

...where ALL PEOPLE...
The Vision of Grace Hill, Pt. 2
Acts 17:16-34

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I. PRAYER

- i. Would you give us eyes to see every single person on this planet the way that you see them? Would you give us the heart of compassion for every single person on this planet that you have?

II. INTRODUCTION

a. My family moved from Shreveport, LA to Herndon, VA when I was 5 years old.

- i. So, Herndon is essentially my home town but I had a southern family and lived in the south long enough to pick up a fantastic southern accent as a kid before Northern Virginia took it away from me.
 - And as a kid, I wasn't quite old enough to understand that there were going to be pretty significant cultural differences between the deep south and Northern Virginia, which is not the south.
- ii. **And so, I'll never forget the day that we moved in to our house.**
 - And the next morning, my brother (who was 7 or 8) and I thought we'd go out to meet our new neighbors.
 - And so, we wake up early in the morning and I can still remember the moment that we knocked on our next door neighbor's house...the Hoffmans.



1. Gary answers the door in his robe...we clearly just got him out of bed.
 2. And all of the sudden, he's got two southern boys at his door just talkin' his ear off.
 3. "Well, good mornin'! We just wanted to come by and say hi. We are your new neighbors!"
 4. And he stares at us in the kind of way where the only sort of response you can muster up is blinking your eyes.
 5. Who are these strange boys from the south that just moved next to me and why are they knocking on my door at this hour?!?
- It seemed that things were a bit different in the south than up here in Northern Virginia.
- iii. Now, we actually ended up becoming great friends with the Hoffmans and all the neighbors on our street.
- b. But actually, when you think about it, there is a massive cultural difference when it comes to our interaction with our neighbors between now and just a few decades ago.**
- i. It's almost as if today, especially in our area of the country, if someone knocks on your door...you're immediately suspicious!
 - It's almost like you stop and try to figure out a way to scope out who is at your door without them noticing in case you decide to not answer the door and hope they just think no one is home.



- Now a days, if someone knocks on your door, it's either the UPS man or someone trying to sell you something.
 - Even we have gone door to door in the neighborhoods here in Herndon as a church and I bet just 5-10% of people actually answer their doors when you knock on them.
- ii. **It seems that we have become more fearful, more suspicious of the stranger nowadays.**
- It has become more and more comfortable to only interact with those who are familiar to us and avoid interaction with the stranger.
 - And I believe that God has commissioned the church not to avoid interaction with the stranger, but to welcome in, to love, and to befriend the stranger.

III. SERIES PLUG

a. This morning, we are going to continue in our sermon series on the Vision of Grace Hill Church.

- i. **Our vision is to be a church where all people can find joy in Jesus.**
- Last week, we spent the sermon talking about what we mean by the word church.
 - That's a loaded word and when we say we want to be a CHURCH where all people can find joy in Jesus, we need to define what we mean by church.
 1. So, if you missed that, be sure to go back and listen to that online.



- ii. But this morning, we want to spend some time on the next part of that vision statement.
 - We want to be a church where ALL PEOPLE can find joy in Jesus.
 - What do we mean by ALL PEOPLE?
 - What does it mean to be a church that is for ALL PEOPLE?
- iii. And to answer that question, I want us to go to Acts 17.

IV. ACTS 17:16-34

a. As always, let give you some context.

- i. Starting here in v.16, Paul is in Athens, Greece and he is waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him.
 - Paul was on one of his missionary journeys through the Mediterranean preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - And so, of course, while Paul is waiting in Athens, he decides he is going to do some preaching.
 - Both in the Synagogues and the Marketplace...eventually Paul would be invited by some philosophers to share his message at the Areopagus...a place where matters of religion and morality were debated.
- ii. And as we read this account of Paul evangelizing in Athens, we are going to see in the text a theology of ALL PEOPLE and how that theology impacts Paul's method of sharing the gospel.



b. Read Acts 17:16-34

- i. So, Paul preaches the gospel to these philosophers and we see at the end that some believed and were converted, others wanted to hear more, and I am sure others thought everything he was saying was crazy.
 - Now, there is so much we could pull out of this text...more than we have time for this morning.
 - So, as I said, I want us to discover this theology of ALL PEOPLE that is found here.
 1. And we are going to find in this text three truths about every single person on this planet.

c. Truth #1 – God made every single person.

- i. Read v.24-25.
 - See, Paul had taken notice of all the different idols in Athens that were made of gold, silver, and stone and were enshrined in these temples.
 1. And so, Paul makes the point that God is not made with human hands and he does not live in manmade temples.
 2. Rather, God is the one who made us.
 3. He is the one who has given us life and breath...we have not given Him life.
- ii. You know, I think it is easy for me to meditate on the beautiful truth that God has created me.
 - You know, you read these great prayers like Psalm 139:13-14 – *“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”*



1. And these Psalms are so encouraging because they remind us of how personally God knows us and how he was involved in every detail of our creation.

iii. But think about this.

- God made your neighbor.
 1. God made your boss at work and your co-workers.
 2. God made the pan-handler on the street.
 3. God made the terrorist plotting an attack.
 4. God made the soldiers hunting for them.
 5. God made the students who go to this school.
 6. God made the person sitting next to you.
 7. God made the Apostle Paul and the philosophers he was debating.
 8. God has made and given breath and life to every single person.
 9. God formed their inward parts.
 10. God knitted them together in their mother's womb.
 11. Each and every person is fearfully and wonderfully made.

iv. This automatically elevates each and every person's value and dignity dramatically in the eyes of the Christian.

- There is no one who is inconsequential. No one who is random. No one who is dispensable. No one we are not called to love. No one that is not worth fighting for.
- Every single person is someone God cares about and that leads us to truth #2.



d. Truth #2 - God places every single person.

i. Read v.26-27

- God has specifically and individually placed every single person geographically and chronologically...look at this in v.27...for the purpose of them finding God.
- God placed these philosophers in Athens at this time that they may hear the gospel from Paul.

ii. Think of your story...how did you first hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and come to faith?

- I came to know God because my parents taught me the Gospel.
 1. God placed me in my family in Shreveport, LA so that I might find him.
- There are people in this church who were not following Jesus and God placed them in Herndon, VA at the Herndon Festival walking past our Grace Hill tent where they would get a flyer.
 1. And lo behold that flyer informed them that there was a church meeting in a school within walking distance of their house.
 2. God placed them in that house at that time.
 3. God placed this church in Dranesville ES despite us wanted to meet here at that time.
 4. So, they came, they heard the gospel and started following Jesus.
- Where were you when you heard the Gospel and responded?
 1. Who did God place in your life?



2. What were the circumstances? What was the place?

3. Because it was all orchestrated by God.

iii. **So, think about this...**

- God has placed your neighbors.
 1. God has placed your boss at work and your co-workers.
 2. God has placed the classmates at your kids' school.
 3. God has placed the teammates on your kids' sports team.
 4. God has placed the people in your gym class.
 5. God has placed the people you interact with on social media.
- Listen, God has placed these people where they are SO THAT they might find Him.
 1. Hmm, if God has placed these people in the same path as you...and you know the Gospel...I wonder what might be the means through which these people find God?

iv. And we know God wants all people to find Him...because....

e. **Truth #3 - God calls every single person to repentance.**

i. **Read v.30-31.**

- The Bible is clear. Every single person on this planet will face the judgement of God.
 1. God has called them to repent of their sin.
- Paul puts it this way in **Romans 10:9-15.**

ii. **So, think about this...**

- Your neighbor will face the judgement of God.



- Your boss and your co-workers will face the judgement of God.
- The people you see everyday at the gym will face the judgement of God.
- They have been called to repentance and God has provided a Savior in Christ.
 1. But how will they believe the gospel unless they hear the gospel?
 2. And how will they hear the gospel unless someone tells them?
 3. And how will someone tell them unless God places them in the same path as someone who has been sent to tell them the good news???

f. This is our theology of ALL PEOPLE.

- i. God has made all people, He has placed all people, and He has called all people to repentance.
 - And the people of the church have been commissioned by God to be the ones who will see people through this lens.
 - God has called every single one of us to see the people around us in this way and to understand that God has specifically placed us and specifically placed them that they may hear the gospel.
- ii. Listen, there is no detour in your life, no circumstance, no setback that is not a part of God's plan to place you where he needs you.



V. HOSPITALITY

- a. **We see this in our text this morning, Paul understands this theology of ALL PEOPLE and he takes advantage of this specific opportunity in Athens.**
- i. Paul was only in Athens because that was as far as the ship he was riding would take him...and he was hanging out until Timothy and Silas arrived.
 - But to Paul, this was not a coincidence. Paul believed God placed him and these philosophers there, so he could preach the gospel.
 - ii. And as we look at Paul's methodology here in Athens, we find something really interesting.
 - Paul clearly was a student of their culture, was observant of their religion and beliefs and customs, and used that information to communicate the gospel in way that they could relate to.
- b. **And when we think about the culture that we live in today, as we mentioned before, we live in a culture that is suspicious of and uncomfortable around the stranger and prefers to be surrounded by the familiar.**
- Just go to the airport, ride the metro, walk in a crowd of people...everyone will have their nose in their phones and their headphones on not acknowledging anyone around them.



- i. And like Paul did in Athens, we need to be aware of the culture that we exist in and be strategic in how we communicate the gospel.
 - God will always use people who boldly preach in the street.
 - But, in our culture today, I don't believe door to door evangelism and street preaching is the most strategic way to effectively share the gospel.
- ii. Like Paul strategically reacted to the culture in Athens, we must do the same today.
 - And I am convinced that the most strategic way that we can share the gospel in our culture today here in Northern Virginia is through the regular practice of biblical hospitality.

c. See, last week, we talked about the practice of biblical fellowship.

- i. We studied Acts 2 and we learned that one of the marks of the early church was their devotion to fellowship.
 - And if you remember, that word fellowship is the word KOINOS in the Greek which is the word for common.
 - And we defined fellowship this way:
 1. *"The intentional use of one's own resources (i.e. time, money, home, etc...) to serve their brothers and sisters."*
 2. A true biblical church is one where every sees what they have as a means to love and serve their brothers and sisters in Christ.



3. We fellowship with those that we have all things in common with.
4. Because we share a belief in Christ and are a part of the same faith family, we have all things in common and we are commanded to spend time together and serve one another in biblical fellowship.

d. But we also see in Scripture, that the church is also called to biblical hospitality.

- i. Here is how I define biblical hospitality:
 - *“The intentional use of one’s own resources (i.e. time, money, home, etc...) to befriend and serve a stranger.”*
 - A stranger is someone who is different from you. You don’t have all things in common with a stranger like you do with your brothers and sisters in Christ.
 1. We tend to think of the word stranger as something is negative.
 2. But it’s not negative, it’s just a description.
 3. We serve our brothers and sisters through fellowship and we serve strangers through hospitality.
 - And the Bible calls us to both.
 1. Romans 12:13 - *“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”*
 2. Hebrews 13:2a - *“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...”*



- ii. And to give you a vision for what biblical hospitality actually looks like, I want to read a (long) quote from Rosaria Butterfield, one of my favorite authors, in her book “The Gospel Comes with a House Key.”¹
- “Radically ordinary hospitality is reflected in Christian homes that resemble those of the first century. Such homes are communal. They are deep and wide in Christian tradition and practice. As Christians we are a set-apart people, and we do things differently. We don’t worry about what the unbelieving neighbors think, because the unbelieving neighbors are right here sharing our table, and they are more than happy to tell us what they think.”
 - “Radically ordinary hospitality characterizes those who don’t fuss over different worldviews represented at the dinner table. The truly hospitable aren’t embarrassed to keep friendships with people who are different. They don’t buy the world’s bunk about this. They know that there is a difference between acceptance and approval, and they courageously accept and respect people who think differently from them. They don’t worry that others will misinterpret their friendship. Jesus dined with sinners, but he didn’t sin with sinners. Jesus lived in the world, but he didn’t live like the world. This is the Jesus paradox. And it defines those who are

¹ Butterfield, Rosaria. *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Crossway). Preface.



willing to suffer with others for the sake of gospel sharing and gospel living, those who care more for integrity than appearances.”

- “Engaging in radically ordinary hospitality means we provide the time necessary to build strong relationships with people who think differently than we do as well as build strong relationships from within the family of God... Radically ordinary hospitality shows this skeptical, post-Christian world what authentic Christianity looks like.”
- “Radically ordinary hospitality gives evidence of faith in Jesus’s power to save. It doesn’t get dug in over politics or culture or where someone stands on current events. It knows what conversion means, what identity in Christ does, and what repentance creates.”

iii. See, I agree with Rosaria Butterfield that in our post-Christian world where people are skeptical of what we believe, the evangelistic weapon that we must become skilled at wielding in sharing the gospel is the regular practice of hospitality.

- The regular practice of pursuing relationships with people who do not know Jesus and are different from us.
 1. Yes, this means befriending, serving, and loving people who think different than us.
 2. The moral and immoral.
 3. The rich and the poor.
 4. The straight and the LGBTQ community.
 5. The right and the left.
 6. The citizen and the immigrant.
- Having them in our homes.



1. Getting to know them. Getting to know their worldview. Caring about what they care about. Building a context so that you can speak the gospel into their life winsomely like Paul did in Athens.
- As a church, we must use hospitality with the expressed goal of turning the strangers around us into family.
 1. Our vision is to be a church where ALL PEOPLE can find joy in Jesus.
 2. Everyone is welcome at this church because we believe that all people can find joy in Jesus.
 3. From the most successful people according to the world...to those who have made a complete train wreck of their life.
 4. And God has placed this church where we are that all people might hear the gospel.
 - The word for stranger in the Bible is XENOS.
 1. And that is where we get the word XENOPHOBIA from.
 2. And although we might not be xenophobic in a racist way.
 3. But we have a xenophobic culture where we don't like strangers and people who think differently than us...and the church has an opportunity today in our culture to demonstrate that the Gospel of Jesus Christ obliterates that.

e. After all, this is what God did for us in and through Christ.

- i. Because of our sin, we were strangers to God.



- Not welcome in his Kingdom.
- Immoral, unclean.
- ii. **But God, in his mercy, sent Jesus to us.**
 - He took up residence with us.
 - Lived in our world.
 - Dined at the table of sinners.
 - And gave everything he had, his life, so that we might know and have fellowship with God.
- iii. **Don't you understand that your very salvation is due to the radical hospitality of God.**
 - Ephesians 2:19 - *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."*

f. And it is for this reason, that we are launching our Community Groups in September with the vision of being groups that practice hospitality together.

- i. Today, after the service, you'll have the opportunity to go into the lobby and sign-up for a Community Group.
 - Community Groups are groups we have that will meet in people's homes for the expressed purpose of biblical fellowship and hospitality throughout the week.
 - We are launching six groups
 1. (Listed in bulletin)
- ii. **And our desire is that these groups will be a source of not only fellowship but also where all of us are challenged to live lifestyles of hospitality.**



- Each of our groups will have a group leader along with a mission leader.
 1. And that mission leader will be asked to lead the group in practicing hospitality together, engaging with people whom God has placed near us so that they may hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- iii. And so, we are very excited to have groups start up again at Grace Hill Church and we encourage each and every person to sign-up and commit to being a part of a group.
 - You'll have the opportunity to sign-up after the service over the next three Sundays and groups begin the week of September 10.

VI. CONCLUDING APPLICATION

a. However, I want to close this morning by challenging all of us to evaluate our participation in biblical hospitality.

- i. Do we regularly seek to get to know our neighbors and other people we cross paths with?
 - Are we intentional with them? Do we seek to spend more time with them?
 1. Or do we give into the culture that says that strangers are scary and weird and you should stick with the familiar?

b. I think we all have different excuses for why we don't practice biblical hospitality.

- i. Maybe we say we're too busy.
 - Maybe we say that we don't have the right personality for it.



- Maybe we are just afraid to put ourselves out there and knock on a door or strike up a conversation.
- ii. **What is the reason that you have?**
 - What's the reason why this week, you won't make plans to invite a neighbor or a co-worker whom you don't know yet over for dinner?
- c. God personally created everyone we cross paths with. He has placed them in your path. He has called them to repent.**
 - i. And this morning, as I invite you to the table up front that has the Lord's Supper, I want God's radical hospitality in the bread and wine to be a motivation for you to invite people to your table.
- d. You are invited back to the table this week to be reminded of what Christ has done for you so that you are no longer a stranger to the family of God.**
 - i. Reminded of how Christ stepped out of the comfort of heaven into our world so that we might be saved.
 - ii. As you eat the bread, be reminded of the broken body of Christ and as you drink the juice, be reminded of His shed blood.
 - And ask the Lord to give you a love for the strangers around you and the desire to see them share this same meal with you as family.



e. If you are not a follower of Jesus, we ask you not to forward for the bread and juice but rather I want you to know that God has called you to repent of your sin.

- i. He has made you. And he has placed you in this service today that you might here the good news of Jesus Christ.
- ii. You will face the judgement of God but forgiveness is available to you in and through Jesus Christ.
 - Believe in Jesus and his death and resurrection and you will be saved.
 - And if you want to pray about that, please come find me after this sermon and we'll do that together.

f. Grace Hill, I'm going to pray and then let's share this meal together and enjoy the incredible hospitality of God.

VII. PRAY

