

Grace Fellowship Church

Buddy Hoffman

Series: Acts

November 27, 2011

Hungry for Hope?

Acts 17:19-34

If you're here tonight and you don't have a Bible with you, slip up your hand. We have some Bible carts. If you have a Bible, open up to Acts 17, and we're going to pick up right there where we left off last week where Paul goes into Athens, and he is preaching there in Athens. It would have been the intellectual center of the world. I have a desire tonight. I hope to answer three questions. They're on your sheet there.

1. *What is hope?*

2. *Why does hope matter?*

3. *How do I become more hopeful?*

Now if none of those things interest you, you're going to be bored the next 30 minutes, but if you have this passion for hope, and if you don't, what I'm hoping to do is quicken within you a desire

and hunger to be hopeful and why you should really be that way. Why should that be something that characterizes our life?

We are in the Advent season. As the church has done for hundreds of years, this is the first Sunday of Advent. It's hope, and next week is love, and then it is faith. Is that right? Faith? No, it's not faith. It's hope, love, joy. Is that what it is? You don't even know, do you? Peace. That's what it is, and then Jesus. Do you know why the church does that? Because we need to remember and to cultivate and calibrate and look at our life in a way that we nurture the things that are important. Otherwise, what happens is we get busy living life, and the things that are really important just slip through our fingers.

How do we live hopeful, and why should we live hopeful? If you look at verse 19, they bring Paul "...to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?'" (Acts 17:19) The central part of this is about the resurrection. "'For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.' 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." (Acts 17:20-21)

Here's the essence of the message he preaches: "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 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.'" (Acts 17:22-23) We looked at that last week. That's that transcendence. God is above and beyond, and there's actually an "unknowability" about God.

What he does here is, "Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing..." this transcendence, "...Him I proclaim to you:" (Acts 17:23) Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. "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. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 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..." (Acts 17:24-26)

Now Luke doesn't give us the entirety of the message. What he does is he gives us these bullet points, and every one of them is just so densely packed. He makes point of the reality that God created everything, that God is King of the cosmos, God is uncontainable, that He's not something we can contain in our hands, that God is the Giver of everything. He gives life, breath, and all things. This is God's nature to give. Actually we don't give anything to God because everything we have comes from God.

We had a Thanksgiving dinner here on Saturday for people new in America. They were immigrants, and the room was just packed with people. It was just a lot of fun. One of my grandchildren came with me to the thing, and we just had a great time. As we were leaving, she says to me, "D-Daddy, I have two dollars and three quarters." I said, "Wow babe, that's a lot of money." She says, "I earned it doing chores. I would like to go to the Dollar Tree." I said, "All right."

So on our way home, we pulled into the Dollar Tree. I'm telling you what; you can actually buy a few things for less than three dollars at the Dollar Tree. So we went in there, and there's a big aisle there full of toys. She was going through the thing, and we had that whole aisle, and she was picking stuff out, and she had this little cart she was looking at, and she lost one of her dollars.

She looked down, and she only had a dollar and three quarters, and she looked at me like this just utter terror, and she goes, "I lost my dollar." I said, "Well sweetie, probably somebody was walking around and they were praying and they were saying, 'God, I need a dollar,' and they found the dollar." She looks up at me and she says, "Well I'm glad they have it then." I said, "Well that's a great attitude."

So she has her stuff, and I said, "What do you want?" She's picking all her stuff out, and she picked out 11 things, and she said, "Now I have to find out which ones I want the most." I'm telling you, I had no idea you could spend an hour at the Dollar Tree. I could have been doing inventory there.

So she had her 11 things, and I was asking her, "Now why do you want that?" She said, "I want to give this to this person." I said, "Oh I think you should just get them all." She goes, "Everything?" I said, "Everything." Now this is a hint. You can make a massive impression at the Dollar Tree on a child for less than \$12...massive memories.

We need to recognize this because we recognize it in ourselves, right? Now when I give to my children or my grandchildren, do you think I took that little girl home and said, "Now you're going to wash my car. I did that, and I expect my car cleaned out"? Now do you know why I did that? It brought me pleasure. I enjoyed it more than she did, I promise you, and all I really wanted for her... I wanted to see her little face, and I wanted her to go, "Everything? Wow!"

Now that brings me pleasure. I have way more than \$12 pleasure out of that, right? Now then, what do we think God wants out of us? Is there anything actually we can give Him? Is it something like, "Oh, I know what it is You want"? No! You know what God wants out of us? He wants the *wow*, right? That's what He wants. He wants us to wake up every day just delighted to be in His presence, delighted with the things He has provided for us.

He says, "Listen, God is a Creator. Not only is He the Creator, He is the King. Not only is He the King, He is the Sustainer." Look at verse 26. Look at this. "And He has made from one blood every..." and this word that's used here, *nation*, is the word *ethnos*. Every ethnic, every sort "...of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings..." (Acts 17:26)

Now do you understand what he's saying here? He is saying something that has taken humanity a long time to wrestle down, but it's the reality that if we're human we share the condition of humanity, that everybody who is created in the image of God is created in the image of God, no matter what your ethnic background is, no matter what your color of your skin is, no matter what language you speak, no matter where you grew up.

There has been a curse upon humanity that has defined humanity as people like us, but the reality is all of us are like us. We're all in this together. No matter whether you have blonde hair, or curly hair, or no hair, we're human. We're made from one blood. There is a problem that has plagued humanity, and I don't know any other word but to call it *tribalism*. It's the idea that my group is a superior group and my group feels different, looks different, is different, is better than another group, and the reality is he says, "God has made all humanity in His image."

Look at verse 27. "...so that they should seek the Lord..." (Acts 17:27) This is a common reality of humanity that we are incurably religious and we need to worship. "...in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him..." look at this, "...though He is not far from each one of us; 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.'" (Acts 17:27-28) We're made in His image.

"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature..." (Acts 17:29) This is where he is going to make some logical jumps. He says, "The fact that we are made in His image ought to convey to us logically that God is not material because we're more than material. Not "...like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising." (Acts 17:29) We don't invent God, we don't imagine God, and we don't make God. God makes us!

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 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..." (Acts 17:30-31) Look at this. He started the sermon with the resurrection, he is ending this sermon with the resurrection, and in verse 32, he says, "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead..." there are three reactions here, "...some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.'" (Acts 17:32)

Some ridiculed, some delayed the issue, and then "So Paul departed from among them." (Acts 17:33) There's a third group of reactors here though. "However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris..." (Acts 17:34) They joined and they believed. So there are three reactions there.

There is one of, "No, that's not possible. There's no way that's reality." Now this is incredibly important because what you believe and what we believe about the resurrection really defines our worldview, how we react, what kind of hope we have. I wish I could just spend a whole lot of time on this, but here's what the Bible teaches: The most extensive teaching on this is 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus Christ is the first fruits of the new creation.

Now if you grew up in church where they talked about going off to heaven somewhere and you died and you went off to heaven (and this is going to kind of date me), but did any of you grow up watching *Casper, the Friendly Ghost*? Okay, you ever know that program *Casper, the Friendly Ghost*? I think a lot of people grew up kind of imagining heaven as like Casper, the Friendly Presbyterian, or the Christian. We die, then our bodies go in the ground, and then we have this home off in the heavenlies.

Now that's partially true, but it's not the full truth. The full truth is that the Bible teaches when you die to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, but the Bible teaches Jesus was resurrected bodily, He ascended up into heaven, He's going to come back with those who are with Him, and the bodies, literally the bodies, the physical bodies, and actually the trans-physical bodies, the new bodies of the new creation... Your spirit is going to be reunited with your body, and you're actually going to inhabit earth as it was designed to be. That's doggone exciting! You understand that? Everything you like about life, heaven is going to be that squared, multiplied.

I hear people sometimes say, "What if Jesus comes back before?" Listen, before nothing! When Jesus comes back, everything is going to be so much better, and most of us can't really even imagine what's better; we just imagine what won't be...the injustice, the pain, the suffering, the hunger, the brokenness. We just define this new heaven and new earth by the absence rather than the presence, but it's going to be as it was meant to be.

Now then, here's what I want to do because this idea, this doctrine of the resurrection really in Athens messed people up. There were two primary groups there. There was a group there called the Epicureans, and the Epicureans believed this. You can study it. This is literally true. Atoms were racing through space, and they collided, and the random chance of this collision of atoms produced creation. They did all that. They figured that out without even a microscope. Isn't that amazing? It just happened to happen, and some day it would all fall apart and it wouldn't be anymore.

So here's the idea of the Epicureans: Enjoy every day because it'll be over, and then it won't be ever again. Boy, that's exciting, isn't it? Now I don't know about you guys, but I do know this. In my house, random smashing things together doesn't just usually work out that well.

Do you know anybody who has ever come home from Starbucks and said, "Honey, I was in the truck, and I was backing up, wasn't paying attention, and then I had a mistake. I hit the gas instead of the brake, and then the tires squealed, and I ran back, and I ran over a Volkswagen, but look what I got. I got a Maserati"? No, that's not how that works! Random running things together doesn't produce better things. So when he starts talking about the resurrection, they're going, "No, it's all just random."

Now the Stoics were almost exactly the opposite. They thought there was a God, but this God was detached, and He didn't care. Basically Deism. Everything was predetermined, so just suck it up and be stoic. This is just the way it is. There's nothing you can do about it, so just be there.

Here's what Paul says: "No, there is another narrative you can live by, and that narrative is that God is actually there. He creates, He gives, He sustains, and even if you die, there's going to be a resurrection and a restoration of all things, and if you believe that, what that produces is a life of hope. No matter what, hope comes." Now let me give you these three things kind of quickly.

1. *What is hope?* Because the way we use the word, we've lost the meaning of hope as it is in the Bible. We use the word like kind of, "I hope the team I like will win," or, "I hope I get home

before it starts raining," or, "I hope this sermon is almost over." All right, that's just kind of a weak wish or maybe even a strong desire. That's the way we use the word *hope*.

Hope in the Bible is used 150 times, and it has other words that are translated. It's the same word, but it's translated differently. It's usually used for waiting, but the word when it is used in the Bible means expectation. It means expectation, and I gave you a couple of examples. Proverbs 10:28: "The hope of the righteous will be gladness..." now see the corollary? "...But the expectation of the wicked will perish." (Proverbs 10:28) "When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, And the hope of the unjust perishes." (Proverbs 11:7)

Proverbs 13:12: "Hope deferred..." See, you could put that word *expectation*. Expectation, when it doesn't come "...makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life." (Proverbs 13:12) Luke 2:25: It's that whole idea of Simeon. He was waiting for the King, the Messiah. He was waiting for this to happen. So hope is expectation, and if you ask the question, "What do you expect? What are your expectations about? What are your expectations in?" you can answer the question about hope.

2. *Why does hope matter?* Three things there really. First Peter 3:15: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15) The kind of life we should be living is a life that's characterized by hope. People should look at our life and go, "Why are you so hopeful? How come you have your life characterized by hope?"

Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you..." (Jeremiah 29:11) Have you thought about this that God has a plan for you? God has a dream for you! In His mind, in the heart of God, the Creator of the cosmos, He in His mind has a plan for you. "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)

Lamentations 3:21: "Yet I still dare to hope..." how does that happen? "...when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning." (Lamentations 3:21-23)

Now look at this. Psalm 147: "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful." (Psalm 147:1) Now verse 11 of that same psalm. "The LORD takes pleasure in those...who hope in His mercy." (Psalm 147:11) Isn't that interesting? God likes it when we're hopeful. God loves to see His people hope.

3. *How do we become more hopeful?* I put some categories there...*Me, Family, Church, Community, Nation, World.* Now here's a question: On a scale of one to 100, like in school, like 90 to 100 being an A, let's think about the world. How hopeful is the world right now? Let's vote on this. How many of you think the world should get an A in hope? Ah, the world's not doing too well. Okay.

Let's see. How many of you think the world deserves a B in hope? Okay. How many of you think the world deserves a C in hope? Well we have a few hopeful people here. How many of you give

the world a D? Okay, this is a question. How many of you think when it comes to the category of hopefulness, the world is really failing? Yeah. Wow! I agree with you. At least a D, maybe an F. You're going to have to repeat this grade. The whole world could use a course on hopefulness. Read the news!

Okay, what about our nation? How much hope? I don't know if you feel this, but I have lived long enough to see the nation goes through these seasons where there'll be a season of just like a cloud hanging over people's spirit. What about our community? How hopeful are we as a city and a community? As a church? As a family? If people were driving around your neighborhood, and they were thinking, *Hey there's that family. Boy, that family! They are hopeful people.*

What about your coworkers? If you were to go in and have to do a 360 on your hopefulness quotient, if we were go in and say, "We're going to poll all your friends at work to find out whether you are a hopeful person or not," how do you think your friends would rate your hopefulness? Now I'm going to tell you something. God delights in hopefulness, takes pleasure in hopefulness. It is a category that everybody actually delights in. Here's what he says: "We need to cultivate, stir up, and calibrate our hope."

On the bottom of your sheet it says, "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared." (Psalm 130:1-4) Now look at this verse 5. "I wait for the LORD..." (Psalm 130:5) This is the same word of hope. My expectation. I turn my face to the Lord. "...my soul waits, And in

His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning..."

(Psalm 130:5-6)

You know what he's describing there? He's describing those night watchmen. In the days of old they would put somebody upon the corners of the castle, and their job all night long was to look for danger, and their job was to keep an eye out all night long, but I know something about when you are staying up all night and you can't go to bed till it gets daylight. You quit looking for danger, and you start looking for the sunrise. You're going, *O sun, come up!* You long for that rising of the sun.

Our family went to be with some folks in Florida over the holidays, and I drove back Thursday night, and I came into Snellville like 3:00 in the morning after Thanksgiving. I don't know if any of you have been around Snellville at 3:00 in the morning, but I'm going to tell you something. There's not many of you around at 3:00 in the morning.

I have, and usually if you're around at 3:00 in the morning, it's just police. That's it. Police are usually up. Not always, but sometimes, and the people at Waffle House who are usually drunk, and that's about it, but 3:00 in the morning this week, I pulled into Snellville, and it was like rush hour traffic. It was. It was like rush hour traffic. It was insane. Not only were the roads clogged up, the parking lots were jammed to the road. Even Starbucks was open.

Being the curious person, I had to go do some investigation. *What is this all about?* All day long, I've been asking people, "Were you out?" but actually I've not met but about five people who

actually admitted they were up at 3:00 in the morning shopping in Snellville. I am absolutely sure the percentages are some of you had to be there waiting for that vision of the big screen TV.

What are you hoping for? Some lady in California pepper sprayed 20 people to get an Xbox. Now can you imagine? What does she tell her child? "You know what I had to go through to get that Xbox for you?"

Now here's what the psalmist says: "My soul turns its face toward You. 'O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption.'" (Psalm 130:7) I don't know if you've had to measure your hopefulness quotient, and I don't know what kind of grade you would give yourself, but here's what I would hope, and this is what the church has hoped for in looking into these big issues of Advent.

If you would say, *I'm afraid I'm a D*, this year you make up your mind, *We're going to move that hopeful quotient up just a little bit*. We're going to become more hopeful in our family. We're going to become more hopeful personally. We're going to become more hopeful as a church. We're going to make this something that is worth working on so next year when Christmas comes along and we start talking about hopefulness, you'll stir your mind up and you'll go, *I remember this last year!* "God, You've done something in my heart. I'm more hopeful than I was last year."

Let's pray: Lord, thank You for You. Lord, thank You for what an amazing God You are. Lord, You are a great Giver. You are a Provider beyond imagination. Lord, Your grace to us is not just

adequate; it is abundant! Lord, I pray for us as a people to be hopeful people, that in a world where people look and they go, "Why should we be hopeful?" that we are ready to go, "Listen, here's why we should be hopeful: We have a God who loves us, who created us, who communes with us, who has provided for us, and no matter what happens, we're going to see this resurrection and restoration. Lord, thank You for this *blessed* hope. In Your name we pray, amen.