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Paul in Athens , The Unknown God

Scripture: Acts 17:16-34

Theme: We can share Jesus with people who don't know Him yet

1st-3rd Grade (Ages 6-8)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

This Sunday school lesson explores how Paul boldly shared Jesus with people who didn't know Him yet, even in a city like Athens where many worshiped idols and statues. When Paul saw altars dedicated to an "unknown God," he knew this was a chance to tell others about the true God they were worshipping in ignorance. In Acts 17:16, 34, Paul didn't shy away from speaking to the Athenians, he explained the love and justice of Jesus in a way they could understand, showing how faith isn't just about following rules but about knowing and trusting God. Kids will learn that God wants everyone to know Him, and they can share the good news in their own lives too, just like Paul did! The key verse, Acts 17:23, teaches that even when people worship something they don't fully understand, God invites them. Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

Bible Story

One day, as Paul and Silas were walking through Athens, they noticed something strange. The city was filled with beautiful statues, and everywhere they looked, people were worshiping idols, wooden and stone images of animals and gods they had never heard of. Even in the center of the city, there was an altar with an inscription that said, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' The people didn't know what to worship, but they still honored the objects they had made.

Paul stood up and looked at all the idols. He smiled and said to the crowd, 'Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in your ways. You worship many gods, but you don't really know who you are worshiping.' He then pointed to the altar and added, 'This altar says 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' You don't know this God, but He is the One who made the world and everything in it. Since you are ignorant of Him, I will tell you about Him.' The people listened, curious and a little confused.

Paul explained that God is not like the idols, they are empty and cannot help people. Instead, God is a living, loving Creator who wants to show kindness to everyone. He said, 'The God who made the earth, the skies, and everything in them is not worshiped like these things. We should not worship what we can see or touch, but instead, we should worship the One who made everything.' Some in the crowd began to listen, while others sneered, thinking Paul was just another strange teacher.

One man named Dionysius, who was a judge in Athens, listened carefully. Later, he invited Paul to his home to discuss God more. Paul shared the Bible stories of Jesus, showing how He was the promised Savior who died for people's sins. Dionysius and others who believed were encouraged to meet with Paul regularly. Meanwhile, a group of women, including a noble woman named Junia, also joined their faith. They were excited to learn that God had not forgotten them, He wanted to save them too!

As Paul preached, more people heard his message. Some believed, while others laughed or argued. But Paul kept sharing the truth: 'The God who made the world is not afraid of us or the empty idols we worship. He wants all people to find Him and know His love.' With this, Paul and his companions left Athens, ready to share the good news wherever they went.

Key Verse

Acts 17:23 , 'For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship , and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.'

The key verse (Acts 17:23 , 'For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship , and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.') calls us to respond to God's truth.

Prayer Focus

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for this lesson on Paul in Athens. You show showed us that God is everywhere, even to people who don't know You. Lord, please help us to speak Your truth with kindness. Will You make our words c clear and our hearts brave? We pray that we can share Jesus with everyone, just like Paul did. Give us strength to listen and love. Help us see the go good in all people. Amen.

>> Missions Spotlight

In secular Western Europe and North America, many people have 'unknown gods' , they believe in something but don't know who God really is. Paul's approach in Athens gives us a model for sharing Jesus in post-Christian cultures.

-> To the Cross

Paul found an altar to 'an unknown god' and used it as a bridge to share the Gospel. He told the Athenians that the God they didn't know was the God who made everything , and that He proved it by raising Jesus from the dead. The cross was his climax.