

Christ and the City (Part 1)

Acts 17:16-23

Our home is Berlin! The city that was described by a mayor as "poor but sexy."

Young, hip, and experience-hungry people from all over the world come here – a melting pot for all kinds of influences. And we're right in the middle of it.

Just a few years ago, this was still no man's land, the dividing line between East and West Germany, at the intersection of the divide in Germany. World-famous clubs and bars are in a small radius around us. Strongholds of left-wing autonomists and criminal clans are not far from us. Berlin is a special place.

The longer we're here, the more we realize that the city stands completely contrary to our teachings. While we hold to marriage between man and woman, the city hall hoists the rainbow flag. While we preach Christ's love and justice, we live in the most criminal city in Germany. While we hold the Bible as the only authority, we stand in the midst of a society that places tolerance, diversity, and progressiveness on a pedestal.

Many Christians say to themselves: "We don't belong here!" Churches move to the outskirts, where a more conservative lifestyle is still more welcomed. But the question remains:

How do we reach the city?

Is church planting doomed to fail here? Or does the Bible give us clues on how we can have a positive influence?

Paul shows us in **Acts 17:16-23** how he reached the world city of Athens with the gospel – and gives us three tools to reach the city:

1. With a Christian Worldview

While Paul waits in Athens, his spirit is provoked within him as he sees the city full of idols. The city – the intellectual center of antiquity – impresses him, but it is full of false worship. Historians confirm:

"In Athens it is easier to find an idol than a person." (Petronius)

"Athens has more idols than all of Greece." (Pausanias)

Paul's reaction is not sinful anger, but an expression of a **Christian worldview**. He knows God's command:

"You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3)

Idolatry is an abomination before God – and yet man repeatedly falls precisely here. Idols exist today too: career, entertainment, status, autonomy, freedom – anything that captivates our heart more than God.

"An idol is anything or anyone that captures our heart, mind, and affections more than God." – Bigney, Gospel Treason

Berlin is – like Athens – a city full of idols. But we don't meet it **through adaptation**, but by standing against it with a clear, Christian worldview.

2. With Christian Distinctiveness

When Paul speaks in the marketplace, he encounters the philosophers – Epicureans and Stoics. Some sought pleasure and peace ("ataraxia"), others self-control and stability. Both reject him:

"What does this babbler want to say?"

Paul is considered uneducated, his message foreign – and that is precisely **the** nature of the gospel. It is **different**, not classifiable, not adaptable.

Christianity remains foreign because it proclaims an eternal truth: There is only **one gospel**, which is the same everywhere – in Berlin, Munich, or Athens.

"They are in the world, but not of the world." (John 17:16)

The gospel calls for distinctiveness. For Paul, this was not an obstacle, but precisely what fascinated people – they wanted to hear what was "new."

3. With Christian Truth

Paul is brought before the Areopagus – the council that decided on new teachings. He begins respectfully:

"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious."

He meets them where they are: at their religiosity. He mentions their altar "to the unknown god" and uses it as a **point of contact for the gospel**.

"What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."

The Athenians are religious, but without knowledge. They have seen traces of God in creation, but have not recognized the Creator. Paul reveals the truth to them: There is **one** true God – and to know him means eternal life.

"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3)

Evangelism means revealing **Christian truth** – making the unknown God known.

Conclusion

Can the city still be reached? Does church planting have a future here?

Yes!

Thanks to God's help, we have tools to be light even in corrupted places. In the dark streets of the city, the light of the world can shine when we encounter it:

- With **Christian worldview**
- With **Christian distinctiveness**
- With **Christian truth**