

NEWS AND VIEWS
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***“Southern Baptists with the Full
Gospel for the Whole World”***

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Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. (Acts 17:16)

I've never been to Athens...but I've been to Raleigh. A few weeks ago I was engaged in a World Religions Practicum, a week-long intensive seminary course of study. During that week we traveled to different places around the Triangle area to observe many different religious traditions that are being practiced in our midst. It was an up close and personal encounter with the religious practitioners and an opportunity to find out what they believed. It was indeed an *intense* experience. The week confirmed to me what I believe and teach...that human beings are created to worship. And our city is surely full of idols.

The spiritual provocation that manifested itself in the Apostle Paul can still rise up within us in our day, if we are not too deadened to its quickening. I can testify that being in the presence of practical idolatry was truly a spiritual experience. And not all spiritual encounters are holy ones. I was awakened in my spirit as to how much my heart has been calloused over to the spiritual condition of the Buddhists, Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses around us. As the week progressed I had hoped that visits to a Greek Orthodox church and two Jewish synagogues would bring me back to a place where I was comfortable. But alas, even here where the Word of God has once had a place, sadly I found that its place now was not first place. My spirit was provoked within me as I witnessed the proclamations of the rabbis and the priest as far away from the gospel of Jesus Christ as the philosophy of the imams in the mosque. I realized how utterly lost people are outside the church. And how lost we can be inside the church to being sensitive to their dire and desperate dilemma. All religious paths do not lead to the biblical Kingdom of God.

Beginning in May, we will begin to explore some of the gospel's claims in contrast to some world religious beliefs. I hope to share what I have learned about these world religious practitioners in hopes that we as a church can be more informed as we engage others with the gospel. What is it that draws people into these religious communities? What is it that will draw them out? I think Paul's proclamation to the idolaters included the key. He observed the Athenians worshipping at an altar of the Unknown God. They were ignorant, or without knowledge, of that which they worshipped. What they were missing was the knowledge of a God who is Personal. One who is real. One who is alive. One we can know.

*“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”
Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.” (Acts 17:30-32)*

In this Resurrection season, I am reminded that we have a mission to carry a message. For all who are worshipping in darkness, Jesus has come as the Light of the world. My goal is to gain an audience among the worldly religious practitioners...Resurrection from the dead is not reincarnation. And resurrection is hopefully different, not hopelessly ignorant. These things I know. Our city is full of idols. But Jesus is alive. And Jesus is Lord.

Blessings to you
Pastor Sam