

Good morning. My name is Shane Gould, and I am one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. When it comes to being a follower of Jesus, it goes without saying that we live in a spiritual world. As those who believe in Jesus, we understand that when it comes to life, there's more, ...much more, than meets the eye. The Apostle Paul said that to live for Jesus is to "live by faith, not by sight." A relationship with God is oriented more around what *is unseen* than what *is seen*.

To a growing church in the ancient city of Corinth, the Apostle Paul said, "we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." I love the way the Message paraphrases 2 Corinthians 4:18, "There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever."<sup>1</sup>

Probably like a lot of you, I was really struck this week by the news that Steve Jobs had died. All over the world people are mourning his death. One newspaper article I came across was entitled, "Steve Jobs: The Man Who Changed Your World." Now, I have to admit that there are few things I that I have come to love more than my iPhone, thankfully some of those things are my wife and children. Although, my wife, Linda, sometimes wonders if I have a closer relationship with my phone than I do with her! Right now I have an iPhone 4. It's pretty amazing and can do some important things – like play games, my favorite is Angry Birds! My daughter, Serena, and I love to play. But as much as I love my iPhone 4, I know that it's about to become outdated by the iPhone 5. The luster of my iPhone is not going to last. It will soon be old, outdated, and replaced. I'll soon be trying to negotiate an upgrade for an iPhone 5!

Steve Job's passing, like other great icons of our culture, is a stark reminder that the world we currently live in is temporary and often consumed with temporary things, as the scriptures remind us, "The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow."

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7

That's why God calls us to fix the eyes of our hearts on what is unseen, to be focused on the life to come. God wants us to never forget the temporary nature of this life, to have a perspective on life that always keeps eternity in view. God wants our primary preoccupation to be him and the people around us who have not yet come into a saving relationship with God through Jesus. That's why we're here as a church. Whether you realize it or not, as a church we are on a mission to reach out and make it known that there's much more to life than meets the eye. God has planted you and I here to point people toward Jesus and their need for God's gift of eternal life.

In each one of us God has placed a deep desire to know him. There is what Erwin McManus calls a "soul craving" in each of us for God and the things of eternity. No matter who you are, or whether you realize it or not, everyone is on a quest to make sense of life. McManus goes on to say, "We're all trying to figure out who we are, why we're here, what this whole thing is about."<sup>2</sup> We live in a world driven by spiritual questions. Everyone around us is searching for the answer to the cravings of their soul.

This fall we have been taking Sunday mornings to look into what's involved in Reaching The Heart Of Our City with the good news of Jesus. Last week Dave Sattler reminded us that God has called us to be translators of Jesus' invitation of hope and salvation, that many more people would encounter Jesus and be rescued from the eternal consequences of sin that separate them from God. This morning we are turning to the Book of Acts, chapter 17, to learn how to better engage the spiritual hunger of those around us.

### **Pray.**

I invite you to turn to the Book of Acts chapter 17:16-34, pg 1723 in the blue Bibles. . En route to the political and commercial capital of Corinth, the Apostle Paul makes a pit stop in the ancient city of Athens to wait for his companions Silas and Timothy.

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<sup>2</sup> Erwin McManus, Soul Cravings Prequel, 2009, p.35

**Acts 17:16-21**

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. 19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." 21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Soon after arriving in Athens, Paul is struck by the city's spiritual hunger, but also by its idols. As Paul walked the streets he must have felt the city's darkness. He was disturbed, provoked according to the Greek, by its empty spirituality. So, as he waits for his companions, he sees an opportunity to explain the truth to point people to the real God, to Jesus and the promise of the resurrection.

Even though ancient Athens was well past its historical height, it remained the cultural zenith of the ancient world. It was a place of ideas and it served as the cradle of democracy. Athens was home to some of the world's greatest thinkers, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It was a place where people came to discuss and figure out life. In some ways the literature, sculpture, and cultural height of Athens has never been surpassed. People still flock to Athens to see its ruins – someday I hope to get there myself to take my own pictures.

But in reality, Paul saw that for all its sophistication, it was a city of idols. As someone fixed on Jesus and the reality of eternity, Paul was able to look past the surface beauty and intellect of the city to see its

true spiritual state: it was a city trapped in darkness, ignorant of God, and built on temporary, outward beauty.

In many ways Vancouver is like Athens. That may be hard to hear, but I think it's true. Vancouver is a city of beauty and sophistication, regular on the top 10 places in the world to live. But in reality, much of our city is trapped in darkness, largely ignorant of God, and built on temporary, outward beauty. Most in our city would probably consider themselves spiritual but few would consider themselves religious – we should probably be thankful for that. But even fewer would consider themselves a follower and believer in Jesus. Though many would consider themselves spiritual, few know or experience the truth of Jesus.

Paul wasn't in Athens to judge. He was well aware of what it means to be ignorant of Jesus – in the not too distant past of his own life, Paul knew what it meant to be outside of Christ. In fact, he lived a very religious life but one that was empty because it was without Jesus. So instead of speaking judgment, Paul was moved to begin a conversation. In verse 17 it says that Paul began to reason and speak with both the religious and the irreligious. To share the good news of Jesus, Paul went first to the local places of worship, as was his custom, but he soon went to the marketplace, which basically amounted to the food courts of today's malls.

Wherever people were hanging out, Paul spent time for the sake of beginning a conversation about Jesus with whoever would listen. Paul's message about Jesus was something brand new to the Athenians who were listening – they were intrigued. But they had a hard time grasping what he was really saying.

The people of Athens had no grid for the God of the Bible. They were people with a totally different background and worldview from Paul. Because the things Paul was saying were so different from their normal way of thinking, it was taking the Athenians time to hear Paul's message. But what they were able to hear left them wanting to know more.

Like Paul, we're surrounded by neighbours, friends, relatives, and workmates, who have little or no grid for the God of the Bible. More and more, people are growing up with little or no knowledge of the Bible. Our city is full of diversity, different backgrounds, cultures, and worldviews – it's part of what I love about our city. Like Paul, we need to look for opportunities to begin conversations about Jesus. Because the Bible's message of Jesus is so different from people's normal way of thinking, sharing Jesus with someone is going to be a process. Our friends and neighbours are going to need to hear about Jesus more than once to begin to really grasp who Jesus is and how much they're lives are in need of him. God wants us to have conversations that leave people wanting to hear more, even though they're not ready to believe.

After hearing Paul, his listeners took him to the high court of the city called the Areopagus, where God expanded Paul's audience.

#### **Acts 17:22-31**

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and 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 built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' [a] As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' [b]

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 made by human design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

As Paul stepped up to the plate to speak more, he spoke on a level the people he was trying to reach could understand. He looked for common ground as a starting place to begin talking about Jesus.

So, the first thing he tells the Athenians is that he sees that they are very spiritually minded. It's kind of a compliment but not really as Paul quickly points out that they really don't know what they're talking about when it comes to truly knowing God. He says, I see you even have an idol dedicated to an 'unknown god.'

One historian described Athens as having more idols than people. The city's approach to life was to try to cover all the spiritual bases, whether through idols, even one dedicated to the god it didn't know, to giving life it's best thought through its philosophers. Seeing humour in the situation, Paul seizes the idol to make a segway to the Athenians' need to know the *real* God.

Paul then begins to tell the grand story of the Gospel in his own words. Usually when Paul speaks or writes, he uses the scriptures to explain how Jesus is God's promised Messiah. But as Paul speaks to these Athenians at the Areopagus, he doesn't quote a single scripture. Paul's audience isn't familiar with the Bible and don't yet see it as the Word of God, so he doesn't use it.

To some of us, that sounds like sacrilege! But here Paul chooses to use his own words instead of scripture to explain the gospel. This is not your classic Roman's Road To Salvation presentation of Jesus, where you walk someone through 5 scriptures from the Book of Romans. That can be a really great way to help someone begin to see

their need for Jesus as it's explained in the Bible. And normally, Paul is the first in the room to quote scripture when he knows his audience is familiar with it.

But here in Athens, Paul is speaking with people who have no grid for understanding the Bible. They don't know the book. They don't know the story. So instead of *quoting* scripture, Paul, using his own words, to tell the grand *story* of scripture.

Putting the Gospel into his own words, Paul tells the grand story by beginning first by saying:

**1) There is "One" creator (v.24)**

*There isn't many gods, there's only one and one way.*

**2) He determined your life so you would seek him (v.26-27)**

*God is closer than you think and wants you to know him.*

**3) He requires that you come to him for mercy by turning to his Son (v.30)**

*You are actually made in God's image. To find him you must turn to Jesus because you are in need of his mercy.*

**4) God will one day bring justice and hold our lives to account. (v.31)**

*Life as it is now will soon end. God's justice will one day be served as each of us will have to give an account for our life.*

**5) God has proved his power and promise of salvation through the resurrection of Jesus (v.31)**

*If God can raise Jesus to life, he will also give you eternal life by raising you.*

Not only does Paul use his own words to explain the gospel, but he also uses Athenian pop culture. The only thing Paul quotes in his gospel presentation are two Athenian poets as Paul points to the intimacy you have with God through Christ: 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'[a] As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'[b] In the footnotes of some Bibles the Greek

philosophers being quoted, Epimenides and Aratus, are even listed.

To reach people way outside the four walls of the church, Paul presents the Gospel in a way they can understand using words common to them, not him.

Really, that's what our upcoming Transforming Pathways course Joining God's Mission is all about. It's five Sunday nights of teaching and training how to introduce people to Jesus who know nothing about the Bible or who God is. It's a lot of fun. Many here have already taken the course – we really want to see everyone take this course and get equipped to tell people about Jesus.

After Paul spoke, it says that some scoffed at his message, but there were some who believed. Not everyone will choose to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he was resurrected on the third day, and that he is coming again to bring justice and to renew the world. But some will.

**Acts 17:32-34**

"32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." 33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others."

People are spiritually hungry for the things of God and are in need of the love and forgiveness of Jesus. This world will soon pass away as we know it to be replaced by the life to come where only those who have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ will inherit eternal life.

I invite you to make a fresh commitment to live in light of eternity. I want to invite you to begin praying for your friends and neighbours who do not know Jesus and have never heard his invitation to know his love and forgiveness, who aren't even aware of their need for him.

I want to encourage you to come to Joining God's Mission to learn how to share the gospel in your own words in a way your friends can understand.

God is calling us to come alive spiritually by fixing "our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

### ***The Lord's Supper***

In a few moments we are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. As we do, Jesus is calling us to remember our constant need for him – that he alone is the food our souls crave. Only the sacrifice of Jesus' body and the shedding of Jesus' blood can make us inwardly clean and re-connect us with God. Only through Jesus can we find restored relationship with God and access to eternal life.

Before going to his death, Jesus told his disciples to remember him by sharing a meal. Through the symbolism of a supper, Jesus invited them, and by extension us, to picture him as food for the craving of our souls, that only he can satisfy. Jesus was and always will be the longing and need of every human heart.

In symbolically speaking of himself, Jesus said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them." (John 6:54-56)

I want to invite the worship team and those serving to come forward.

In a moment, we want to invite you to come forward and take a piece of bread, picturing it as Jesus' body. Then as you dip the bread, see the juice as symbolizing Jesus' shed blood. And as you eat, thank Jesus for giving his life for yours as he was nailed to the cross. Invite him to fill you with a fresh sense of his grace as you take in the elements that represent his life.

The good news of Jesus is that everyone is invited to the table. All that is required is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died on your behalf as payment for sin, and that on the third day, he was raised to eternal life. In Jesus, we find the fullness of life we are all craving.

### **Benediction**

Isaiah 55:1-2

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?"