

#3
GOD: SELF-SUFFICIENT, ALL-SUFFICIENT

Acts 17:16-34

Will you open your Bibles again to Acts chapter 17. It is not my purpose, this morning, to expound this passage, although it is a wonderful lesson in how to present the Gospel to people who have never heard of Christ. You can see as you look at the message, beginning with verse 22 and going down through verse 31, that about all that Paul does in this passage is to teach the people about God. He refers just very briefly to the Lord Jesus but not by name. He indicates that God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world "by that man that he hath ordained." ~~But~~ The point that I want you to see from this, and I trust it will be written upon all our hearts this morning, is that God was ^{at} the very heart of Paul's ministry and Paul's preaching. Several years ago, in fact a good many years ago now, J. B. Phillips, who has given us a paraphrase of the New Testament, wrote a book called Your God is Too Small. And while you and I might not agree with everything that Mr. Phillips says in that book, the note that he touches is a note that needs to be sounded in our day: ~~that~~ most of us have a conception, an understanding of God, that is far too small. ~~And~~ Consequently our lives show the effect of it. It was good to hear Leonard this morning, wasn't it ("How Great Thou Art"). ~~And~~ I am sure that most of us could go right along with him in the words, but there is always a danger isn't ^{that} there, when we know a hymn or a passages of Scripture, ^{we} you become so familiar that we can almost sing it without thinking about it, or repeat it without giving too much thought to it. Our familiarity often keeps us from getting the full impact of ^{it} that. ~~And~~ I trust that as Mr. Weeks sang to us this morning, "How Great Thou Art," that the Spirit of God used ^{it} that with all of us to make us realize us that God is far greater than any of us here this morning can possibly realize. ~~And~~ I am sure that when we get to heaven, then and only then, are we going to learn of the greatness of our God.

10 Now we have been thinking in the past few Sunday mornings when I have spoken of something of the character of God, coming to know God in a more intimate and understandable way. ~~And~~ I believe the last time I spoke we were thinking together about the eternity of God,

and especially that expression in Psalm 90 where Moses declared, "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." Now this morning I want to direct your attention to the sufficiency of God, and the verse of this passage that I am thinking especially about is verse 25, where the Apostle Paul, in speaking to these Athenians, says, "Neither is worshipped ~~by~~ (that is God is not worshipped) with men's hands; as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." Now I have taken as my subject this morning, "God: Self-Sufficient and All-Sufficient." and In using those two expressions I have in mind in the first place what God is in His relationship to Himself. God being eternal obviously existed before there was any universe, therefore He is not dependent upon the things that He made, or He could have not had an eternal existence. So in Himself He is self sufficient. He doesn't need anything. I can't bring anything to God that He stands in need of. If none of us existed God, would continue to exist, because He is the self-sufficient One.

~~But~~ On the other hand, when you think of us, when you think of creation, we are utterly dependant upon God. We couldn't live a day without Him, because, instead of His being dependant upon us, we are dependent upon Him. All creation is dependent upon Him for "life, and breath, and all things." And, from the beginning of time to the end of time, this universe and every living creature (man and otherwise) who ^{have} ~~has~~ had a part of this ^{have} ~~has~~ been utterly and continually dependent upon God for "life, and breath, and all things." So as Paul preached this message he was pointing them to a self-sufficient God, who, nevertheless, was the all-sufficient One as far as His creation was concerned. So He is self-sufficient with reference to Himself. He is all-sufficient with reference to creation. ~~Now~~ This means among other things, as I have indicated, that He is self-sufficient because He is all fullness and all perfection. He can never be in need of anything. He is not lacking in anything. He can never lose anything that He has within Himself. As we have seen and will continue to see as we look at some of these Scriptural pictures of God, He does not change. He is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself like we are. He existed eternally by Himself, and the same is true

of Him now. So as Paul sought to teach the Athenians this about God, that we do not bring anything to God in order that He may continue to exist, he was simply teaching them what is repeated elsewhere in Scripture. For example, in Psalm 50 ~~in verse 11 and 12,~~¹³ the Lord is pictured as saying, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" And Psalm 145:15 and 16, David, who wrote this psalm, says, "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Now you see why the Bible is not only a revelation of God because you and I would never come up with the truth concerning God which is so wonderfully revealed to us in the Scriptures. Even Isaiah, who has a great deal to say ^{about God}, especially in the second part of that great prophesy, ~~to say about God~~, emphasizes this truth where he mentions that passage of Scripture, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth," ^{(Isa. 45:22).} and the reason that he gives for this is, "^{for} ~~because~~ I am God and there is none else." ~~So~~ God is so completely sufficient for us, that there is absolutely no need that can arise in your life or my life, there is no need that can arise in the universe, but what God is utterly sufficient to meet that need. ^P Now I spoke to you just briefly in introducing this about the communicable attributes ~~of God~~ and the incommunicable attributes ^{of God}. and ~~By~~ that, I was relating this to God's purpose to make us like Himself as a result of salvation. But as I pointed out earlier, there will always be ways in which we are not like God. We will never be Deity. And so while God is self sufficient, He does not make us self sufficient. In fact He does just exactly the opposite. He so works in the hearts of His people that they realize more and more their complete dependence upon Him. I was talking to the young people in our college class this morning about the primary ministry of the church which is to teach the Word so that Believers will grow and our ministry to the world and to each other is a result of that. Most of you are familiar with this. But you know, somehow we have the idea ~~(and~~ ^{perhaps} it is because we relate to our spiritual lives what we think of in connection with our natural lives, ~~because~~ as we grow up

in our families, ~~As~~ you see these dear babies who were dedicated this morning growing up, they gradually become more independent of their parents, ~~Their~~ their parents obviously won't have to take care of them in exactly the same way, in a year from now, that they do now. So we have been inclined to relate this to our Christian lives, that the more a person grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the more independent he becomes; independent of God's people; independent of help; and sometimes even in our thinking we feel that there might be some things that we don't have to depend upon Him for. If you read the Scriptures carefully, you will see that spiritual growth is not indicated by more independence of God but by more dependence upon Him, and you can see this in many of the people of our own congregation who have walked with the Lord for many years. The statements of greatest trust and greatest dependence upon the Lord will always come from the people who have known Him the longest, and have trusted Him the most. So God does not make us self-sufficient; God makes us dependent upon Him ~~who~~ who is all-sufficient. ~~And~~ When you start to think of this in connection with your Bible, it seems like all the Bible from Genesis to Revelation was written to convey this truth to us.

Now in the time that remains this morning I want to take just briefly some passages of Scripture, ~~and~~ There are literally, and I am not exaggerating, there are literally hundreds of passages that I could use for this, this morning, ~~and~~ It has been a little bit ^{of a} source of turmoil in my own heart to know what to include this morning and what to leave out, because this subject is so vast. But let's relate this, this morning, first of all, to the subject of salvation. Now if God is the all sufficient One, then this is to be seen in all that He does with people; ~~and~~ when you relate it to salvation it must mean two things. It must mean first of all, that He is the only One who can say this, and secondly, it must mean that He does everything that is necessary to save us. When Paul stood before those Athenians, his heart had been greatly exercised as he spent some time waiting for his coworkers there in Athens, and he had seen that the whole

city was given to idolatry, and then he saw this one altar that was built to an unknown god, and he took this as his point to introducing the subject of the Gospel, and telling them something about God. But when he says these things about the one who to them was the unknown god, and he begins to unfold these precious truths concerning God; that He is One Who can't be contained in temples; and He is One Who is not dependent on us but we are dependent upon Him; And He is the One Who has set the times; and He is the One Who has placed nations where they are; and He is the One Who has appointed the day in which He is going to judge the world; and He is the One Who has commanded all men everywhere to repent. Remember that when Paul speaks of God in this way, he is not indicating to the Athenians, "Now this is true of all of your gods but it is more true of this God Who to you is unknown that it is ^{to} any other god." Now, he wasn't saying that. He is saying that these things are true of the God of heaven and earth, and they are only true of Him. There is no one else who can be described in these terms. So when it comes to salvation it is not surprising, is it, that when we read the passages that deal with salvation, the Bible never anywhere teaches that this is one way out of hundreds of ways that you can be saved; but consistent with an all sufficient God the Gospel, which they preached, was a Gospel that indicated that this is the one and only God who can forgive your sins and guarantee you a place in heaven. You know some of these verses as well as I do. When we were studying John 6 and the Lord taught and said some things that many in the crowd didn't like, John tells us at the end of that passage that from that time many of His disciples turned and walked no more with Him, and He turned to the twelve and said, "Will you also go away." And they gave that remarkable answer which indicates that they understood that they had something in the Lord Jesus Christ, and something in God the Father, that they couldn't get any place else, and you remember the response was, "Lord to whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life." And if you are going to turn away from the Lord Jesus, if you are going to turn away from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, where are you going to go to find what you are going to only get in Him. No one else ~~who~~ can


do for you what He can do. The Lord Jesus Himself said, "I am the way ["] (not a way); "no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." ^(John 14:6) The Apostle Peter, preaching in Jerusalem, said, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." ["] ^{Acts 4:12} And God does that work so completely, He is able to save to the uttermost, to the end, completely, by Himself, as a divine work, ["] seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for ^(us) ^{Heb 7:25}. Paul said, in one of His last Epistles, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." And so let me remind those of you who know the Lord, as well as those of you this morning who may never have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as **Savior**, that in coming to Him, and coming to the God of heaven and earth, you are coming to the only One Who can give us salvation; and He has provided this salvation in His Son for all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. ~~And~~ He does such a complete work of saving us, this all-sufficient God, that there is nothing left for you or for me to do.

^P Secondly, I want you to see this morning the relationship between this doctrine and all of the needs of our daily lives. What are your needs this morning? What are the problems that you have come to church with? Let me take you to what surely must be the most familiar passage in all the Bible. You could quote it with me and we go to it again and again. I guess I have used it hundreds of times at funeral services. But there isn't any reason why it should be relegated to funerals, ~~because~~ you and I need it every day. ~~and~~ David is the one who has given it to us, and you have guessed by now that I am talking about the 23rd Psalm. ~~And That~~ Psalm deals with the past, and the present, and the future. ~~and~~ You know it begins by saying, "The Lord is my shepherd," ^(notice we are thinking about an all-sufficient God) "I shall not want." Do you see what he is saying. Because God is what He is, and because He is my shepherd, whether you relate this to the Father or to the Lord Jesus Christ, because of what He is, there isn't anything that can possibly arise in my life by way of daily needs but what He

is more than sufficient to meet that need. "He leadeth me beside the still waters. ~~He~~ th restores my soul; ~~He~~ th leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." ~~Why?~~ "For thou art with me." ~~Now~~ David couldn't have said that about any companion that he had. His closest friend, Jonathan didn't fit that pattern. But he is talking about an all-sufficient God. ~~and~~ Whether you speak of the valley of death as the experience of death itself, or living in this world which is characterized by death, it means that you can go through the most devastating experiences that you will ever face in this life, and you have no need to fear any evil, because you have One with you who is all sufficient, who has promised that He will never leave you or forsake you. That's great truth isn't it. So that David concludes by saying, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," because He never runs out of what He has, "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

~~P~~ Let me speak of a passage of Scripture that is closely related to that. "Psalm 23, as I understand it, speaks more in terms of the routine experiences of our daily lives, but you know there are some Psalms which speak of special trials and special troubles which come to us. Now I have trials and troubles that are different from yours. ~~Now~~ ~~We~~ might have some that are the same, but God deals with us in different ways. ~~And~~ He deals with us as He sees fit to deal with us, ~~But~~ here again suddenly a special need can come up. Suddenly I am thrust into a special trial. Suddenly I am overwhelmed with grief or a circumstance that I can't control. It is above the normal routine of all of the needs that I have day after day. ~~And~~ I don't think to my dying day that I will ever forget the president of Moody Bible Institute, who stood on this platform probably 5 or 6 months before he went to be with the Lord, ~~I tried to get him to stay over for Sunday to preach for us,~~ Dr. William Culbertson, ~~and~~ ~~He~~ stood here preaching at Multnomah's commendement (I think it was October or November of that year that he was with the Lord) and he knew that he was dying when he was here with us. I have the tape of his message and he spoke on the 46th Psalm, ~~and~~ I never

will forget that marvelous way in which that deep voice of his rolled out with those words, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea; thou the mountains swell," and you know how the Psalm goes and then the psalmist comes down to the point where he speaks of the fact that, "the Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge." and At the end of the Psalm the psalmist says, "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." I was talking to Dr. Culbertson down at Multnomah after the service was over and telling him how much I regretted the fact that he couldn't be with us on the Lord's day to minister here and he said, "Well, Dwight I am not kidding myself, I know exactly what's going on. And I know that it looks now like the days of my ministry are coming to an end." But he said, "I have no complaints with the way that the Lord has seen fit to deal with me. He has been all that I have ever needed." We are inclined to fear the future aren't we. I am sure all of us have wondered at one time or another, maybe it is almost a constant anxiety with some, how is it that I am going to go to heaven. Am I going to be transported with the saints as I hope or am I going to go through some prolonged illness, some great trial, what is it going to be. Oh how wonderful to know that we have an all-sufficient God. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved. God shall help her, and that right early." So that you and I, as we look to the future, ~~we~~ don't know what it holds for any one of us. ~~But~~ Isn't it wonderful to know that nothing can possibly arise, but what our God is sufficient.

 Now Then I want you to think in terms with me this morning of that special trial that was given to the Apostle Paul. And you know it was given to him to keep him humble. He said, "lest I should be exalted above measure." ^(2 Cor 12:7) And some way he was transported to the third heaven and ~~he~~ saw things that it was not permitted for him to make known to us. ~~But~~ the very fact that he had this experience, and Paul being a human as he was, would

certainly have served to create a feeling that he was above others because they had not had that experience. ~~And~~ So there was given to him a thorn in the flesh, ^{and} he went to the Lord and he prayed three times that it might be taken away. Some of ^{us} down at the Bible Memory Camp were talking about this, and ^{it} reminded me of the person a few years ago ^{with whom} I was discussing this passage of Scripture ~~with~~, and the person said, "You know what was wrong with the Apostle Paul and why he had to keep his thorn in the flesh?" And I said, "No, why, ~~what~~ was it?" This person said, "Because he didn't pray four times instead of just three." And I said, "Do you know why he didn't pray four times?" because he might have. The Bible tells us ~~because~~ He answered him after the third time. And God said to him I am not going to take that away, but ^{My} grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." So Paul said, ^(2 Cor 12:9) ~~all~~ right, if that's the way it has to be it has to be." Is that what he said? No! He said, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, ~~that~~ the power of Christ may rest upon me; for when I am weak then am I strong." ^(2 Cor 12:9-10) That's not the language of men. That's the language of a man taught of God. A man who has learned the ways of God and who doesn't mumble and grumble because of the way God has seen fit to deal with him. ~~Because~~ The Apostle Paul evidently came to the place where he looked upon every trial, every testing, as an opportunity for God to make known the fact that He was the all sufficient God. Read his letter to the church at Phillipi and you would never believe that he was in prison. Full of joy and rejoicing; preaching the Gospel where he had never otherwise had the opportunity to do so; and satisfied that God was right in all of His ways; saying at the end of the book a testimony not to the greatness of the Apostle Paul but to the greatness of his God. "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." ^(Phil 4:11) "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." ^(Phil 4:13) ~~And~~ You see the Lord brings us into these difficult circumstances, not because He likes to see us miserable. — He is a God of compassion, infinite compassion and mercy — but ^{because} you and I are so self-sufficient, ~~inclined to be so self-sufficient~~ and so independent, that the Lord has to bring us down and put us in difficult circumstances so that He

can teach us how wonderful He is.

How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord
is laid for your faith in His excellent Word.
What more can He say than to you He has said
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled.

Fear not I am with thee oh be not dismayed
I, I am thy God and will still give thee aid
I'll strengthen thee, help thee and cause thee to stand
upheld by my righteous omnipotent hand

When through the deep waters I call thee to go
the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress

When through firey trials thy pathway shall lie
My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply
The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design
thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

Then a verse we don't often sing.

'En down to old age, all my people shall prove
My sovereign eternal unchangable love
And when hoary hair shall their temples adorn
Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be born.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to his foes
That soul though all hell should endeavor to shake
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

How thankful this morning I am that I can proclaim to you an all-sufficient God. What a marvelous God we have. More than all that you and I will ever need for all of the difficulties we can possibly face in this world. ~~And~~ Let's love Him. Let's trust Him. Let's open our hearts to Him, and let's trust Him to use the trials and testings that He brings into our lives to teach us as we could never know in any other way how completely sufficient He is to meet every need. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." If you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior this morning, you will never find in any one else what can only be found in Him. ~~And~~ I would urge you to trust Him as Savior, that you may know the joys that many of us here this morning know because He is our Lord and our God.