

Fren-12 Apostolic Foundations - Paul at Athens

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of apostolic foundations, boldness, and perception in proclaiming the gospel as the power of God unto salvation.

Duration: 1:02:43

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 16:22-25, Acts 17:14-18, Acts 17:24-25, Ephesians 2:20

Topics: "Apostle Paul"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of a challenging and uninspiring meeting he had to participate in. Despite feeling tired and lacking a message, he prays for a woman who then sits in the front row. The speaker emphasizes the importance of the resurrection and trusting God in difficult moments. He highlights the eternal consequences of the word being spoken and urges the audience to see the night as God sees it. The speaker also emphasizes the need to become living testimonies of the message, rather than just speaking correct words. He encourages the audience to immerse themselves in the apostolic scriptures and make them the foundation of their reality. The sermon concludes with a reminder that we are of divine descent and should not worship idols, as God has revealed himself to us and calls us to repentance.

Transcript

Children of God, I didn't understand the word of that introduction, which is probably just as well. But I'm happy to see every soul here. And I don't know what my brother said about our previous seminar some months ago, but I strongly recommend that you get the tapes of it, because there's a design in these days.

The Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. On the last occasion, we spoke on the prophetic word. And in these days, on the apostolic foundations.

And I ask your prayer for us in these days, because I don't have a clear sense of how this is going to unfold. Nor did I have it the last time either. I only knew months ago what the subject was for tonight.

And so by faith, I'm just going to be obedient to speak about it. It's Paul on Mars Hill. It's an ultimate confrontation.

It's not just an historical oddity or curiosity. It's not just an episode in the life of an apostle. It is the quintessential confrontation between the foolishness of God and the wisdom of the world.

And if you can see by the eye of the Spirit, it is a confrontation toward which we ourselves are now presently tending. God is shaping us to be an apostolic presence. And we're going to meet the Spirit of the world in a final hour.

Our weakness versus its strength. The foolishness of the cross and the resurrection as against its wisdom. So I pray that you'll hear this tonight with another kind of hearing.

Something for which we ourselves are to be fitted and prepared. And before I begin, I want to introduce the band of souls who are with me in these days. If we all look tired, it's because we are.

We spoke last night in Cairo. Got to bed at about midnight and woke up again at 2.30 this morning in order to get to the airport to fly out to Geneva. And I also brought my seminary with me.

I brought my wife. Other men go to institutions, but God has given me a very special training. And I would like for my wife, Inga, to stand and greet you.

Look, you can see her. And then I want our group to stand, and it's quite an international group. We have students from Africa, New Zealand, and Germany and Switzerland who are not with us tonight.

And an assortment of others that I mentioned, New Zealand, and an assortment of other saints and ministers from the United States. We have been traveling together through Israel and Egypt, and now we are for these days here in Switzerland. And when they go home at the end of this conference, I take a few with me, and I travel in Italy for four weeks.

So I'd like for them to stand and to face you, that you can see their faces. Thank you. They are Americans like me, so none of them speak French.

So be gracious to them. Make allowances. I'm going to ask my brother to read the text from Acts 17, beginning with verse 14, where Paul is fleeing from persecution that has come upon him.

And right to the end of the chapter. While Paul was waiting for his companions in Athens, he was overwhelmed to the bottom of his soul, seeing how much he was filled with idolatry. The indignation seized his heart.

He seized the opportunity to speak about it at the synagogue, with the Jews and the Pagans converted to Judaism. On the other hand, he spoke about it every day in public, with the first people he met. He came across, among others, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who engaged in a rather close discussion with him.

Some exclaimed, Others claimed because they had heard him speak about Jesus and the Resurrection. So they decided to take him to the airport, in front of the city council, to ask him for explanations. Could we know exactly what this new teaching that you propagate is about? You speak of strange things that seem original to us.

We would like to know what all this means and what it is about. It must be said that all the Athenians, both the inhabitants and the foreigners living in the city, spent the clearest of their time glancing or collecting the latest information. Paul, standing in the center of the airport, began, Citizens of Athens, I have seen

with my own eyes that you were, in every way, concerned with honoring the divinities.

You are certainly the most religious of men. Indeed, while walking the streets of your city and examining your sacred monuments, I discovered, among others, a hotel bearing the inscription of an unknown god. Well, precisely this god, which you will dream of without knowing it, I come to announce to you.

It is the god who created the universe and all the multitude of beings that inhabit it. He is the Lord, Master of heaven and earth. He does not inhabit temples built by man's hands.

He does not lack anything. Therefore, he does not need to be served by men. On the contrary, he is the one who gives all beings life, the air they breathe, and all the rest.

From a single man, he created all the human race. He gave him, in sharing, the entire surface of the earth, by assigning to each people the duration of their existence and the extent of their domain. Through all this, he invited men to seek him.

He wanted them to make an effort to discover him, like a tatan, and to try to make contact with him. For, in reality, he is not far from each of us. Indeed, it is in him that we live, that we act, that we exist.

This is what some of your poets have recognized. We too are of divine descent. If, therefore, we are of divine descent, how can we imagine that divinity can be represented by statues made of gold, silver, or stone, sculpted by the hands of an artist according to his imagination? But God, in his goodness, closes his eyes on those times of ignorance when men knew nothing of him.

Today, on the other hand, he announces to all men, in all places, that they must repent and change their lives. He has already fixed a day when he will judge the whole world in all justice. He has designated, as a supreme judge, a man whom he himself has credited.

Indeed, he has given to all a perpetual reason to believe in him, for he has raised him from the dead. When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to shout, others said to him, we will listen to you on this another time. This is how Paul withdrew from their assembly.

However, some listeners followed him and became believers. For example, Denis, a member of the municipal council, Damaris, a woman of high society, and others with them. Let's pray together for the word.

Let us pray. Precious God, we ask your marvelous grace. Father, we ask you to give us your wonderful grace.

You alone are the high priest and the apostle of our confession. You alone are our great priest, sovereign sacrificer, the apostle of our faith. And we know that this word is dear to you.

You've made it the very foundation of your glorious church. And now we ask that from this first speaking in this night, you shall begin to open to us its meaning. Show us the anatomy, the heart, the substance, the spirit of that which is apostolic.

Breathe upon this text now. And penetrate our understanding. Show us what is timeless and universal.

Eternal. The thing to which we ourselves are called. Let your word become an event for your French-speaking church and your church over the earth.

Be with my mouth and with my brother here as one voice together. Yours. For Jesus and for his kingdom's sake.

In thy name we pray. Amen. I can see that we're going to need the entire five days just for this one text.

But we need to spend a moment at least seeing what is the inception of an apostolic event. It did not come by the premeditation of men. It had not to do with that which is religiously planned.

When it came, it came suddenly and circumstantially. But it was God. Paul was brought by other men, we read.

They conducted him to Athens only to await his colleagues who would join him. But while he waited there, his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the whole city given to idolatry. And so we come to a point of apostolic beginning.

Then, now, and in every hour. His spirit was stirred in him. That which is apostolic begins with the inception of the spirit.

An apostolic man is eminently a man of the spirit. He himself constitutes an event. Wherever he comes and wherever he's brought.

He's instant, in season and out. It has not to do with careful theological preparation. It's a man brought by circumstance by other men.

That is to say, by God. And as he was grieved as he saw the city wholly given to idolatry, the next verse says, he disputed in the synagogues with the Jews. You may scratch your head in bewilderment.

How does the one lead to the other? What has idolatry to do with the Jews and with the synagogues? And your bewilderment reveals where you are. You have not yet an apostolic perception. For there is nowhere where idolatry is more blatantly to be found than in the synagogues of the Jews or the Gentiles.

That is to say, in whatever nominal religious form there is, that gives men a sense of religious satisfaction and absolves them from any responsibility truly to follow God. This is the logic of these verses. And we need to see them.

We need far more than that. We need to have our spirit grieved as we see our cities wholly given to idolatry. God is waiting for such a man through whom the grief of God can be expressed.

We need to come to this kind of seeing. But I have the sense that if you were there, you would be admiring the Greek architecture. You would be going to the cultural places of interest.

You would be very impressed with the sophistication of the Greek philosophers. You would be very deferential to the Jews in the synagogues. Can you sense the cry of God even in this present hour? For truly apostolic men who are not the reflections of their own time or culture, but occupy another place apart from those influences that enables them penetratingly to see through them because they have their citizenship in heaven and in him they move and live and have their being.

And not in Geneva or Lausanne or France. The world is too much with us. It has conditioned and affected our thought.

And our silence condemns us in that we give affirmation to the assumptions and the premises by which the world lives. Not so, Paul. The God whom you ignorantly worship, him I declare unto you.

I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious. What an abrasive man. How mindless he is with whether he is upsetting the sensitivities of those whom he is addressing.

He instinctively goes right to the jugular vein. I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious. Can there be any insult more calculated to offend intellectuals? Full of self-congratulation.

Seekers after truth. Every day assembling to hear some new thing. Always seeking the truth.

But never coming to the knowledge of it. And what a lovely plaque at the foundation of their monuments to the unknown God. Doesn't it sound spiritual? They really do have a sense for spiritual things.

Paul was not at all impressed. He saw right through the subterfuge. Not only is he an unknown God, but of him you are willfully ignorant.

But him I declare unto you. Apostolic boldness. Apostolic authority.

It needs to be sounded again by an apostolic people. Nothing less than this will suffice. We have been too accommodating to the spirit of the world and have not seen through their disguises.

Which need to be unmasked and revealed. By the kinds of things that Paul both saw and said. The God who made the world and all things in it in verse 24.

Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. I just want to caution you here. You are going to hear a complete theology.

You are going to hear a complete cosmology. In one statement he sums up the whole purpose of human existence. What men spend their whole lives purporting to find.

He announces in a moment. God who made of one blood all men and established the bounds of their habitations that they might seek after God if happily they might be found of him. Do you recognize this for the medieval attitude it is? He is saying that the whole purpose of human existence is to be found of God.

And everything and anything else is only supportive to that end. Or a distraction or a deception. What an absolute view.

How singular. It will not consider any other alternative. The only purpose of human existence in this life is to be found of God.

To establish that relationship with him which will be eternal. And for that reason God has made of one blood all nations of men. And established the bounds of their habitations.

Made them national entities. Not that they should pursue culture. Or advanced technology.

These are secondary things. There is only one real purpose. It is to be found of God.

Do you believe that? Raise your hand if you believe that. All right, put your hands down. Do you live as if you believe that? Silence.

Do we live with that kind of apostolic absoluteness? There is a reason why Paul's words that day pierced the hearts of these Stoics and Epicureans. Because there is a special penetration to the speaking of a man who lives what he speaks. Who lives as if he believes that this is the only purpose for our existence.

His very presence is convicting. This is apostolic. And it is foundational to the church that God is wanting in this hour.

These perceptions. This mindset. This absoluteness.

This uncompromising insistence. This total unimpressiveness with contemporary culture. Because the church is to be built on the foundation of the apostles.

Not only their principles or their teaching. But what they are in themselves as men. Imitate me, Paul said.

Follow me as I follow Christ. He made himself a model and an example. He said, him whom you ignorantly worship, I declare unto you.

It sounds like uttermost arrogance and conceit. It is actually the opposite. It is uncommon meekness.

The God who made the heavens and the earth. He made the world. He is the Lord of heaven and earth.

Notice the content of every single statement. Completely unpremeditated. Coming forth spontaneously on the spot.

Not by a man who has a head full of religious ideas. But by the word that has been made inwrought in him. He is the very word himself.

Made flesh. And in one statement. He connects the issue of creation.

With the issue of lordship. The God who created the world. Is also the Lord.

Not only of heaven. But also of earth. Which includes Athens.

And in one statement. We have moved from abstract philosophical considerations. To a place where the life of men is impinged or gored.

To have human life here face to face. Almost pierced. Do you understand where Paul is going? He will not allow men the luxury of their deception.

He will not allow them this willful ignorance of an unknown God. He is going to make him known. As he is.

Both as creator. And because he is the creator. Also the Lord.

Not just of heaven which we might allow him to rule. But also the earth. Including where you yourselves live.

You have an obligation to know that. And you will be held accountable from this day forth. You will not be able to stand before God with excuse.

Because God has appointed a day. In which he will judge all men. By that one whom he has raised from the dead.

Even Jesus Christ. He said that without embarrassment. When he referred to Jesus.

When he referred to the resurrection. He did not look sheepish. He spoke with authority.

He did not make any apologies. Excuse me, I am moving from philosophy now to religion. Paul does not have such categories.

There is only one category. It is all life and reality and being. And Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

And his right to judge the world is at the heart of this reality. This is the reality. Though it is unseen.

And I proclaim it unto you. And God is waiting for that proclamation today. I will not ask you to raise your hand if you believe in the doctrine of resurrection.

It does not qualify you to go up to the Mars hill of your generation. Because if it is your knowledge. Then you do not have the qualities to go up to the Mars hill of your generation.

It is insufficient. You will miss something. Because this would not convince us.

But if we want to speak of the resurrection. Then there is only one basis to it. It is that we know him.

Who is the resurrection and the life. I am speaking from that life tonight. Or you say, Katz, you always say that.

You are always telling us how tired you are. You are always arriving exhausted. You are never adequately prepared.

But you are just saying those things. Because look how coherent your words are. You must have spent much time in preparation.

No, not in the message. In the life. We cannot speak of a judgment to come.

Except out of the burning conviction of Jesus Christ. Crucified and resurrected. This is foolishness to Greek philosophers.

But Paul made no apology. He did not say that this is not intellectually tenable. A German theologian has rightly stated.

True faith begins where the atheist thinks it should end. True faith begins where the atheist thinks it should end. In the foolishness of God.

Christ and him crucified. God crucified in weakness. Paul made no apology.

Because he believed that this gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Because he believed that this gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Not intellectual explanation, not a sophisticated apologetics.

This gospel is itself the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. To the Jew first and also to the Gentile. He made no apologies.

He stated it. He proclaimed it. But not abstractly.

Not academically. Not merely technically and correctly. Out of the demonstration of the grace of that gospel which is wrought in his own life.

I'll be speaking of that in these days. Paul speaks of my gospel. The gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ.

How many of us speak like that about the gospel? For us it's a technical formula which we invoke for witnessing purposes. And even then we're a little somewhat embarrassed by it. There's a proclamation for which the world is waiting.

Of an apostolic kind that is linked to a demonstration of the reality of that gospel. Do you know it that deeply? Him I proclaim unto you. Not the theology above him.

Not the correct doctrines. That has its place. But Mars Hill is too earnest an encounter.

For mere theology. Him I declare unto you. And they said, and what will this babbler say? And some said, we'll hear again of this matter.

But they never did. But as much as they did hear. For that they will stand eternally accountable in God.

To meet an apostle is to have a total confrontation with God. And the same is true for an apostolic church. I'm not talking about the name of a denomination.

I'm talking about a glorious organism. That has this perception. Moves in this authority.

Proclaims with this boldness. Moves through the world without being impressed by it. It is beyond what we have institutionally understood as Christianity.

And God is calling for it to be restored. That there might be a final confrontation at the end of the age. By men who say that God is not served by human hands.

By men who say that God is not served by human hands. God does not allow himself to be impressed by your philanthropy. Because of course he gives life to all, and movement and being.

Recognizing also that he gives to all, all things. Do you believe that? All things. See, the Paul of Acts 17 was also the Paul of Acts 16.

And I don't even know that his wounds have yet healed. When he was publicly disrobed and stripped naked and beaten with a whip 39 strokes. And thrown into an inner dungeon and bound hand and foot.

To smell the stink of the excretion of prisoners. To be cast into the inner dungeon. A great distance from his own home.

Abandoned and lost. Beaten and humiliated. But at midnight.

In the darkest hour. Paul and Silas prayed. And sang praises unto God.

They received their beating. And their humiliation. As coming from the hand of God.

It did not have to be explained to them. Because they receive all things as given from God. Such an absoluteness in their view.

Of the total sovereignty of God. Not just for that which we call blessed. But that which we receive as suffering.

So that when we stand in the 17th chapter on Mars Hill. We can speak with authority to men. Of the God who gives to all men.

All things. Do you want to speak that with authority? Are you willing for stripes? And imprisonments? And humiliations? And when they come, will you praise God in them? This is apostolic. What will this babbling say? Many of us could not even tolerate being so addressed.

Our feelings would be wounded. Our dignity offended. After all, we're ministers.

But some came unto him and believed. I praise God for that phrase. They did not just subscribe to an abstract doctrine.

They came unto him and believed. I've had one such privilege in my 20 years in the Lord. And the lady is here tonight through whom it came.

A Jewish woman and a professor at a university in America. Many years in pain in her back for which there was no solution. One who would never consider hearing anything from a Christian.

Let alone a Jewish man like myself. But desperation had brought her to that place. And when she came, I did not greet her with kind and comforting words.

My first words were these. How arrogant must your Jewish pride be that God has allowed such calamity to come into your body or else you would never have considered him. She was astonished and shocked as I was myself because they were not my words.

They were his. When the issue of eternity is at stake, God is not careful to coddle men. If they need to be slapped into consciousness and wakefulness, it's very love even if it offends your French sensibilities.

Because men have elevated their French-speaking sensibility above the spirit of the living God which itself is idolatry. Little wonder that their spirits are not grieved for they do not see their cities wholly given to idolatry. For their seeing is dulled as they subscribe themselves to the idolatries of their own generation.

An apostolic man is a separated man and they came unto him and believed. I invited that Jewish woman to the meeting where I was speaking that night. She said, I can't come.

My pain is so great I can't sit more than 15 minutes. I said, let me pray for you that you might sit. So she allowed me to pray and she came.

And she sat in one of the worst meetings in which I have ever had to participate. It was an American evangelical horror. A singing group on a platform.

When we all get to heaven, what a wonderful day it will be. Everything calculated to turn a sensitive and intellectual Jewish person off. And I had no message.

And I was tired. And I looked out over this audience. People who were well fed and burping.

Coming to see the novelty of a Jewish personality. I groaned before God. In the hopelessness of that situation.

I'll tell you what, children. If there is no resurrection, we of all men are most to be pitied. And if that resurrection is not available to us in moments as inauspicious as that, then we of all men are most to be pitied.

Can you trust God in such a moment when a life is at stake before you? Exactly the same situation as tonight. Oh brother, I don't see that anyone's life is in danger tonight. That's because you don't see.

You think this is just a meeting. It will either be good or bad, or you like it or you don't like it. And afterwards you can have your critical fun examining the speaker, his personality, how he expressed himself.

I'll tell you that you don't see this night as God sees it. He sees this night as a being of enormous eternal consequence. Life and death is hanging in the balance by the word which is being spoken.

No wonder Paul groaned, who is sufficient for these things? I'll bet you a hundred francs you have never once groaned that in an entire Christian lifetime. Do you know why? You're living beneath the apostolic requirement. There's not that greater demand upon your participation in life.

You have a much more casual view of things. You do not see things as urgently and as ultimately as the apostles did. You're well able out of your own ability and intelligence to conduct religious affairs.

Examine yourself and see whether you are in the faith. The faith once given to the saints. This faith.

The apostolic faith. Everything else is idolatrous. A distortion.

Something less than that which is a glory to God. So she sat there in the front row looking up at the platform. And I sighed and groaned, who is sufficient for these things? And I opened my mouth by faith, just like tonight.

And I don't remember what I said, but I think it impressed her. And she wasn't quick to leave when the meeting was over. We were sitting on the steps in the hallway of this high school and she was complaining to me.

My Jewish life has not been a preparation to believe these things. My intellectual background. I can't believe in virgin birth or resurrection.

But I believe in you. And because she believed in me, she took my hand and followed me like a child in a sinner's prayer. And would not let me leave that city that night until I could find a church somewhere where she could be baptized.

You come and examine tonight this trophy of God who no longer is a chain smoker suffering agonizing pain but is a glory to the God who saved her because she claimed unto me and believed. We need to become our message. Mere correct words are not enough for Epicureans and the Stoics of our generation.

We need to steep ourselves in the apostolic scriptures and make that the foundation of all our seeing. You need to make a willful choice about what it is to which you give your attention, your thought and your time. What are the true foundations of your reality? What is the basis for your seeing? Hallelujah! Only a true worshiper can discern a city given to idolatry.

An apostle is nothing if he is not true. He sees that which is invisible and eternal. He sees the greater weight of glory that makes his present sufferings a momentary and light affliction.

He is without fear and he cannot be intimidated. He can go up to a hill without the guarantee that he'll come down. And yet speak abrasive and challenging words to men without fear of consequence.

He can speak of the judgment which is to come by that one whom God has raised from the dead and speak of it with such solemnity and authority that will make men to tremble or call him a babbler. Paul says we shall be judged for all that we do in our bodies. Knowing the terror of God, he said, I persuade men.

We need to know that terror. We need to restore the fear of God to the Church. Because if it is apostolically missing with us of what shall we persuade men that God has a plan for their life that they should accept Him, that they might receive the benefits knowing the terror of God, I persuade men.

We need to come into a wholly different mindset an apostolic one to fulfill the purposes of God in our own generation. We need to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified. It will take a determination for every other kind of knowing wants to crowd in.

And diminish this message. This absoluteness. This single-eyed seeing.

That God has one purpose in human life that men might seek after Him if happily they might be found of Him. For God has winked in times past but He commands now men everywhere to repent. He commands all men everywhere to repent.

It's not an option. It's an absolute declaration. It needs to be made again.

For we are much closer to the judgment of which Paul spoke. It can only be spoken by one kind of people. Those that are like Paul.

Absolute. Unmasking and revealing the false values of the world. Not impressed with their monuments to unknown gods.

I'm going to be speaking about these things in these days. What does it take to fashion such a man? What is apostolic character? Authority. Seeing.

Conduct. This is a day in the life of an apostle. One which he did not plan.

But God had His man in His place in His time. And only a few claimed to Him and believed. Among which is Dionysius.

The very name of pagan sensual revelry. Christian legend says that he came to Paris. And he went up to a hill himself.

But he didn't come down. I think that place in Paris is called the Mount of the Martyrs. Montmartre.

There's no assurance you'll come down. For which we need now to see all things in preparation. I want to pray tonight.

For an apostolic people. Whose intention is large in God. And willing to be formed at His hand.

The God who gives all things. In Him we move and live and have our being. This has got to become real.

Let's pray. We trust these words to Your Spirit, Lord. May You bring them as shafts into the hearts of men.

Feel free to disturb us and to confront us. That we might ourselves confront our own generation. In the only way in which it is eternally significant.

Apostolically. Have such a church. With such a foundation.

Whatever the cost. Bless those even now tonight. Who are determining in their heart to be it.

Reveal and break the power of our own idols. Intellectual and cultural. Religious.

Bring us to the things that Paul saw. That we might speak and act as he. To the idolatrous cities of our own generation.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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