

# **Ridin' High Cowboy Church**

**8771 FM 35**

**Union Valley/Royse City, TX**

**Pastor: Steve Bishop**

## **May 15, 2016 – A Great Place to Start**

Pastor told us a story of a co-worker who said, “I think religions started because people are afraid to die, and they want to feel better about family who die.”

Everything has a starting point. You had a starting point (some planned, some by accident, but we're glad you're here)...first love – had a starting point even though you were 9 and it was your cousin – most people grew out of it (depending, of course, on which state you grew up in ☺).

FAITH also has a starting point.

The Bible is a hard place to start, because it's hard to read, and to apply it to your job, your marriage...

Sometimes as an adult we need a new starting point, because the faith we had as a kid got torn up through the teenage, college or adult years. Because the faith you had as a kid was built on the stories you were told about the Bible and about how God acts, but it seemed like those things lost their meaning when temptations and life got tougher.

Then add preachers who don't all say the same things ... it gets really confusing.

The New Testament was put together about 300 years after the life of Jesus, so people became Jesus followers not because the Bible said to, but because they heard about what Jesus said and did, many of them lost their lives for what they heard and saw.

We are going to read a story from scripture about how Paul who followed Jesus not because of what he read, but because of the people he knew who knew Jesus (the apostles who had encountered Jesus).

He is wandering around in Athens, Greece, waiting for friends...

***Acts 17 16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.*** (The people of Athens were

religious but they were uncertain of who the real one was.) **17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18 A group of Epicurean (life is a party and when you die that's it) and Stoic (if we think about it long enough we will come up with who the real God is) philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods."** (They thought Paul was trying to add another God to the list.) **They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.** (Paul had taught them about Jesus coming into the world and was crucified on a cross and then rose from the dead and was seen by people who were still alive and could be talked too.)

**19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus,** (a court that decided if a god could be talked about and if that god got a statue or not) **where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." 21 (All Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) 22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 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 people of Athens had a statue to every god they could think of, there was a god to keep kids safe, a god to make crops grow, a god to help you have more kids, a god of the weather, etc. and they made one with an unknown name in case something bad happened that they didn't have a god for, they could say, "Oh! This is your statue, we knew you were there we just didn't know your name!" A just in case god!

We do the same, you know people who are not very religious and they don't think about God much but they go to church on Easter and Christmas, go to confession once a year, make sure the kids go ... just in case he's real.

Middle of v23 **So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. 24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.** (God is bigger than your religion, he can't fit in your temples) I grew up in a church where it was called the "Lord's House" and fat preachers would say don't run in church, but if they read their bibles, they would know their body is the temple of God and they would be more religious if they ran around in the church and lost weight!

**25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.** (The Greeks and the Romans believed that every nation had their own gods, Paul is saying there is one God for all people) **27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'**

**29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by human design and skill.** (Don't make your God so small)

**30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,** (have a change of thinking about how to approach God) **31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.** (everyone is accountable for this teaching) **He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."**

**32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead,** (they tore down all of their idols and worshipped Jesus) **No some of them laughed,** (Ok, this guy is a nut) **but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."** **33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed.**

Here is the point ... many people have had a bad experience in church from what you had to wear, to people who said one thing and did another, things that made you feel uncomfortable, that is religion.

Many people are reaching out for God and God reached back through Jesus Christ.

Religion asks the question, "Who is right?", the better question is, "Who is Jesus?"

Religion asks, "What do I have to do?"

A relationship with God asks, "What has Jesus done?"

Even cowboy church ... if we are not careful, can become a religious approach to God.

Think of the areas where you have decided this is the way to approach God and replace that with Jesus dying for your sins and rising again.

Homework ~

How and when did you begin your faith?

How well has your faith held up through the struggles of life?