

PAUL ... who left the mainspring out of his watch  
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(ACTS 17: 16-34)

Now while Paul waited at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." A dreamy indolence pervaded the streets, for when its citizens were not prostrating themselves before their idols, they gathered to debate new doctrines. Paul stood before the images, read the inscriptions, and turned away sickened when deluded people placed offerings at the feet of a god who could neither see nor appreciate what was being done. He moved along the street, and seeing yet another of these Athenian gods, paused to read its inscription. When he saw "To the Unknown God," his eyes became stars, and his grim face softened. So, after all, these people believed there might be another God. " And Paul's spirit was stirred in him."

#### An Intense Desire

"Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market place daily with them that met with him." Probably he challenged his compatriots with the fact that their silence was inexcusable. Why were they not upholding the faith of the fathers, and denouncing idolatry? From the synagogue he went into the market place, and his open-air meetings became a feature of the city. "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? Others said, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?" And thus Paul was presented with his supreme opportunity in Athens.

#### An Interesting Discourse

"Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom then ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." And the oration which followed was easily one of the best of Paul's speeches. A great psychologist, he correctly read the thoughts of his audience ; and quoting their own poets, he logically reasoned concerning the greatest things in religion. Yet he omitted one detail. If we are to judge by this record, he did not mention the name of Jesus. He merely referred to Him as "that man." He realized that the cross would be foolishness to his intellectual audience, and avoided all mention of the death of Christ. He preached a Christ without a Cross , a risen Lord but no redemption ; the certainty of judgment but no explanation of how a man may be justified. This was a glorious oration, but somehow it didn't work- he had left the mainspring out of his watch.

#### An Increasing Dissatisfaction

" And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. S<) Paul departed from among them." And in after days, Paul had plenty of time to reflect upon his message. He was not satisfied. He had reasoned with the Athenians ; he had been an expert psychologist ; but " the foolishness of God is wiser than men." These absurd doctrines of reconciliation through the death of Christ had the uncanny knack

PAUL ... who left the mainspring out of his watch of transforming lives. These apparent absurdities completely changed the outlook of human beings. Apparently the meeting on Mars' hill had been a great success ; his oratory had delighted his hearers ; but he had not founded a Church. He never did this in Athens.

#### An Illuminating Decision

" After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth. . . ." And even as he journeyed, regret nagged at his peace of mind ; frustration tormented his great longings, and out of his surging emotions came a fierce resolve. He would know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Soon, the people of Corinth were hearing of the death of Christ ; and within a short time, a Christian Church was established in the city. Long afterward Paul referred to that first visit to Corinth, " And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified " (I Cor. 2:1, 2). A watch without a mainspring is dead mechanism; a Gospel without a Calvary is dead dogma! Neither will work!

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