

Nate Young  
The Altar and the Throne

October 15, 2023

Series: One

Acts 17

We're in the sixth week of our *One* series. If you guys are wondering what the bull's-eye looks like, that's the bull's-eye. Neighbors reaching out to neighbors, friends to friends, grandparents praying for a decade for their grandkids...bull's-eye. I love it.

Guys, my name is Nate. I'm one of the directional elders here at the church. It's my joy and privilege to be able to preach to y'all this weekend. It's actually my third time doing so. To be honest with you, I'm not exactly sure why they keep asking me to do this. I'm not a public speaker in any other context in my life whatsoever.

I'm just a normal person. I work at a bank, as a matter of fact...from home. No public speaking. I don't know what I'm doing. I'm just kidding. I do know what I'm doing. I know what I'm trying to do, at least. Guys, we are going somewhere today. I'm going to pray for us, and then we're going to go there. Okay? Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, King of Kings, sitting on your throne, we come to you to learn from you, to hear from you. We need to hear from you. If you don't speak to us, we don't know what to do. We don't know what we're doing. So please speak. We're listening, Lord. We pray this in your name, Jesus, amen.

I want to talk to us today about a very important place. A lot of us have not thought about this place much. Some of us have maybe never thought about this place, but it's a very important place. I want to talk to us today about the temple in your heart. You're like, "Temple in my heart? What is that? Is that a real place?" Oh, yeah, it's a real place.

Inside each one of us, there is this personal temple where worship is happening. Not just inside religious people but inside everybody, this place exists. All of the things associated with normal worship exist in this temple in your heart. There's an altar in this temple, and sacrifices are made on that altar. All kinds of work, habits, and activity are sacrificed over lifetimes on that altar.

All that sacrifice, all that worship, if you will, is being directed toward the throne in here. Now, the throne is super important, guys. It's super important. On the throne in your heart sits the most special thing to you. That throne, definitionally, governs (that's what thrones do...thrones govern) the purpose of your entire life. All of your hopes and dreams are born out of whoever or whatever is sitting on that throne.

All of your fears and nightmares are kind of oriented by whoever or whatever is sitting on that throne. If the right king is on the throne, it goes very well for you. It goes well for those around you. All of the work, activity, habits, and dreams happening in there are good. But if an imposter is sitting on the throne...a false god, if you will, an idol...it goes badly for you and those around you.

So, you have this altar, you have this throne, and there's a door to this place too. We don't think about this place overtly very much, but we stand guard at the door. It's hard to access. It's very vulnerable to let the thing on the throne be threatened, and people don't like it, so they tend to stand guard at the door. You're like, "Is this a real place?" Yes. I promise it's a real place. Acts 17 talks about it. We're going to be there today.

Paul is in three cities today, and here's what he's doing. Here's one way to describe all of Paul's missionary efforts: looking for the door to the place of personal worship in people's hearts, and when he finds the door, he knocks on it, and he makes a claim. It's a big claim. He says, "Jesus is the King, and he deserves the throne in there." Paul thinks Jesus deserves the throne.

We're going to see it here in Acts 17. We have to go quickly through the first two cities because there's a lot happening in the third city. Just to frame it up a little bit, God just broke Paul out of jail at the end of chapter 16. We talked about that last week. Here we go. Next verse. Acts 17, starting in verse 1:

***"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'***

***And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting..."*** Then they shout some things.

I really just want us to notice one thing in these first two cities. Here's what I want us to look at. What's up with the violent reaction? This was not an unusual occurrence for Paul. Paul shows up to a place, starts talking about Jesus, and people get violent. It's like, "This is a little irrational. What's going on with that?"

Well, what's the claim? What's Paul's claim? Paul is saying that Jesus deserves the throne, and if Jesus deserves the throne, then whoever or whatever (that most special thing) is currently sitting on the throne must step aside to make way for King Jesus. People don't like that. So, this violent reaction is actually a rational reaction.

That gets me thinking. How come we don't see that reaction? I mean, I've never seen that in America in 2023. You usually get a shoulder shrug to Jesus most of the time, not a violent reaction. What's going on? Well, I don't think people understand the claim. They don't see him as a king looking for a throne.

They think he's, like, running for a seat in the House of Representatives. Like, he'd be so happy if you'd choose him to represent your spiritual interests, and he has a voice and a vote. There are a lot of other interests represented that have voices and votes, and there's kind of this collective decision-making process. No, no, no. Jesus is a king, and he deserves a throne. That's the claim.

So, these people get it. They have the wrong reaction, but they get it. They get mad and run Paul out of town, out of Thessalonica. They run him over to Berea, and he's doing the same thing. Let's pick it up in verse 13.

***"But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed."***

All right. Now we're just going to settle down in Athens. We'll be in Athens for the rest of the time. We're going to see in Athens Paul has a very deliberate process. He has a four-step process he goes through for how to get Jesus through the door and onto the throne in Athens. I'll just give you the four steps. Then we're going to spend the rest of our time talking about them.

So, he *sees*, he *feels*, he *finds*, and he *knocks*. (If I was good at this, like Pastor Kyle, those would start with the same letter. I tried really hard, to be honest with you guys. I sat down with the Google machine, looking up synonyms. I couldn't figure it out. I couldn't do it, guys. You get the lay elder version today. Okay?)

He sees idols, he feels provoked, and then he goes and finds a door and knocks on the door...those four things. The first two are right here in the next verse, in verse 16. Let's look at it. Verse 16 says, "***Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.***"

All right. We have to be clear with our language. Let's define *idols* for a second. The most helpful and classic definition of an *idol* is a false god, a counterfeit god. Here's what a false god does. It makes a God-sized claim but is lying. It's false. It's a false god.

It says things like, "I satisfy ultimately. I have the power to bless you or curse you. Being close to me is the best thing. Being far away from me is the worst thing." It makes these God-sized claims but, in the end, is found out to be a liar, full of empty promises, bankrupt.

So, Paul gets to Athens and sees that the city is full of these idols. We have to understand what it was like for Paul to get to Athens. Back then, it was this world city. It was a little past its prime but still the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman Empire. It was this massive city. Just visually, to arrive in Athens, even to this day, you have (it's so classic) the Acropolis, the Parthenon, and the Temple of Athena...all of these places of worship on top of this mountain.

Guys, the Parthenon... This is crazy. They say to build the Parthenon, they mined 100,000 tons of marble from a quarry 10 miles away and got it over there somehow, and then up this mountain to put 100,000 tons of marble on top of a mountain...a massive undertaking. How big is this undertaking? Trying to relate the mass transfer...

I have a 2- and 4-year-old, and sometimes we go on a walk. I throw them in a wagon and take them on a wagon ride. Let's call it 50 pounds combined. I would have to take them on 4 million 10-mile wagon rides to build the Parthenon. You're like, "Okay. Kind of interesting, but why are you bolding and underlining this so much?"

Here's the point. It's hard work. Why did they do this? They were totally convinced, obviously, that their gods were real, and they were willing to work hard for them. Here's what's interesting. Whoever or whatever is on the throne demands total devotion. The interesting part is that the worshiper willingly gives it. They want to. They willingly give it.

Paul gets there. He sees a city full of idols. Let's bring this all the way home. Imagine Paul rolls into Winston-Salem and pulls into your driveway. What would he see? Would he feel, as it says, provoked? Here's the truth, guys. Everybody is worshipping, not just religious people. Everybody is doing it.

What do I mean when I say everybody is worshipping? Everybody has a pursuit that they think is worthy that they are wrapping their life around, all their time and energy. We all wake up and do something day after day after day. Here's what's really important: What's the thing on the throne behind the altar where we're sacrificing our life away? That's an important thing to figure out.

You would think it would be obvious to see what that thing is, but I actually don't think it's obvious all the time. So, how do we see it? How do we see what's on the throne? Well, we just have to color in the picture with some thinking, color in the picture of our personal worship. Good questions aid good thinking, so here are some good questions for us to color in this picture.

For all of us, in our personal worship, we have a functional heaven (the thing that actually functions as heaven), a functional hell, and a functional altar. So, just ask some questions, start coloring in the picture. Functional heaven. What do I find myself daydreaming about? What excites me the most and why? The opposite of that...hell. What scares me the most? What are my nightmares and why? The *why* points in a direction, by the way. *Why* points toward the throne.

Then sacrifices, altar. Where am I sacrificing my time, my life away? Why am I doing those things? It's a helpful exercise for all of us to walk through for ourselves. Maybe not fun. Maybe it's fun. Maybe you like the answers to those questions. I don't know. To make it a little bit more vibrant, I'm going to walk us through this with what I think is the predominant idol in America in 2023. I think it'll make it a little more vibrant for us.

I think the idol sitting on the throne of our culture is... I'm going to call it *personal pleasure*. I had it put to me like this one time. I was doing youth ministry right out of college in Gainesville, Florida. There was this kid who was new to America from Nepal. He said in the most innocent way (he was brand-new to America), "Hey, Nate, in Nepal, our main virtue is hard work." He wasn't trying to be mean. He said, "In America, your main virtue is fun." *Ding! Ding! Ding!* He saw it right. He got here and saw it.

Okay. I'm calling it *personal pleasure*. If that's on the throne, what does heaven look like? What are we dreaming about? Oh my goodness. It could be all kinds of different things. Maybe it's dreaming about your next vacation, the next thing that's going to help you enjoy yourself. Maybe the dream is as big as "I can't wait to get the kids in bed, sit on the couch, watch my favorite show, eat a bowl of ice cream, and scroll on my phone to buy more stuff." Right? Kind of a silly example. Kind of a real example.

Honestly, guys, I think this type of stuff gets people through their lives. Like, dreams of the evening getting people through their days; dreams of the weekend getting

people through their weeks; dreams of retirement getting people through their lives. If all we are solving for in all of that dreaming is how we can enjoy ourselves as much as possible... It's just pointing in a direction, right?

Okay. Functional heaven. Functional hell? We don't have to talk about that forever. It's just the opposite. Maybe it's financial strain. "I don't have enough money to afford the things that are going to let me enjoy myself." Or maybe it's people needing you. That's one. You hear this these days. It's crazy. You get these newlywed couples, and they're like, "We don't want to have kids."

"Why don't you want to have kids?"

"I'll lose all my free time."

True. You will lose all your free time if you have kids. That's totally true. That's a threat to your personal pleasure in the short run. Well, that leads us to the third one. What gets sacrificed? Threats get sacrificed. If all you want to do is enjoy yourself to the max (that's number one in your life), your kids are annoying you to death, and you can't stand your wife, the altar demands some blood. Right?

A lot of missed opportunities with wife and kids dripping down that altar in front of personal pleasure. A lot of family blood on that altar. All right. Threats get sacrificed. What else? Most obviously is time, just a lot of time, a lot of time trying to get entertained and enjoy ourselves.

Guys, I went down the rabbit hole a little bit. It's a scary place down there. It's interesting, though. Follow me here. How many hours a day do you think the average American watches TV? I couldn't find a consensus number, but *three* is the conservative. It's between three and four hours for the average American.

Social media usage for the average American: 2 hours and 14 minutes a day. So, we're at 5 hours and 14 minutes. Video games for the average American, not average teenage boy (this one was interesting to me), is one hour a day. Ladies, I hate to break it to you. The gender split on video games is 52 percent male and 48 percent female. So, you're probably not playing *Call of Duty* with a headset on. Maybe you're playing Candy Crush or something. I don't know what you guys are playing.

In any event, we have 6 hours and 14 minutes a day, 43 hours a week (because no weekends), and then (this is mind-blowing), in a 75-year life, for the average American, 19 years (no sleep) in those three categories. We're just sacrificing our lives away, trying to get entertained.

Some of you guys weren't quite sure if this personal temple was a real place when I started, and where you currently find yourself is standing guard at the door. Like, "Stop threatening that throne with that example." Am I saying all this is bad? No, I'm not. Guys, honestly, I almost didn't even do this section, because I don't want you to leave here and hear me incorrectly and be like, "He said that God doesn't want me to have any fun." I'm not saying that.

Rest and relaxation are gifts from God. They totally are. Rest is part of the created order...day seven. I'd argue some of that is not restful, but in any event, there's a place. There's totally a place for it. But at 43 hours a week, we just have to be honest. It has gone from rest and relaxation to religion. It's gone from a good thing to a god thing, an ultimate thing.

You're like, "Okay. Fair enough. Then what's the number? How many hours a week is appropriate?" I don't know. It's less than 43, it's more than zero, but that's not the best question. Here's the best question...*Who's on the throne?* The number points in a direction. It just tells you what's happening. The most special thing to you on the throne governs the numbers. That's how it works. Thrones govern.

So, Paul looks around, and he sees a city full of people wasting their time (step 1). He sees the idols, and he goes to step 2. He feels provoked. We're still in verse 16. A lot is happening in verse 16, a short little verse. Let's look at that verse again. ***"...his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols."***

Here's a dangerous question. You're like, "Didn't we just ask dangerous questions?" All right. Here's another dangerous question. How do you feel when you see someone running after bankrupt things, when you notice it? I know you know the right answer. What's the real answer? Don't think about everybody. Just think about one person far from God and close to you, your one, a close family member.

I don't think we always feel provoked, so here are some other categories we might feel sometimes. Maybe we feel nothing. Maybe we're just too concerned with our own stuff. We feel nothing. Maybe we feel jealous. Maybe you're like, "Man! I wish I could do that. That looks kind of fun. I wish I was going to the Bahamas with my girlfriend this weekend, doing stuff. That looks fun."

Hear me. It's not wrong to be tempted, but just know what's happening. Here's what's happening. An idol is saying, "I'm fun. I'm fun. I'm fun," and it's lying to you. These idols seem fun as a fantasy, but they get mean when they manifest. So, maybe you feel jealous. Maybe you feel superior. That's a category. I struggle with this one too. I mean, I do, just to be honest, if we're being honest.

For some perverse reason (I don't know why), we kind of like how it feels to gaze down from our moral high ground and see somebody else flailing around, running hard after an idol. We're like, "At least I'm not like *that* guy." You feel good. I mean, did Paul do this? Did Paul get to Athens and say, "Pfft! These dumb Athenians. What are they thinking wasting all their time? Ridiculous!" No, he didn't do that.

We hear this, and it sounds something like this: "Oh man! Do you see the way she dresses? She must be so insecure. I feel bad for her." Do you? I don't know. It's sad. Or maybe *this* one. How about this one? This is real. "All of these people these days think boys can be girls and girls can be boys. Ridiculous!" I agree with you, but why are we having the conversation?

Are we having this conversation so we can feel good about ourselves, because we have to figure it out, and so we can disassociate with this other group of people? Or conversely, are we having the conversation so we can figure out a way to get Jesus through the door and onto the throne for real people who are really confused who are usually really, really young, bowing their knees and making massive sacrifices...massive sacrifices in front of an idol that's lying to them, saying, "Your sexual [whatever] is going to free you"? It's lying to them.

Are we looking to damn people or are we looking for a door? If you feel superior, you're not going to go looking for a door. You won't. Quite the opposite, actually. If you feel jealous, you won't go looking for a door, and if you feel nothing, you won't go looking for a door, but if you feel provoked (step 2), you'll move naturally to step 3: go looking for a door.

Okay. How do you feel provoked? I can't make myself feel something. How do you feel provoked? Really important. This is how it happens. You have to have seen and experienced and, I would say, be experiencing the joy and freedom of Christ Jesus on the throne right here. You have to know what it's like that he's the greatest treasure and joy. That's how you feel provoked.

Let me tie this to an analogy. It'll be a little clearer, I think. You and I, like everybody else, have been using maps on our phones for years now, especially in a new place. That's how you get around. Probably Google Maps. I mean, if you use Apple Maps, it's the wrong thing to use.

So, you're using maps on your phone. It's how you get around in a new town. It's amazing. You can find restaurants. You know the town better than the locals. You can make a reservation for the best restaurant through the app. Amazing. Oh, the joy and freedom of life with Google Maps. Right?



Then your dad comes to town to visit you from out of town, and you notice printed out on his dashboard are some directions from MapQuest.com. Do you guys remember that? Stapled together, printed on his dashboard. You're like, "Oh my goodness!" precisely because you've experienced something so much better. You feel provoked, and you're like, "Dad, there's something out there that's so much better. Let me share with you the gospel, the good news of Google Maps."

Now, you won't feel provoked if *you* use MapQuest.com printed-out, stapled-together directions yourself. In the same way, you won't feel provoked if you think all this stuff the world is running after is the best stuff. You're running after that same stuff. You won't feel provoked, in other words, if you're an idolater yourself.

Paul feels provoked because he knows Jesus really well, and he knows the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus. He moves naturally into verse 17. I realize we were in verse 16 for a while. There's a lot happening in verse 16. He moves to verse 17 and finds the door. That's step 3: find the door.

It says, ***"So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there."*** This word *reason*... This is the second time it has occurred in this passage. I didn't point out the first time. It's a little bit of an interesting word to occur twice.

The Greek word is *dialegomai*. The only reason I bring that up is because it's the same root word for our word *dialogue*. What's he doing by reasoning? He's having a dialogue. He's having a conversation. There is preaching, but there's also listening. There's proclamation and paying attention. He's asking real questions. He's trying to get to know the people.

It's very important that we do this as well, as we go looking for doors. This is how you look for a door. It's also how you disarm the doorkeeper. If they know you care about them, they'll warm up to you, obviously. That makes sense. So, he's doing that. He's paying attention. Verse 18:

***"Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, 'What does this babbling wish to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.'***

***Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. So Paul, standing in the midst***

*of the Areopagus, said...*" He gets his moment. What's the door he chooses to walk through? Very interesting. What an interesting guy. Look at the door he uses.

***"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."***

What's the door? It's a pagan altar. Are you kidding me? This guy is such a pro. He uses a pagan altar as a doorway for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Athenians have all of these manifold worship practices they are doing, and just in case they've missed a god out there, they've created a bonus altar with a blank space so that if he comes and shows up and is mad, like, "Hey, you guys don't worship me," they'll be like, "No, no, no. We do worship you. What's your name? We'll just write it right here. See? This one is for you. We do worship you." It's ridiculous.

Paul uses the parts of the culture that are searching for God in the wrong places as a doorway for the gospel. It's like "worthy pursuit, wrong location." That's what he's doing. Paul is such a pro. I mean, this is next-level stuff. What might we learn that a good door looks like from this altar to the unknown God? Well, I think the altar is saying two things about the Athenians that good doors usually say, actually.

There are two confessions it's making. Here's the first confession: "What we're doing isn't working." The existence of the altar says that. Think about it. Why even build the altar in the first place? They must have had a sneaking suspicion that all this other stuff was not working. "We've got to reach out. We've got to do something else. There's got to be something more. It's not working."

It's not usually overt, but if you sense that someone is like, "Dude, all this stuff...it's just not working out..." Door! Pay attention. Door. So, they have this altar as a cultural confession. We have some cultural confessions too, interestingly. I think this is a formula, by the way, for writing a top, massively popular song. Sometimes it's overt, actually. Like, you have U2, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." That's the formula. Usually it's more subtle. "I Fall Apart," Post Malone. Same formula.

Taylor Swift uses it a lot. What's her formula? "The romance isn't working. Relationship isn't working. Spill my guts. Write a song. Huge hit." Who knows? Maybe Travis Kelce solves it for her. I don't know. We'll get more "Love Story." Anyway, I digress. The point is if you hear somebody say, "What I'm doing isn't working" or sense that that's happening...door. Pay attention. Door.

Second point. Good doors usually will have this type of confession attached: "I'm scared." Think about it. Why build the altar? Because they're afraid there's something

else out there that has power over them that they need to do something to appease. They're scared.

Guys, we see this all the time. I mean, I don't even need to be very colorful with my language. People are anxious. People are scared. It bubbles up in times of suffering and tragedy. We have to pay attention. Those are doors when those things happen. Here's a good thing we need to remember about doors. It's very important. They go away. There's a door for a while, and then it turns back into a wall.

Think about it. You have a friend. Maybe their mom just died, or something, tragically, out of the blue. That's a door in that moment. They're kind of letting you into that a little bit. That's a door. But if you wait four, six, or eight months, they've buried it. They don't want to talk about it anymore. They're busy doing other stuff. Wall.

So, if you're wise enough to see the door...you get all the way to step 3, and you see the door...you have to knock on it. If you get all the way to step 3 and don't have the boldness to get to step 4, it's totally useless. You have to have the courage to knock on the door. Let me just be real. I think a lot of us are in this precise moment with our ones right now. This is exactly where we're at.

We see the things they're running after that don't satisfy. We feel provoked. That's why they're our one. They've let us into something. As I'm saying it, you know exactly what it is. There's a door. You see it, and you're thinking about it, and you're praying about it, and you're thinking about it and praying about it and thinking about it and thinking about it and thinking about it and thinking about it.

Do you know what it's time for? It's time to knock. It's exciting to knock. It could be an exciting week for a lot of you guys. It's time to knock. That's the next step. That's what Paul does. Step 4: knock on the door. How do you knock on the door? This is how you do it. We'll see what Paul does in just a second. You have to be able to blow people's minds with the truth about Jesus and demonstrate that he's so much better than the bankrupt stuff.

Sometimes it's natural. Sometimes it's hard work, actually, to figure out how to do that. It's worth it. Even if it's hard work, it's worth it to figure out how to do that. You have to be able to show that life with Jesus is the best life. That's why it's really important that your life looks a certain way. You can't be out there saying, "Life with Jesus is amazing" and simultaneously be a perpetually grumpy person.

You'll be like Charles Barkley on the WeightWatchers commercials. Remember those 10 years ago? Big ol' Charles Barkley on WeightWatchers commercials. Unbelievable. It's like, "Dude, I hear you, but I can also see you. I don't think I believe you. I'm not

buying it." Don't be Charles on WeightWatchers commercials. Anyway, let's look at what Paul does here. In verse 24, he starts blowing their minds.

***"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man..."*** In other words, you don't design him; he designs you. The gods of the Athenians, our gods today... They're only as big as our imaginations. God doesn't come out of our imagination. No. We came out of *his* imagination. If he's small enough to be designed by us, he's not big enough to be worshiped by us. No, he's the designer. The designer gets the worship.

He keeps on going. Verse 25: ***"...nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."*** In other words, you don't have to provide for him; he provides for you. The Athenians are working and working and working and working to try to please their gods.

We're doing the same thing. They're never satisfied. They're hungry. They stay hungry. There *is* blood on the altar, but we don't have to bring it. That's the amazing thing with *this* God. That's what Paul is saying. If he's small enough to be provided for by us, he's not big enough to be worshiped.

Verse 26: ***"And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place..."*** This one is a little bit harder. You're not in control; he's in control. He determines the boundaries. You're not in control; he's in control.

Well, it's scary or good. I don't know. If he's petty and vengeful, like the Athenians thought he was...scary. His total control is kind of scary. But if he's good... That's kind of a basic, foundational doctrine of God that Christians believe. If he's good, then that's good. But if you think about it for more than two minutes, it starts to get upsetting. Right?

It's like Pastor Kyle talked about last week. Why do good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people, like injustice? "You're in control. What's going on with that?" This one is kind of real for me, to be honest with you. I just had a good friend die a couple of months ago, the best man, out of the blue. Horrible. It's like, "God, why? That doesn't make any sense. I don't understand."

If he was small enough to be understood, he wouldn't be big enough to be worshiped. Can I take that medicine? Can we take that medicine? It tastes bitter on the tongue, but I've found that as I swallow it, it's the only thing that gives any peace, because in the end, we have to hold fast to the fact, the belief, that he makes all things new and he's justified in his judgments in the end on the last day.

Speaking of the end, let's get right to it. Verse 31: "**...he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.**" At this point, they kind of cut him off. Paul can't finish his sermon. Some believe. Some scoff. Most scoff, actually. They're like, "Paul, this is absurd. Are you kidding me? The resurrection of the dead?"

Guys, ultimately, in our conversations, we have to drive toward the absurdity and reality of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have to. It's a temptation to get dragged sideways in a conversation about all of the taboo things, like politics (somehow that's a religious conversation), sexual behavior, identity...all of these other things.

All that is a little bit wasted until we establish "Is Jesus Christ the risen Lord and King?" Because if he's not, what are we even doing here? But if he is, then that King has a claim on your life, on my life, on everybody's life. I mean, that's what this says. He's the Judge.

So, here's what's vital. Here's what's really important. What's really important is that on the last day, when we see that Judge and we see the throne room in heaven, the temple in heaven, that that place looks like *this* place. It's really important that the King sitting on the throne in the center of heaven is the King sitting on the throne in the center of your heart. It's really important.

And guess who's not going to be revealed sitting on the throne in the center of heaven? You from the corner office, your bank account, your next vacation, or you on the couch. The King on the throne is so much more worthy than that stuff, so much more valuable. I mean, that joy and treasure compared to *this* stuff... We have to start treating him like it.

There's an altar in that throne room too, and that altar is filled with a sacrifice worthy of the King. Do you know what it's not satisfied with? Your goodness outweighing your badness based on your made-up metrics. No, no, no. He's way too holy for that stuff. You'd better be perfect or the blood on the altar had better be.

There's one door, and I'll stop being subtle. Jesus Christ said it himself. "I am the door." We enter through him by his blood on the altar, by his sufficient sacrifice (and only that is sufficient), to come to him to receive a judgment. And what is the judgment? That's a really important question. What is the judgment on the last day?

Well, for those of us who cling to him and believe in him and have made him King right here, here's the judgment for you: free, forgiven, welcome, redeemed. He's so generous to do that. Do you guys realize how generous that great of a King to do that

is? So generous. He's amazing. Would you guys bow your heads and close your eyes with me?

Lord, you're amazing. You're so holy. God, some of us have thought really hard about it and dreamed really hard about it. Some of us have not thought and dreamt about it nearly enough, but no matter how hard we think and dream about how great you are, when we see you on that day, we won't have gotten halfway there. You will blow our minds. It'll be so much better than we could have possibly imagined.

All of those idols will be revealed, too, to be totally bankrupt. God, help us get to the end of them sooner rather than later. Help us all to taste and see, to take our next step. Help us to be able to demonstrate to our friends and neighbors how much more worthwhile you are. You're so amazing. You're the King. You're on the throne, and you get the worship. We pray this in your name, Jesus, amen.