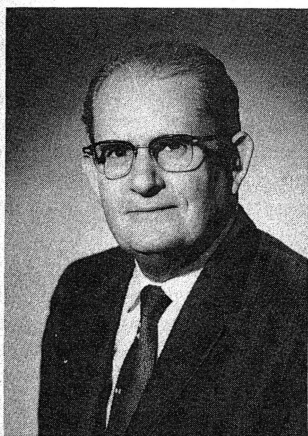


# BAPTIST HOUR SERMONS

*for July*



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## MORE THAN RELIGION

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"Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' Hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are very religious"—Acts 17:22, American Standard Revision.

When Paul stood on Mars' Hill he was surrounded by evidence of the incurably religious nature of man. Along every street and upon the portal of every home were the more than thirty thousand altars and statues of the Grecian gods. Petronius once wrote sneeringly that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Among them were not only man-made concepts of deity. They had also deified their human virtues and vices.

Before the apostle sat the intelligentsia of the city, namely, the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. Boiled down to their basic ingredients, the Stoics were pantheists. God was absorbed into the ele-

ments of nature. Thus, to them, God was a captive within His own creation. The Epicureans, on the other hand, were deists—rank materialists who held to the eternity of matter. Their God, if there were such, was an absentee-God with no concern for the welfare of His creation or His creatures. Thus, to them, God either could not or would not meet the ultimate needs of life. To the one life became a series of self-willed efforts to achieve the better life. To the other the only end of life was happiness whose basest expression was, "Eat, drink, and be merry; for tomorrow we die." In both of these and in this multitude of altars was perfect proof of man's inability to have a vital experience with God through the cultural and intellectual approach to religion.

Which is but another way of saying that it is not enough for you to be religious. As Paul said of these philoso-

phers, you may be "very religious" and yet be absolutely ignorant of a vital experience of a saving relation with God. If you will analyze modern man you will discover that he worships every one of the gods of Athens. We have deified the forces of nature, even our own virtues and vices. By the expression of our supreme loyalties and values of life, we daily bow down before their altars—either in a willful self-righteousness or in an abandonment of moral principles in our elusive pursuit of happiness.

The Athenians, fearing that they may have overlooked some god, had erected an altar TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Seizing upon this Paul said, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly (unknowingly) worship, him declare I unto you." Thus he entered the body of his sermon wherein he presented, first, the God of creation; second, the God of history; third, the God of judgment.

First, note the God of creation. In Acts 17:24-25 Paul said, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things . . ." Here was a complete answer to both the Stoics and Epicureans with regard to creation. The universe is the direct creation of God, who not only owns it but rules it. He is not confined to material things such as the Parthenon or the temple of God in Jerusalem. Furthermore, His name is not honored nor is His wrath appeased by the self-righteous deeds of our worship. Rather than being an absentee-God, He is intimately concerned with our welfare, being the very source of life, breath, and all things.

In these words Paul strikes at the very heart of the modern conflict between scientific theory and revealed truth with regard to the origin and nature of the universe. Recently we heard one of our

most illustrious scientists define truth as "the best that we know at the moment." This is not a definition of truth but of theory. The scientist is in constant quest for truth as it is contained in nature. In a sense this becomes his religion. Such a search often leads him outside the realm of truth altogether. What to him is truth today, the best that he knows at the moment, may be error tomorrow. Given time and enough information he will ultimately arrive at truth in a given area.

But the problem arises when he insists that the revealed truth of the Bible must constantly adjust to the best that he knows at the moment. If you attempt to do so you must not only be a theological chameleon, but you will make wreckage of your faith, and wind up in the bug-house. Instead of seeking to chase after the scientist, let him come to you. Like Paul said, "Whom therefore ye unknowingly worship, him declare I unto you." There is no conflict between true science and true religion. Both are of God. In an age which bows down before the altar of theoretical science, we must ever point TO THE UNKNOWN GOD who has fully revealed Himself in Christ, and who progressively unveils Himself in nature as He wills.

Second, consider the God of history. Once again Paul speaks. "And hath made of one (blood, not in best manuscripts) all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord . . ." In short, God is neither absorbed in nor absent from the affairs of men and nations. No nation exists either in time or in geography apart from the expressed will of God. He is both immanent in and transcendent above history, directing it toward His own redemptive and gracious ends.

What a message for you and me! No nation ever emerged from the womb of

time as a surprise to God. Students of history, while they may differ in their interpretation of events, recognize that nations rise, reach their zenith, and fall. Paul says that all of this is in keeping with God's redemptive purpose. God causes a nation to come into being at a given time and place. Insofar as that nation fits itself into the eternal purpose of God it prospers. Failing, it goes down to ruin. The highways of time are littered with the debris of such.

Furthermore, God uses nations for His purpose even when they do not recognize him. The Old and New Testaments abound in illustrations of this truth. When Alexander pointed his Macedonian phalanx eastward, little did he know that history would record his greatest achievement as the spread of Greek culture and language throughout the ancient world, to prepare for Him whose gospel would be preached throughout that world in the richest language known to man. The Roman legions marched

forth to establish peace, build roads, and establish sea lanes over which God's messengers would go.

Paul continues, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being . . ." This is true not only of men but of nations. The figure is that of a prenatal child who lives, moves, and has its very being in the body of its mother. Nations are like that. Their very life, movements, and beings are under the direct control of God. When they reject Him they do so to their own destruction. Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee reminds us that of twenty-one world civilizations nine teen have fallen. No nation, says he, wa ever murdered. They committed suicide. Would that modern nations which stru in pomp and power might realize tha it is suicidal to reject God's purpose fo their being!

Again, the apostle adds, "Forasmuc then as we are the offspring of God we ought not to think that the God head is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. Look at Athens as Paul saw it. Th Golden Age of Pericles was gone. Mar: thon and Thermopylae were but name. The Roman conquest was complete. Th Stoic and Epicurean philosophers b: mouthed as empty phrases that whic fell from the lips of Socrates, Plato, ar Aristotle fraught with meaning. Th glory of Greece was but "a piece molded bread in the garbage can history." Her genius for art could b produce graven gold, silver, and sto before which blinded men groped aft God only to miss Him, "though he not far from every one of us" (17:27).

Herein is a lesson for our beloved lar the United States of America. Conceiv in the will of God, she has forgotten t Rock from whence she was hewn. H God-given genius has been turned to t making of material altars before whi we bow. Oh beloved land! Our towers steel and stone shall become as t Acropolis in Athens or the Colosseum

## Baptist Hour Sermon Topics for August

Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs

Theme: GLORY and SHAME

- Aug. 2—The Glory of the Gospel  
(Acts 20:21)
- Aug. 9—The Glory of the Church  
(Acts 20:28)
- Aug. 16—The Glory of God's Will  
(Acts 22:10)
- Aug. 23—The Shame of Sin (Acts  
24:25)
- Aug. 30—The Shame of Scorn  
(Acts 26:28)

Hear them on

**THE BAPTIST HOUR**

Read them in

**THE BEAM**

Rome — unless we seek the Lord and His will for our being. We trust in our wealth to buy the favor of the world, only to reap its scorn. We rely upon our superior armaments, but they shall become to us a delusion and a snare. When France fell before the German armies in 1940 she had the largest army and the third largest navy in the world. Her Maginot Line was but a stack of cards. Her own statesmen said that she perished from moral deterioration within. Hear the word of the Lord! "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety [victory] is of the Lord" (Prov. 21:31). "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34).

Third, note the God of judgment. Coming to the climax of his sermon Paul declared, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at [overlooked]; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge [literally, is about to judge] the world [inhabited earth] in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereby he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." A captive God? An absentee God? Rather, an omnipotent God of judgment. This was the first time that the Athenians had heard the gospel. Henceforth they know that their pagan ways are under the judgment of God.

But these words have modern import. A terrible import! Note that God "is about to judge the world." There is an end to the patience and longsuffering of God. As nations stand poised to strike with hydrogen bombs in their hands, how we need to heed this warning! When asked what weapons would be used in World War III, Dr. Albert Einstein replied, "I cannot say what weapons will be used in World War III. But I can tell you what weapons will be used in World War IV — wooden clubs and

stone axes! For World War III will destroy civilization as we know it."

But while God judges nations by their own misdeeds in the framework of history, He has appointed a day when every man must appear before the judgment seat. It will be realized in His own good time. In the meantime, He gives assurance [offers faith] to every one of you through Jesus whom He has raised from the dead. Both the Stoics and Epicureans denied the bodily resurrection.

What will be your attitude toward the resurrected Lord? Luke tells us that when the Athenians heard of the resurrection, "Some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter." Some mocked to their eternal damnation. Others heard to their eternal salvation.

The apostle had delivered his soul, and so have I. There are those who say that Paul failed in Athens. But did he? Luke says, "Howbeit certain men clave [glued themselves] unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite [one of the judges], and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan reminds us of the wonderful results in Athens. In the second century the church at Athens produced such men as Publius, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras, and others—bishops and martyrs. In the third century the church was "peacable and pure." In the fourth century her Christian schools gave to the world Basil and Gregory.

You cannot mock the gospel out of effective existence. Nor can you forever postpone your answer to it. I beg you to become a Dionysius or a Damaris, believing, and through whom God may continue to work out in history His eternal purpose — that men should seek the Lord!