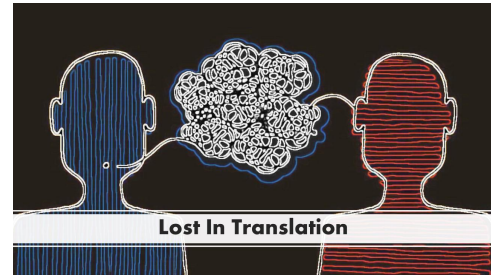


## Lost in Translation (Week 1): America is Athens:

### **Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less**

1) "How do you communicate Christianity to an increasingly post-Christian culture that doesn't share or understand much of our language or basic ideas?," that's that question behind this new series.



2) During this series we'll be looking in depth at Paul's time in Athens, and especially beginning in week 2 his speech explaining Christianity to an audience who had no prior exposure to it (Acts 17.16-34).

3) Paul was deeply distressed by the many idols in Athens, leading us to ask - as Christians in 2023 America, what emotionally provokes us, and is it our culture's idols?

4) Martin Luther describes an "idol" as that to which we look for all good things, in which we take refuge, and to which we entrust our lives.

5) Instead of laying low, Paul did what Paul always did: he engaged everyone everywhere about Jesus, determined for Christianity to have a place in the marketplace of competing religious ideals and confident that it would stand up to scrutiny.

6) America 2023 is quite a different cultural setting than 1st-century Athens in at least one regard: we are far more reluctant to talk about religion and spirituality or use it to comment on social, cultural, and political matters (per two Pew Research studies in 2018 and 2021).

7) As Jimi Wallis, founder of Sojourners puts it, "Faith is always personal, but never private."

8) The reactions to Paul in Athens were mixed, as is the reaction to Christianity in our day: some thought he made no sense, others were curious because of the newness of what he was saying.

9) But Paul's message was also interpreted to be subversive and threatening to Greco-Roman norms and ideals, so much so that he's dragged off to meet with the city's ruling council (the Areopagus), which leaves us to conclude that Christianity rightly communicated in our day might have the same effect.

10) Thus, we might conclude that America is Athens: both are full of "idols," have their version of Epicureans and Stoics, are infatuated with what's new, can respond to Christianity in any number of ways (from confused to angered to curious), and most of all, can hear Christianity as God's gospel (literally, "good news").

## Explore More This Week

- Want to read the backstory that brought Paul to Athens? Check it out: [Acts 17.1-15 NRSVA](#)
- A quote worth reconsidering about the dying, inadequate gods of our world: "The gods of this world are sick unto death...And we all shudder at the sound because to witness the death of gods is a fearsome thing. Which gods? The gods that we worship. The gods that our enemies worship... These are the gods in whom the world has put its ultimate trust. Some of them are our particular gods, and there are plenty of others each can name for him or herself. And where are they now? They are dying, and their twilight thickens into night. Where is the security that they promise? Where is the peace? The terrible truth is that the gods of this world are no more worthy of our ultimate trust than the men who created them." (Frederick Buechner, in *The Magnificent Defeat*)
- Read Richard Foster discuss the alternative Christianity offers culture, including challenging cultural, inadequate idols: [The Contemporary Battlefronts - Richard J. Foster](#)
- Two short devotionals on our personal idols: [How Many Gods Do You Have?](#) and [Nothing Special](#)
- A somewhat dated but still useful paradigm from a leading evangelical church researcher on how to differentiate the receptivity and needs of unchurched and nonChristian persons: [CityLife Church Melbourne Australia](#) and [CityLife Church Melbourne Australia](#).
- As we prepare to look in depth at how Paul explained Christianity to entirely nonChristian people, this might be a way to prime the pump...it's an 80 minute free online seminar by Trevor Hudson (remember that name?) entitled, "Finding Good Words to Share the Good News": [Finding Good Words to Share the Good News](#)