

PBC20061004CS

SURRENDER

Usefulness

Acts 17

October 4, 2006 - Wednesday 6:30PM - Dr. David H. McKinley

[Dr. McKinley, message, SURRENDER: Usefulness]

...morning by morning, day by day, need by need, God is faithful. And there's never a time, never a place in life where you cannot know and prove His faithfulness. And I stand before you tonight having to say that one of the greatest parts of my personal testimony is the test... testimony of God's faithfulness in my life across so many years, so many seasons, so many moments, so many experiences. Ah... That reality is the ultimate reality in my heart, that God is faithful. And I am so thankful. It began with my coming to know Christ in salvation; the faithfulness of His love and grace. And yet it's been proven again and again in all the experiences of life.

And one of those experiences... one of those times was several years ago when I was ah... in North Carolina. I had been invited to preach at the North Carolina State Evangelism Conference. And was very grateful and honored to receive the invitation. I was a pastor in Florida at the time. I flew up on the evening before the day that I was to speak and was able to enjoy going into Winston-Salem, North Carolina which is the home of Crispy Crème Donuts, and yes, there was one just down the street and I had the opportunity of ah... indulging Crispy Crème there that day, that morning as I started up and went to the church and prepared to speak at this conference.

And ah ... as you might imagine it was an honor to be there. It was a conference that required some preparation and ah... a real sense of wanting to know that I had the message that God would have me bring to this group of pastors. They had come in from all over the state and people from their surrounding churches and we were there in that place and the focus was evangelism, and I just wanted God to use me in some significant way. So I prayed, I prepared, I took my message, I took my Bible, I took my place down on the front row waiting for the hour that I would speak, listened to some of the other speakers who were there.

And I was scheduled to speak after Dr. George McCalep. Dr. McCalep is the distinguished pastor of the Greenforest Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia. And he had served and was serving at the time as the president of the African-American Fellowship of Southern Baptist pastors. And ah... he is an outstanding preacher, teacher and leader. And I don't mind telling you when I saw that I was preaching after Dr. McCalep I was absolutely intimidated and horrified.

And I'm sure you've been in experiences in your life when you thought "Do I really have to..." you know, "Do I really have to bat in that position? Do I really have to be in that spot?" It was a tough assignment. But I trusted God and I was clinging to His word.

But there was a little bit of a problem and that was that Dr. McCalep's flight was delayed out of a connection in Atlanta coming up to Winston-Salem that day. They got me at one point and said, "We need you to be on standby. You may end up preaching first." And I thought that would be the greatest answer to prayer in the world! [tap] But I...ah... (At least that day. Not every day, but that day, at that moment it would have been.) Then they came and said no he's here; he's arrived. And surely enough in some of the preparation music right before he was scheduled to speak they brought him in, brought him right down the aisle; he sat down next to me.

I was thrilled to get to meet him; said hello to him. But then he said to me... Said, "This has just been an unbelievable morning for me." He said, "In fact I've gotten here and I don't have anything with me. My luggage isn't here. I don't even have a Bible." [tap] And I said, "Dr. McCalep, here, take my Bible. You can preach with it." He said, "Well, do you mind?" I said, "Of course not. Take my Bible. You use it." And so we finished that song. He stood up and as soon as he stood up he said, "Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 1."

Guess what my sermon was going to be that day? [laughter] The very text [strike] that I was going to preach from! He used my Bible and used my text to preach the sermon right before I got ready to preach that day! And I did not know what in the world I was going to do. I literally... I hung to every word, held my breath at every moment to say where's he going to go with this? What's he going to say about this? Is there anything left when I get ready preach today that I will be able to say that Dr. McCalep hasn't already said and said much more eloquently than I could say it.

But as I sat there I realized, "Well, I believe God directed me to this passage of Scripture and I believe God gave me this assignment [tap] to come. And frankly, I only have one sermon so I really am kinda up a creek without a paddle." And so when the hour came I just... ah... after Dr. McCalep, I stepped up and I said, "Well, you know, in the game of baseball," I said, "there's nothing like a double-header." You stay in the same seats...[tap], you watch the same teams [tap] play the same games [tap]. You just change pitchers. This is a double-header; I'm preaching from the same text. [tap] Let's get back to it!" And that's exactly what I did, and I preached from that passage of Scripture that day. [applause] And ah... and God was faithful. You know, God was faithful; God blessed it and I was grateful for the opportunity to do it.

Now I told you that whole story because I had a little bit of that experience once again this week. When Dr. Graham stood up to preach on Sunday ah... out of the book of Nehemiah and talked about getting out of your comfort zone, he talked about the kind of person that God uses. And my

topic for tonight was "Usefulness". And so I actually had to take a little time this week and decide am I going to go where I'd planned to go with Paul or am I going to go in a different direction. But I decided to do exactly [tap] what I did several years ago in North Carolina, and that was that I was going to take this topic and we were going to come back to it tonight. Because I really do believe it to be an important topic for where we are and what God is doing right now in the life of our church.

So while we weren't preaching from the same text between Sunday and Wednesday, we're definitely touching the same topic. But I believe it's a topic that matters to you, that matters to me, and it matters to God.

F. W. Robertson said this: "It is not the possession of extraordinary gifts that makes extraordinary usefulness, but the dedication of what we have to the service of God." Let me read that one more time. "It is not the possession of extraordinary gifts that make extraordinary usefulness, but the dedication of what we have to the service of God." And of all the things that I can tell you about Paul the Apostle as we've been involved now in these Wednesdays on a... in a series of studies on the life of Paul and this topic *surrender*... the greatest thing that I can tell you about Paul is that he was a man who was mightily used of God. And he wasn't used because of his extraordinary gifts. He was used because he simply gave himself as he was to God. And there's no window of life, there's no moment in time that demonstrates that in a greater way or to a greater degree than the passage I want you to join me in investigating tonight and that is Acts chapter 17... the book of Acts, chapter 17. Because it is a hallmark moment in the life and the ministry of Paul and it's a passage of Scripture that I think has great parallel to our day, our culture, our lives and our opportunity to be used of God.

Now while you're turning there to Acts chapter 17, I'm going to go ahead and begin to read the opening verses of this passage because I want to go to the opening verses purely as a means of background. It says: [Acts 17:1-]

1) When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, and were there... and where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2) And Paul went in as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3) explaining and proving that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ."

Be sure you get the picture. Paul is in a synagogue. He is in a Jewish house of worship. He is talking to Jewish people from a Jewish culture who are transplants up in Asia Minor in a place... place called Thessalonica. And as he is there, he has one thing that he wants to convince them; that the Jesus that he preaches is the Messiah, the Christ, the Prophesied One who is mentioned all through the Old Testament Scriptures.

Well, needless to say, there were not neutral feelings or opinions about what Paul had to say in Thessalonica. And the result was that there was a stir... there was conflict, there was a lot of debate that was going on. And

the Bible does tell us in this passage that a group of the Jewish leaders who were there started trying to find Paul and Silas, and determined that they were going to find some way to deal with them. And they heard that they were staying in the house of a young man by the name of Jason. And so it says down in verse 6:

6) *When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, (And listen to what they were saying about Paul and Silas) These men who have turned the world upside down (ha!) have come here also.*

Guys, do you know who this is? These are the men who are literally turning the world upside down! These are the ones who are the heart of all the conflict and the controversy that's going on in the Empire of Roman and in the Middle East and in the homeland of ~~Jerus...~~ of Israel and Jerusalem! These people are causing a lot of strife and conflict.

Well the result of what happened in Thessalonica which is in the northern portion of Greece, was that they began to scatter and they started moving and traveling. It was evident that Paul wasn't going to be able to stay there, and the Bible tells us that Paul and Silas were taken out by night and sent to a place called Berea.

But then they began to separate and we pick the story up again down in verse 16. And in verse 16 we begin to focus on the portion of scripture that I want us to really look at and investigate tonight about usefulness to God. And here's what it says:

16) *Now while Paul was waiting for them in Athens,*

Paul had been a part of this group; they separated; Paul ends up by himself back down in the southern part of Greece, and in the cultural center of that day, the city of Athens. And while Paul was waiting for them at Athens:

16) *...his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. 17) So he reasoned in the synagogues with the Jews and the devout persons and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. 18) And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" But others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. 19) And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know this new teaching which you are presenting?"*

Now here's the scene. They've scattered. Paul has gone to Athens; Paul's there by himself. But as he's there in that place by himself, God begins to move in Paul's heart, and Paul makes it his aim to be on a one-man mission to take the city for Christ. That's an incredible thing! It's almost as if you could take Googler and you could go over the top of Greece and you could just kind of come down to the street corner, and here's one man down

in the middle of the street and his name's Paul. And all the city and all the culture and all the stuff's going on around him; and there's Paul. One man! But I think when we see that tonight, we see the first and the most important thing that I want you to grasp tonight in this passage of Scripture and that is that when we talk about the subject of usefulness, we have to begin... begin at the point of the individual. You are an individual and I am an individual and yet God uses individual people. Paul was one man in one place in one moment in time. And yet that one man had so purposed in his heart that he wanted to be used of God that God began to use the man.

Now let me just be sure you understand, this place where he was was no small place. It was the epicenter of culture in the ancient world. It was the place where the most beautiful buildings were built. It was home to some of the greatest philosophers in the world. It was the home of Plato and Socrates. It was the adopted home of Aristotle and ultimately of Epicurius. It was the cultural center, it was the political center, it was the religious center of that portion of the world in that day and in that time. And here this man... this one man is standing around in Athens. And yet from his heart he said, "God, use me."

You see evangelism... sharing our faith, being used of God... is not a group thing; it's a personal thing. Now God uses us as a church, as a group to make a difference in this city, but God's plan and purpose is not just to do the group thing; God wants to do the individual thing, the personal thing. And really the significance of what happens through the group all begins with what God is doing in the heart of the individual.

The greatest danger that we face in the life... in the ministry of Prestonwood in this day and in this hour is to come to the place that we assume that because of all this, God is going to use us! The facility, the resources, the budgets, the programs, the big stuff! But God has always and only used one thing: one life to another life leading that life to Jesus Christ! And we can't ever lose sight of that because the usefulness of this church is all linked to the usefulness of individuals.

Now when God starts using a lot of individuals, there's a whole lot of influence through all of those lives. And by the grace of God and the goodness of God we've seen that and shared that, but the wonderful thing that I see in the life of this man is I see a man who in a moment believed that God wanted to use him.

And that's something that I want you to be convinced of tonight. That no matter who you are, where you are, what stage of life you may be in, what age you may be, God wants to use you. And God is interested in you and me as individuals living out His plan and His purpose for our lives.

And so that's where it started. It started with a man whose eyes saw as though it were this city he was in, this city filled with idols and all this religion and all these gods and all this worship; and he saw that with his eyes and he said this is dead, this is empty, this is lifeless, this is

always a disappointment. He felt with his heart the passion that people would know a God who was real and not just the gods of the age and the gods of the culture and the physical and material gods that people trusted in. He walked with his feet and began to with each step care the weight of the burden of that city upon his heart and his mind, and said, "Oh God, somehow let my track across this city matter! Don't let these just be empty and... and... and wandering footsteps; let me step and live on purpose for You." And with all these things moving and working in his heart, Paul decided to step out of his comfort zone and just step into the zone of missional impact. And he began to touch Athens for Christ.

Now I want you to know that I believe with all of my heart that what happened with Paul in that place, in that moment was something that was not just happenstance; I believe it was something that was prompted by the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us here in this passage of Scripture in verse 16 that:

16) ...while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw the city full of idols.

His spirit was provoked. The word there literally means sharpened. It can mean agitated or irritated, but in particular it means stimulated. And there was a stimulus in his spirit, there was a stimulus in his heart that said, "God, I want to hear Your voice, and I want to do Your will."

You see, God's Spirit is not just in the world... at work in the world at large, God's Spirit is working in your world, in my world because this is God's world and He wants to use you and He wants to use me, just like He used Paul.

Listen to the words of John R. W. Stott. He said, "Paul's reaction to the city's idolatry was not negative only, but also positive and constructive. He did not merely throw up his hands in despair or weep helplessly, or curse and swear at the Athenians. No, he shared with them the Good News of Jesus. He sought by proclamation of the Gospel to prevail on them, to turn them from idols to the living God, and so to give to Him and to His Son the glory due Their name. The stirrings of his spirit, with righteous indignation opened his mouth in testimony."

Is God stirring you? Are there days in your life as you're walking through life, as you move through the city, as you are a part of the masses and all the movement and all the action and activity of this community, is there a sense in your heart in which God is stirring you and saying, "God, how many of these people never think about You? How many of these people never have a God thought? How many of these people are trusting their jobs, their salaries, their homes, their bank accounts, their connections, their networks, their education? How many people are trusting anything and everything but the true and the living God? You see God was doing something individual in the life of Paul. And usefulness to God begins in the life of an individual.

But let me move quickly to the second thing that I want you to see tonight from Acts chapter 17, and that is not only was what happened in that place the result of God using an individual, it was also a usefulness that came because it was intentional. It was intentional. The Bible says Paul was hanging out, standing around in Athens, and instead of just waiting for the rest of them to come... I mean, that's probably what most of us would have done. "I've got to wait until I get a little bit of a critical mass here before we start any kind of engagement." But no, he quit waiting and he started walking. He said, "I'm going to start walking; I'm going to start talking; I'm going to start having some connections with people, and I'm going to see if God will use me, my mission and my message in this moment."

And I say that to you because I really do believe... I've been thinking about this more and more in my own life... that usefulness to God is an intentional thing. It's not an accidental thing. Too many times we want witnessing and life influence and... and being used of God to sort of be a... a serendipitous accident; just something that sort of happened.

Now when I say that is accidental, ... I mean when I say that it's intentional, I don't mean that it was not providential. It was providential! God was involved in all of this! But it was providential; it was not accidental. And Paul began to walk from the crowd... from the corner into the crowd and to move with the people because he had an intent in his heart to be used of God. And I believe we have to be intentional. I believe that as we become more and more intentional in walking with Christ and living for Christ that we have a lot more "accidents" that are providences of God in our lives and in our hearts.

Now I want you to see some things about this intentional experience that Paul had because the Bible clearly says here in verse 17 that he saw the city, he started reasoning with people in the synagogue, and then it says in verse 18 (and I love this)... It says:

18) *And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him.*

How did Paul become intentional in his usefulness to God? Well, the first step in his usefulness to God intentionally was conversation. He opened up to people and he let people open up to him. And conversation is an important part of the way that God begins to use me and to use you. He didn't choose to isolate himself, just be about his business, just do his thing. Paul started focusing on other people and started trying to make a connection with them. But it's very important for me to say that to you because so much of the doorway of witnessing begins at that point: just a conversation. You just talk to people!

I'm sad to say that so much of our training in evangelism through the years... well intentioned and often... often well-used training, has all been about a presentation. "I'm going to present [tap] something to you. I want

you to stand [tap] there; I want you to listen [tap] to me because I'm going to present [tap] something to you!" And we do have something to present. But you'll never get to a presentation unless you learn how to begin a conversation. And most of us want to jump over conversation and just present something. Sort of like: "Hey, I've got your attention! Let me tell you if you die tonight you're going to go to hell!" Most people aren't interested in that presentation at that point [laughter] because you haven't earned the right to say it. You see, it has to begin with a conversation.

How do we engage people in conversation? A lot of ways. We begin to talk to them about things that are happening around them. One of the things you need to do everyday is just be sure you're aware of some of the current events that are going on. You don't have to spend more than... than... than 2 minutes on a website to find out the headlines of the day; who's in the news, what's happening. Catch a brief broadcast. Just find a way to know what's going on and be able to be aware and engage with other people about things that are happening.

Paul was just talking about stuff going on in the city. The people that were there, the forums of discussion, what was happening around them, and there was a simple conversation. Learn to talk to people and to meet them and to learn their name. It's amazing how much a conversation is enhanced when you know someone's name and you remember their name and you call them by name. Especially if it's someone you see time and time again.

I have a friend in Florida who... I never go anywhere with him that he's not calling people by their first name. It always amazes me. People that are just sort of the accidents in his life everyday. But they're people that he's been intentional enough to get to know their names and to learn about them, learn about their life, learn about their family. How do you do that? You listen to them. You learn to listen to them talk about things in their life, things they are interested in, and learn how to begin good conversation with people, because what Paul did was he was in the city, he saw the city, and he said, "Okay, one thing I can do is I can go out and start talking to people." And Paul started some conversations in his life so that he might be able to reason with them, to question with them, to discuss with them, and to move them near and dear to the issues of the heart of faith. So he was intentional in conversation.

But then that conversation moved along such that some of these who heard him said, "You know, [clap] we'd like to hear more about what this guy's got to say." So they invited him to the most strategic forum in the city of Athens. It was the place called the Areopagus. It's what we commonly refer to as Mars Hill. And it was the place where Paul went and climbed up into a common area, and the philosophers and the political leaders and the debaters of that day would all come and stand and talk and share ideas. It's really very much like what we do when you turn on to FOXNEWS or any of the news broadcasts that are going on. It's... it's a talk forum and people are talking about and debating all kinds of issues and things that are

going on. And the Areopagus... Mars Hill was the place where all those people would gather in Athens to talk and to walk through those things. And the amazing thing about it is when you're standing on Mars Hill, the Parthenon stands on the mount just above you and all of the marketplace is just below you. And it was an unbelievable place where they gathered there. And they said, "Hey, Paul, come on over. We want you to talk to us." And so he did.

He went over there. And the Bible begins to describe what happened in verse 22:

22) *So Paul standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious; 23) "for as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you:"*

Now that is a very significant point of contact. He's been out conversing with people, but now when he has an opportunity to open and broaden the conversation, I want you to notice something very important, and that is what I would call *contextualization*. Don't trip over the size of the word. Paul spoke to them in context. He'd been having conversations; now there was a contextualization. He began to talk to them and to engage them, and he started by gaining an audience, talking about things that they knew about and that they connected with.

That's so much the secret of intentional witness. It's not you just jumping from one subject to another; it's gaining a forum through a conversation and building a context to be able to share the message of life in Christ that every person needs to hear. As Paul talked, the talks were growing deeper and broader and more intense. They were getting more and more curious, and Paul was just gaining an audience.

And so suddenly we go... now listen to this... Suddenly we go from one man out... hanging out on the street corner, looking around and just seeing what's happening in the city, to one man who has an audience of some of the most influential and most incredible people in that city on that day. One man and a whole audience! And now he's going to be sure that he connects with that audience. You see, you have to know your audience. And the way that you either connect or disconnect is all based on what you know about your audience.

I heard about one lady; somebody asked her, "How do you keep your husband from reading all of your emails?" She said, "It's very simple." She said, "I've just made a new file folder on my desktop and I've simply entitled it: *Instruction Manuals*, and he never looks in there." [laughter] Well, you know that's true of men, don't you? They're not ever going to read an instruction manual! Well, see, you got to know your audience. And she learned how to protect herself by knowing her audience.

Well, that's exactly what every one of us has to do; we have to know our audience. And Paul, as he had worked through conversation, now began to give context, and as he started talking, I want you to notice several things about the way he provided this context. Okay?
Are you with me? Alright, just don't want to dig a hole too deep for you here tonight but I am trying to walk through this passage of Scripture. Walking with Paul, okay? So here we go. What's the context?

Number one, know his attitude. One of the things that really creates a context for sharing your faith is your attitude. In fact I believe that more... more people overlook this issue in witnessing than anything else. An attitude of superiority, an attitude of combativeness, an attitude of offensiveness will never get anywhere in sharing Christ with people around us. People should say behind your back when you leave a place of business, when you leave a market, when you leave any place, they ought to think that's one of the nicest people I've met all day. That's one of the most engaging people I've talked to all day. Not because you're just such a great intense exciting person, but just because there's a genuineness about you and an attitude about you that's not just so about you, it's about them. Listen to what Paul said; he said here down in chapter 17 and in verse 22, *"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. I mean there are all these idols, there are all these gods; I think you're a religious people."*

Now he could have said, "You're a bunch of pagan, godless people who are going to hell, and everybody knows it cause look at all these dead idols you got around here!" Well, that would have been it. That would have been his two brief minutes at the forum and he'd been over. But you see, he got their attention. He said, *"Men of Athens, I perceive that you're very religious. This is obviously something that you're interested in. It's no... no surprise that we talk about this; everybody's interested in this."*

By the way, people are very interested in spiritual things today. Everybody's talking about spiritual things.

And then, note his approach. He said, "I perceive that you in everyway are very religious," and then he said, "for I have passed along and observed the objects of your worship, and I found also an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." He said, "I saw all these different gods and all these different statues but there was this one statue." And they're all looking, thinking, "Which one is that? Where is that one?" Some of them knew immediately where it was. He said, "And I noticed that there was an inscription that said: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD."

What was his approach? He started with something familiar and he moved them to something that was not familiar. He started with the familiar... the god they knew, and then he was going to redefine and redirect them to the God who is, and the God who is alive. Not the unknown god... He was an unknown God to the Athenians, but He's not an unknown God. And therefore, Paul

began an approach where just like a missionary, he moved them from what they knew and what they understood to something that they didn't.

So there was an attitude of care and concern, of honor and of respect. There was an approach that started with what was familiar to them and moved to what was unfamiliar. And then there was an address, and what was his address? He said: "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." Verse 24:

24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by men.

Literally he said: This God... the one that's the unknown god to you... He's the God that you see in all of creation around you; in the water, in the seas, in the mountains, in the trees. This is the God who created everything.

And that wasn't all that he talked to them about. He went down in verse 27... or r... r... rather verse 26, he said:

26) ... and he determined and allotted periods and boundaries for their dwelling place, 27) that men should seek God in hope that they might feel their way toward Him and find Him.

He not only talked about the creation, he talked about the human conscience. He talked about what was going on inside of man, and that every man has this need for significance and for meaning and for purpose in life. And he said just look at yourself; you have all these gods, but all these are just an expression of the fact that you are seeking to know a god who's real. Because inwardly you know there's something calling you to the sky.

That's why I wrote a book last year called The Search for Satisfaction; because every person is on a life search to find God. They don't always describe it as that; they don't always know that's what it is, but it's because God said in His word in Ecclesiastes 3 and verse 11 that "He has set eternity in our hearts." The animal kingdom looks down to the ground to subsist and to protect. Man looks up to the stars and wonders: Why am I here and why does this matter, and what's life about? Paul said every one of you is seeking and searching to know God.

And then he brought it down to the final point and that was that he said over in verse 30:

30) The times of ignorance God has overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, 31) because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed. Of this He has given assurance by raising Him from the dead."

Who in the world is he talking about there? A man who is raised from the dead. Who is it? Jesus Christ! So he talks about the Creator, he talks

about man and his conscience and he gets them to the place of talking about Jesus Christ. He didn't start with Christ but he got them to Christ! And by the grace of God he had a forum to walk them through this process.

Sometimes you'll get all the way through the process... sometimes you'll just begin to talk to people and get them to really think about creation, think about that. Other times you'll get them to think about life and what they're thinking about it, what they're dealing with. But there comes a time, time and time again, when we can get them to Christ. And it was an intentional thing and it came out conversation and it came out of context! Paul began to press the message of Christ. One man to the audience of the Athenians. Three point message: Creator, conscience, and the cross.

Well then look at his acceptance... his acceptance. It says, after he talked to them about the resurrection for the dead in verse 32 that some of them mocked, but others said, "We'll hear you again." And Paul went out of their midst.

Paul didn't stand there and fight them. He didn't stand there and try to close the deal for everyone. He just simply proclaimed the message of Christ and then he accepted the fact that he'd been intentional, that he done as an individual what God had called him to do, and then simply went away. What a picture of witnessing! What a picture of how God wants to use you and use me! With an attitude of love and concern for others, with an approach that allows us to be able to meet people where they are and... and then ultimately an address that brings them to a place of considering the things of Christ and an acceptance that says, "God, I've done what You want me to do. It's in your hands."

Years ago Bill Bright made this statement about witnessing, and I've tried never to forget it. And I've really tried to make it something that's a part of my own heart and life and this is what he said, he said: "Successful witnessing is sharing Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God." That's it! Sharing Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit; leaving the results to God!

And every time all of us don't always get to go all the way through the Gospel! But the question is: are you ever having the conversation? Are you ever connecting the context? Is your attitude right? Are you trying to approach? See, these are the things we have to deal with in life, because God wants us to be intentional in our witness.

There was one other thing Paul was intentional about and that was clarification. He was intentional about conversation, contextualization, clarification because right at the end he brought up the two words that were the most important words that every person must understand. One, repent; two, resurrection. It all comes down to this: Repent, because every person has to see and understand that they have a need for God that means they must turn from and turn to... turn from idols, turn from themselves, turn from their sins and turn to God! That's repentance.

You see, Paul didn't stand there and say, "You have all these gods. I'm going to tell you about this God and now you know you can add this God to every other god that you have that you worship and you serve." Our message is not this God is just one of many gods, and all gods are the same, and we just have one big faith club. That's not the message. It doesn't mean that we don't engage in forums to talk it through, but it means that we understand that we ultimately have to bring clarification that Christ demands repentance.

And the reason that He does is because of His resurrection. He is the one and only who came, who lived, who died, who was buried and who rose again. And it is the power and the authority of the resurrection that tells us that we only have one message and that is that Jesus Christ is Lord! He's not one of many gods; He's the one and only God! And we always have to bring clarification to that message.

Well let me close the message tonight, and you've listened long and hard and been kind and gracious, and I appreciate all those things, but I love this passage and I could spend a lot more time talking about it. I just want to close it by saying that the person God uses is individual; they are intentional; they are influential. If you'll just determine to be a person that God can use, God will make you influential.

You know we can't all be equal in influencing or... in our influence in life in this world. We'll never all be equal in our business, our education, our social standing, our fame. Our influence will not ever be the same as every one else in those areas. But let me tell you, we can all be influential for Christ.

And here's what I love, verse 33, read it with me, please:

33) So Paul went out from their midst. 34) But some men joined him and believed, and among them were Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

I love that! Paul went out. But the Bible says the impact of what he said and what he did was so significant that one man who was even known as Dionysius the Areopagite... he was a... he was a high profile person! He knew, "That's what I've been waiting to hear! I'm sick of all this empty religion! I'm sick of idols that are dead and hollow and can't hear me! There's a God and I'm going to call on His name!" And Dionysius named the name of Jesus as his Savior. And Damaris was saved! And others were saved! And the influence of Paul was seen and felt and... and heard there in the city of Athens because some ordinary encounters became spiritual appointments.

You know what? Many of you are here tonight because it started with some ordinary encounter that became a spiritual appointment in your life. You never intended to be a religious person. You never intended to be a part of a ministry or church or community like this. But somewhere an ordinary

encounter became a supernatural appointment and you came to know Jesus in a moment through His power. My question is: Are you letting God use you? Are you letting Him use you?

John Wesley in 15... 1753, mightily used of God in a first great awakening, published a covenant prayer and in 1753 this is what Wesley prayed. "I am no longer my own; but Thine. Put me to what Thou wilt. Rank me with whom Thy wilt. Put me to doing; put me to suffering. Let me be employed by Thee or laid aside by Thee, exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee. Let me be full; let me be empty. Let me have all things; let me have nothing. I freely and hardily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Thou art mine and I am Thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

Is that your prayer tonight? "God, use me; however, wherever. As the pastor said Sunday, "Anytime, any place, anywhere... any cost. God, use me."

Father, thank You tonight for Your word. Thank You for the witness of the life of Paul. Thank You for a man who was willing as an individual to believe that You could and would use him, and to surrender to You. Thank You for a man who was intentional; who wasn't willing to go through life waiting for spiritual accidents, but who believed in Your providence and, therefore, took action and stepped out. And Lord, thank You for a man who was influential, and that the influence of Paul there in Asia Minor and in Europe established churches and the testimony of Christ that jumped the Atlantic over 200 years ago, and [music begins] establish churches and cities and communities that became great lighthouses for Christ in America, even as it has spread around the world. And thank You that, Lord, we are those who have inherited this faith and this message. And God, we have tasted of Your grace. Please, Lord, don't let us miss this hour or miss this moment to be used of You.

In these moments while our heads are bowed and eyes are closed, I wonder tonight is there someone somewhere in your life, in your sphere of influence... your potential sphere of influence that you don't know where they are spiritually and you need to find out? Is there a family member... is there a co-worker... is there someone that you know is lost and you don't really know how to build a bridge? Would you tonight... would you right now just say, "Lord, I pray for..." and fill in the blank, their name, the role by which you know them, the place that you see them... "Lord I pray..." And then would you pray "Use me... use me, Lord, to start a conversation. Use me, Lord, to build a bridge that makes a context. Help me, Lord, to clarify. O God, let the [inaudible]

Father, I believe there are enough of us in this room tonight that we can have a great impact in our community and in our church if we would just say, Lord, use me. And so we tonight pray that what we have said on earth will be ratified in heaven. In Jesus' name. Amen... Amen.

Well, thank you... thank you for a great evening of fellowship and worship, of Bible study. I hope you won't forget Acts chapter 17. It is absolutely one of my favorite portions of Scripture. And I pray even more that you'll realized that it was God using Paul that gives illustration and truth and encouragement to you and me that He will use you and He will use me.

So let's stand together tonight. Chris, you have a song to sing us out tonight? We'll sing it in just a moment. I'd like to do that. I want us to sing together.

Let me say this though... final thing. As you leave tonight over on Main Street we have some booths that are set up there for something called Fall Follies. So I'm going from the absolute sublime to the trivial here, okay? But it's not really trivial! Because Fall Follies is a musical presentation that's going to take place 5 times this weekend... twice on Saturday, twice on Sunday and once on Monday evening... with our students... our student choir. It's going to be an American music review.

But the whole purpose of Fall Follies is for us to support and to sup... and to provide ah... encouragement to our students. If they give us a great time of gathering and fun and entertainment, that we might be able to invest with them and to partner with them on their upcoming mission trip this summer. God is using the student mission tour every year to impact and shape young missionaries for Christ and to reach people with the Gospel of Christ. And it is one of our greatest investments as a church.

Rick Briscoe is leading this group. Of course, Rick is earnest ... in re...
[tape ended]