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ACTS

THE STORIES WE TELL

ACTS 17

I. HOW DO WE MAKE DISCIPLES?

- A. SNL Sketch – track team is struggling
 1. Coach – remember the plan – “run fast!”
 2. Start fast, then run faster, and at the end go really fast
 - a) F – fast, A – attitude, our attitude is fast, S – speed, our speed should be fast, T – team – we should be a fast team
- B. Similar to a Bob Newhart sketch
 1. Plays a psychiatrist – woman comes into his office and tells him about a fear she has of being buried alive in a box, whenever she starts thinking about it she starts to panic
 - a) She can’t go through tunnels or be in elevators or in a house – anything boxy
 - b) Bob Newhart diagnosis the woman with claustrophobia
 2. “I am going to say two words to you. I want you to listen to them very carefully. Then I want you to take them out of the office with you and incorporate them into your everyday life.”
 - a) Looks her in the eyes as she listens intently, and he yells “Stop it!”
 3. What other problems would you like to address? – as she begins to share destructive behaviors, he yells “Stop it!”
- C. Pastors and preachers can fall into this trap
 1. Make good choices, be a good person, be more compassionate, love God more, love others more
 2. Telling a team “score more points”, telling a class “answer the questions correctly”, telling a 16 year old “get behind the wheel and don’t hit anyone”
 3. Telling the church – “Go make disciples”
 - a) For the most part – there is a will, what’s missing is the way – the how
 - b) Paul expresses the dilemma in Romans 7 – “What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.
 - c) What a discouraging place to be and far too many people find themselves here
 - d) They want to make disciples – they want to be effective in the kingdom – they want to see lives changed and eyes opened – but they don’t know how
 4. Acts – the church in motion – the “how”

Acts 17:1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” 4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. 5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men

from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. 7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus." 8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. 9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. 10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. 13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. 14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

II. MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

- A. It's not enough for the church just to be moving
 - 1. It must be moving in the right direction
 - 2. ***1 Cor 9: 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.***
 - 3. All run but not all will. Some fight as one who beats the air.
 - a) When it comes to the question "How do we make disciples?" - there are ways that are simply ineffective. Going through the motions. From the outside there is activity, movement – but on the inside the church is dying.
 - 4. We all agree that world is broken, and the solution is Jesus – but we disagree on how we get there
 - a) A few of the most common
- B. Accusation
 - 1. The church's primary responsibility is to remind people they are going to hell
 - a) That is our primary message to the world – you are all a bunch of dirty, rotten scoundrels, and God is going to fry you
 - b) In its most extreme form they flat out lie about God – instead of "God hates sin," it is "God hates you."
 - 2. They find delight in God's judgement just like the sons of thunder
 - a) After a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, James and John asked "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" Jesus turned and rebuked them. and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.
- C. The other extreme is far more common today - Accommodation
 - 1. We don't mention sin, death, or judgement or anything that would make people feel uncomfortable
 - 2. Traced back to the 1960's the church was having a difficult time competing with rock concerts and music festivals – young people were being drawn away from the local church

- a) Innovative church leaders began offering more programs, entertainment – more features to draw crowds
- 3. So began this movement of drawing crowds by any means necessary – the end justifies the means – the how isn't important if people are showing up
 - a) Coffee shops, cafes, bowling allies, concert environments, sports programs, rock climbing walls, arcades
 - b) Messages that center around what the people want to hear – how they respond it
- 4. One author, Skye Jethani, likens this movement to the cruise ship approach
 - a) In the 1st half of the 20th century ocean liners were how people traveled between Europe and America – how we moved people and cargo from point A to point B
 - (1) Changed in 1953 when commercial jet liners were introduced – now a trip that took 6 days took 6 hours
 - b) Passenger ships were in danger of becoming obsolete – ship owners thought of a new way to make money – cruises
 - (1) Passenger ships were no longer about getting to a desired destination - they became about entertainment
 - (2) Changed the purpose of the ship – the ship became the destination
 - (3) All about cramming as many attractions onto a ship to make it more appealing – playgrounds, waterparks, surfing, shows, rock climbing walls
 - (4) Ships went from being vehicles to being destinations
 - c) His point - the church has gone from a vehicle to a destination
 - (1) From a vehicle to connect with God – through worship, fellowship, and the preaching and teaching of His word to an entertainment hub
- 5. Whatever it takes for people to hear the message of Jesus, right?
 - a) While the number of mega churches has exploded and the number of people who are actually attending church has been steadily declining
 - (1) Churches have had to get bigger and bigger and offer more features to attract the same crowds
- 6. The most disturbing thing – accommodation has already been tried and it failed
 - a) Now, across all of Europe, thousands upon thousands of churches remain empty or have been repurposed
 - b) (CIRUS PIC) One notably large church in England was sold to a circus training company – its large sanctuary made it a perfect place to practice their acts
 - (1) (SKATE PARK PIC) Some have turned into skate parks, like the Roman Catholic Church of Saint Joseph in the Netherlands – which at one time hosted over 1,000 people each Sunday
 - (2) (FRANKENSTEIN PIC) This church in Edinburgh became a Frankenstein themed bar
 - (3) (SHOE PIC) This church became a shoe store
- 7. A Scottish pastor said he is often asked by American's how this could happen – his answer "You're about to find out"
 - a) The how matters.
- D. Now we return to the example that Paul gives us in Acts – Proclamation
 - 1. And for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

2. Paul proclaimed the redemptive story of Jesus in a way that his audience would understand – he met his audience where they were at, and people believed
 - a) Where the truth of the gospel goes the truth of the gospel is opposed
 - b) Amazing that European and American churches today are closing unopposed – they are dying from within
3. 1960's something else was going – a small effective movement known as the Jesus movement began in Southern California as many hippies came to know Christ – how? Through a pastor named Chuck Smith proclaiming the Word of God – not elevating a man, elevating the Word of God
 - a) How do we make disciples? We proclaim the redemptive story of Jesus Christ. We can drill down even deeper. How do we do that?

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. 17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. 18 Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbling want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? 20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." 21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. 22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' 29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." 32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." 33 So Paul departed from among them. 34 However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

III. THE STORIES WE TELL

- A. What's your story?
 1. Not asking where you grew up, but what is the story that you shape your life around?
 - a) Maybe our story is a simple one - The American Dream – study hard, work hard, get married, buy a house, have family, grow old and spend your last days in rocking chair on the front porch yelling at kids to get off your lawn
 - b) Or maybe our story is one of perception – we are who people think we are – everything we do is filtered through what others will think, constantly managing an image – our value is found in the opinions of others

- c) Maybe our existence is one of pleasure – life is one endless pursuit of more it – more entertainment, more vacations, more drugs and alcohol
 - d) Maybe life is all about family – life revolves around the kids, their activities, their schooling, creating the perfect environment for them to grow up in
 - 2. The stories we believe dictate the lives we live
- B. Why was Paul such an effective evangelist?
 - 1. Paul knew the true story of humanity and he knew his audience
 - 2. He knew the stories they believed – whether it be the Jews or the Greeks
 - 3. Epicurean philosophers – their story – tonight we eat and drink for tomorrow we die
 - a) The central ethic was one of pleasure – if the belly wants it, the belly should have it
 - 4. Stoics were the opposite – their story was one of virtue through abstinence, self-control, and logic
 - a) Their gods only existed to the extent that they were useful to their worldview
 - b) Zeus to the Stoics was the ruler and upholder of all things – the law, the universe – there could be and was an order to all things
 - c) Epicureans believed in gods but denied their involvement in the world – they didn't care what people did
- C. So where does Paul start
 - 1. Story that starts with our creator God, a God who created us to live in relationship with Him, a relationship that was broken by our sin, but He has made a way for the relationship to be mended if we will repent and believe in His Son Jesus Christ, who died but God raised Him from the dead.
 - 2. We may say we know that story, but do we? The story of God with us. A personal God, a present God, a relational God.
 - a) We believe a story about a God who gives us what we want. We are concerned about His blessings but not too concerned about Him.
 - b) Or a story of a God that we must perform for – to do things for – our story is primarily the question “What can I do for God?”
 - c) God is a cosmic game show host – do good win prizes, do poorly and bad things happen
 - d) The true story of God is God with us – He created us to be with us, our sin separated us, Jesus' death and resurrection restored us
- D. What are the stories our culture lives by today?
 - 1. We live in interesting times. Some say we are a culture that has lost our story
 - 2. Which makes sense if we are all just a cosmic accident – biological impossibility made possible – with no purpose, no reason for existence
 - a) Reality is whatever you make it
 - 3. What we are seeing now is this underlying despair and hopelessness that comes from a life without purpose and meaning
 - a) A wonderful question we can ask today “where do you find your hope?”
 - b) ***1 Peter 3: 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.***