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, and you will be saved."

This is the truth Paul preached in Athens. This is the truth God wants us to zealously confess in our community.

Sadly, when Paul preached in Athens, many scoffed at the message of the resurrection. Others politely put him off. But some listened and believed. Their faith showed that Paul's efforts were not in vain.

We can expect something similar. When you confess Christ in your community, many will probably smile and politely change the subject. Some may be irritated. But there will also be a few in whom the Holy Spirit works repentance and faith. They are why we keep confessing the truth about God, humanity, and Jesus.

Dear Christian, may their salvation God has given you move you to use the opportunities He places in your path to share the Gospel, remembering His promise:

"Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He is not going to come into judgment but has crossed over from death to life."^{vii} Amen.

ⁱ Petronius Arbiter, *The Satyricon*, section 17

ⁱⁱ John 4:24 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 John 4:8 EHV

^{iv} 1 Timothy 2:4 EHV

^v Rom 1:20-23 EHV

^{vi} John 3:16 EHV

^{vii} John 5:24 EHV