

Grace Fellowship Church

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Series: Acts

November 13, 2011

Do Methods Matter?

Acts 17

Okay, if you have that Bible open, Acts 17. I listened to Brian's sermon last week. It was amazing, amen? If you missed that, go back and download it. It was fantastic. You know what's going on there. They go into Philippi, and then what happens in chapter 17, they go into Thessalonica.

If you haven't done this already, write up in the margin of your Bible next to 16, "The book of Philippians." Next to chapter 17, write, "1 and 2 Thessalonians." Then they go into this little town called Berea, and it goes very well because what happens there is that as he opens the Word... If you look at verse 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." (Acts 17:13)

Now one of the things you need to recognize that everywhere Paul preached grace, religious legalists *hated* it. They hated it! They told lies about him. If it had of existed then, they would've tweeted about it. They would've put him on Facebook. They would've recorded his sermons and

audio tuned it. They absolutely *hated* what Paul was doing, and they weren't content with just saying, "We disagree. We just don't agree about this."

Let me just tell you something. Always be cautious about people who are willing to let you die for their faith. Did you follow that? Say amen then, because we should be willing to die for *our* faith, amen? When we're ready to let somebody else die for our faith, I don't see that in the Bible. I know some of you were struggling with that one. That's okay.

Verse 14: "Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea..." (Acts 17:14) Now I want you to see something here. Let's say you are leading a team of missionaries, and revival is breaking out, and things are going massively well, except people are really not liking you that much, and the team gets together and says to you, "I think you should take some time off, Paul." Is that going to feel personal to you?

Yeah, it would me! I mean, I would be like, "Hey, wait a minute! God's hand is on me! Revival is happening here!" Then Timothy is this young guy. He's a young gun. He's going to end up being the pastor of the church at Ephesus, which is going to be a major resourcing center for the entire... Really, it's going to end up being the most significant, influencing center of the church for the first 300 years. Timothy's there. He's young. He's one who's being influenced, and Silas is kind of second on the team, and they get together and they come up and they say, "Paul, you're kind of a lightning rod here. You need to lay low."

Have you ever had something that was incredibly meaningful to you, maybe your own business, just pulled away from you, taken away from you? Have you ever had that happen? Have you ever had something that really was significant to you taken away from you, maybe even a really, really, really good thing?

Now here's the question I have: This is important! How do you react? How do you react when what *you* think is yours is taken away from you? Maybe your health! Maybe you've spent your whole life, and you feel strong, and then you turn around and you're just not strong anymore. How many of you like are over 50? God bless you. We're not that strong anymore. You do know that.

Sometimes I think I am, and then I go into the weight room, and I go, *Didn't I use to have another 45-pound plate on that? How come my arms are shaking?* How do we react when that which we think of as ours God says, "I'm going to give you a little time out here"? Or maybe it's not even your choice.

So they said, "Why don't you go down to Athens?" "...but both Silas and Timothy remained there." (Acts 17:14) Don't you know as he's walking out of town he's thinking, "Man, God, why am I? Revival! These Bereans, man, they're in the Word." "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." (Acts 17:15)

Now look at this. Verse 16: This is really important. "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit..." (Acts 17:16) Now I'm reading out of a New King James. There are different ways this is translated. In the King James, it's translated "provoked." You who have the New Living, what is it translated? Paul's spirit was what? *Distressed*. Who has another one? Any other word translated there? *Deeply troubled*. Any others? Huh? *Upset*. So Paul is in Athens, and he's troubled, upset, provoked. I think it's interesting. Let me show you a video. I want to show you a video. This is actually a pretty funny video.

[Video]

Jimmy Kimmel: I issued a challenge to parents of America. I asked parents to pretend that they ate all their kid's Halloween candy, and video tape that, and post it to YouTube under the heading, "Hey Jimmy Kimmel, I Told My Kids I Ate All Their Halloween Candy," and a lot of people did, and I guess I didn't expect so much crying. I kind of thought the kids would be just mad. Almost every one of them cries, but we got it, and to those children whose tears are about to be immortalized on television, I apologize in advance.

Parent: I'm going to tell you what happened to your candy, Blake. I ate it all. I ate yours too, Allen.

Parent: Me and Mommy ate it last night when you were asleep.

Parent: I ate all your Halloween candy last night.

Child: Daddy, where's the candy?

Dad: What candy?

Child: Daddy!

Mom: You mean you have no candy?

Parent: I think Adam ate all your candy. I am so sorry.

Parent: I tricked you. I didn't eat all your candy. I tricked you.

Parent: I'm very, very sorry, Rachel. I ate all your Halloween candy. How much was it? Oh, oh, Rachel. I'm sorry. You know I like candy, Rachel. Do you still love me?

Rachel: Nuh-uh!

Parent: Last night I ate all the candy.

Child: What?

Parent: I'm so sorry. It's just I'm pregnant and I get really hungry, and I ate all of it.

Child: I'm going to check. You didn't eat all the candy!

Child: Can I please get my candy?

Parent: I ate them last night. I took them to work with me.

Child: What! Why did you do that? Ah!

Father: Last night we stayed up and we ate all our candies. Are you guys okay with that?

Child: No!

Mother: Why?

Child: No!

Father: Natalie, calm down, Natalie.

Child: Dad, you're ugly!

Parent: I ate all your candy. You have no more Halloween candy left.

Child 1: What?

Child 2: Where is it?

Child 1: What the heck?

Child 2: Mom!

Parent: Don't you guys think you ate enough candy last night?

Child 1: No. I only had like one bite of candy. Are you serious? Oh good for you. Now you're going to have probably get a bellyache. It's why you shouldn't eat so much candy. Mom, that's two.

Parent: Two what?

Child 1: Two bags of candy.

Child 2: Two plus two is equals five!

Child 1: AJ, you were so close, and did you see how much I had? I went to a lot of houses.

Parent: I know. I ate it all. It tasted so good, especially the peanut butter cups.

Child 2: Oh! You sneaky mom!

Jimmy Kimmel: That's all the sneaky moms and sneaky dads. Kids are very unstable.

[End of video]

Ha ha! Now let me ask you a really simple question. I mean, those kids are funny, but the real question is quite frankly...*Do you see yourself there?* Do you see conversations you have with God there? I mean, these parents have the capacity to buy them an entire *houseful* of candy, but the moment what they think is theirs is taken away they basically go into a temper tantrum. I mean, they just melt down.

Now with a child... I know. Listen, don't even email me. It's a cruel video. I understand that. I get it. They shouldn't have done it. Jimmy Kimmel is not a theologian. I get it. Okay, I'm not advocating Halloween, so save those emails too! What I want you to think about with me is...*What do we do when what we think is ours is taken away?*

Now I'm not even going to get into the whole issue of tithing. You know that. I mean, this is what God says to do. This is how you acknowledge everything you have is His is through that tithe, but when not just the tithing or offerings, but those things over which we have these proprietary interests where we say, "God, there's Your 10 percent, and here's some offerings on top of this, but what about my job and my house and my family and my ministry," and the my

stuff we've carved out and said, "This is mine! I expect it to go well because I have this agreement with You, God. I'm going to do this, and You're going to do that"?

Now the church at Antioch had sent Paul out with specific blessings of the Holy Spirit, clarity of ministry, but everywhere he went, not only did he have incredible blessings, but if you look at some of the things that happened... I mean, he is beaten. He is put in jail. He is falsely accused. Everything you can possibly imagine happens to him, but when he gets into Athens...look at this..."Now while Paul waited for them at Athens..." (Acts 17:16) Let's fill in the blank with some of our common responses.

He was deeply depressed because he had been mistreated. He could not get over the devastation ministry brought him, so he holed up in a hotel. When Paul got to Athens, for many days he contemplated his lonely condition there. As Paul went to Athens, he recognized he had been taken from a place where they were open to the Word and there was a readiness of heart and there was an eagerness of spirit, and he could not understand why God would put him in a moral sewer with almost no response and no supportive team, so he went into a massive emotional funk for weeks on end.

No. "...his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols." (Acts 17:16) Notice what he does. "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." (Acts 17:17)

Then some of the most interesting ministry happens. "Then certain Epicurean..." (Acts 17:18) Now that's not like a cook on TV, although that's where the idea comes from. The Epicureans had this idea about life is that the physical is all there really is, and their idea was more akin to what we might think of those who had this idea that you seize the day because this is all you really have. Enjoy life to its fullest.

There were some things about the Epicureans that were really out of hand, but really the core theology or the core philosophy behind the Epicureans was, "Enjoy life!" The Stoic philosophers were kind of on the opposite end. You're just supposed to do your duty. They "...encountered him. And some said, 'What does this babbler want to say?'" (Acts 17:18) They really can't penetrate into what Paul is saying there, and the word that is used there, *babbler*, actually comes from a slang term of somebody, a rag picker who picks some information here and picks some information there, and just kind of throws them all together. He says, "He's not saying anything that hasn't been said before."

Then look at this response. "Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods...'" (Acts 17:18) Now we read that and that doesn't sound too ominous to us, but if you'll remember, Athens was the place where Socrates was fed the poison, and he was charged with teaching foreign gods. So when they throw this accusation, this indictment on the table, this isn't like, "Oh, I think he's just bringing some foreign god in here." No, this is an accusation that has the potential to lead to the death penalty. I mean, this is a very kind of subtle, and not even really subtle, really intimidation "...because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection." (Acts 17:18)

That's really important there. I wish I had just times and times and times to go through this because if you'll remember your history of Western Civ, and you go back to your philosophy courses, you'll remember the Greek philosophy and Plato's core philosophy, that there is that which is immaterial and that which is material, and the material is kind of nasty and the material is kind of just messy, and it's going to go away, and there is immaterial that is really what we really are shooting for, that mystical immaterial world.

If you'll remember that story, that core story of Plato's cave. He says imagine somebody is tied up and behind them is a fire, and they can only see one thing, and they see this wall, and people are walking behind them, and they're seeing shadows on the wall, and everything in life is basically a shadow of the reality. He called it the *forms*, and I'm not going to dig into this, but let me just say this to you. It's really important. Much of the church is basically infused with a neo-Platonism.

Now by that what I mean is the idea that this world, this flesh, what we do here really doesn't matter. What matters is out in heaven somewhere. Now let me just tell you something. If you grew up in a church that taught we're going to die and we're all going to go off to heaven somewhere, and you said, "I said that prayer, so someday I'm going to go off to heaven somewhere," you need to get your eschatology and your biblical reality in check there because here is the reality: Revelation 21 says heaven is actually coming down here. That's really, really important. What we do here actually really matters.

You're not going to float on a cloud somewhere with a little harp in your hand. You're not going to disappear as a drop in the cosmos somewhere and be part of this mystical reality people think of as God. That is Buddhism. That is not biblical theology. When Paul started talking about the resurrection from the dead, they go, "What? Are you kidding me? We're actually going to have bodies?" He goes, "Yes! We're going to have resurrection bodies. We're going to eat, we're going to drink, we're going to know each other, we're going to walk this planet, we are going to be here." Man!

Listen, all this stuff that's here that's right and righteous that blesses your heart, the reason you like it, the reason it resonates with you is because God created you for it. Do you understand that? When God created... Read Genesis. God created us to eat, to drink, to think, to have conversations and communion with one another, to have communion with Him. When you look at this fall, and if you haven't done it, and you look at the tree colors, and when you hear beautiful music, and when you hear your name from someone you love, and you sense the familiarity of the streets you have grown up, listen, let me tell you something. Heaven is that times infinity, but it's going to be here.

Here's what's going to happen: God is coming back. Jesus is coming back. He is going to renew, restore, and I have this new word I actually picked up in my brain somewhere when I was extremely tired. I know where it was. I was in Norway, and you were having the car show. Did any of you go to the car show? They bring all these cars in that they restore, but you know what I've discovered about people who restore cars? They're not content with restoration. They hyper-restore. You know what I mean?

Some of them go, "Oh, we're going to take it back to mint condition," but once they get it back to mint condition, they want a Bose sound system in it. My Aunt Jackie here is on the front row. They bought a 1964 1/2 convertible Mustang. Do you remember that car? Oh my word, that was like touching heaven, but they didn't have Bose speakers back then. Look at them.

Listen, when Jesus comes back and He restores the way it is supposed to be, as I read it, I really believe this, and don't think me dogmatic about this, but I actually think it's going to be better than Eden. I do. I think it's going to be like hyper-restoration. You know why I believe that? It's because when God does something, He always does it exceedingly, abundantly, above all we can think or ask. That's just the kind of God He is. He *likes* to surprise you. He does, and when He surprises you, you know what He wants you to do? He wants you to go, *Oh! Wow!*

Right out there, there's one red tree left that's scarlet. You know what? I park beside that tree and talk to it. Two weeks ago when I left, I said, "Hey, hang on there. I'm coming back. Hold those red leaves. God made you to be red. Hold on." I prayed for that tree. I know that sounds really crazy, but I was so happy to come home last night (it was from Nicaragua), and I pulled in this morning, and I saw that red tree, and I said, "Good job, tree. Good job, God."

Now I'm going to tell you something. Some of you walk around not drawing in the blessings of God because you draw into yourself, and let me tell you, always forever there will be things to be depressed about, and there will be things you can exalt God about. You have to choose! You

have to choose, *Am I going to go into this funk, am I going to let myself be sucked in, or am I going to just praise God and worship God?*

You may be going, *Listen, there's no way I can praise God with the way I am. There's no way I can sacrificially give. There's no way I can be happy because I don't have the job or I don't have the house.* Listen, I have traveled enough to know people can live in adobe huts and eat rice and praise God, and if we can't, we are not praising God; we are praising ourselves and our circumstances.

Most of us have houses that when people from other parts of the world come they want to know how many people live there. "What do you do with all these other rooms?" I'm not going to go there. I have to cover my points. You'll notice there are no blanks here. I did that on purpose because I had no actual aspirations to cover all these points, but I'm giving you something here to dig into because I really think Acts 17 is an incredibly important prototype model on how do we reach those people who seem unreachable. If you notice there five questions...

1. *What did Paul see?* What he saw was a nation given to idolatry, or a city.

2. *How did Paul feel?* He felt this jealousy for their worship.

3. *What did Paul do?* I'm not going to try to cover this. I'm going to stop right there. Let's stop right here on feeling. There was a nation, there was a city that was given over, they were addicted to, they were buried in their idolatry, and Paul saw the passion they had for their

idolatry, and the word that is used there is *jealousy*. It's the same word and idea when Elijah saw the idolatry, when God is called a jealous God. God looked at their passion for actually the things of these false gods, and it broke his heart because he wanted to see that same passion for God.

I can understand why he'd feel that way. Okay, let's stop for a minute. Think about this...*Man, Georgia killed yesterday didn't they?* Yeah. Who did they play? I actually knew that. Brookwood won. Clemson? What happened to Clemson? Did they win? They won. Did Tech win? Tech lost. Who did they play? Who? Virginia Tech. Well they shouldn't have won that game. Virginia Tech's tough. Brookwood won.

Now here's the question: How many of you yesterday watched your favorite team and somewhere during that time you went, "Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Oh no! It can't be. I don't even know if I want to go to church tomorrow"? I saw Randy wearing a Grayson tee shirt because he lost a bet.

We as a community... I'm going to tell you something. The gods of our community are athletics and academics and money. When our kids get good jobs, *Man!* When our kids make great grades, *Wow!* When our kids score on the SAT, *Wow!* When our kids get those prime plump positions on the football team or the basketball team or cheerleading, we carry on about that endlessly. There's nothing wrong with those things, but let me just say this to you...*They are poor gods.* They are poor gods.

We need to be convicted, provoked, jealous for the passion that belongs only unto our holy God, and we should be deeply convicted not only about our community, but about our community, and not because we are too energetic about things that are good, but because we are underwhelmed by an overwhelming God.

I told you what we we're going to go. We're going to open the Bible, we're going to pray, and we're going to worship. We've opened the Bible. We've prayed. People have to make choices. If you look at that passage, this is what Paul did. He said, "You need to make a choice. Are you going to live in that idolatry, or do you want to serve the God, the King of the universe, who is Jesus Christ?"

Now some of you, you may have never made that decision, that you want Jesus Christ to be King and Lord of your life, and this morning I call you to that choice. This morning I call you to who is King and who is Lord, and if you do not know Jesus Christ as King and Lord of your life, this morning I would like, I ask you, I beg you to come into the kingdom today.

Some of you, you came into the kingdom a long time ago, but you've had two feet over like this. You just keep going like this. This is what Elijah said. He said, "How long will you halt between two opinions?" You know what that *halt* means? It means you're crippled. You're just back and forth over between two decisions. This is what he says, "Choose you this day who you will serve." Make a choice. Make a choice. Let's bow our heads. Lord, thank You for You. Lord, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for the models You have laid out before us, which really is really about You.