

Share Your Hope: God is Holy

Acts 17:22-31

When Jesus began His ministry, we find Him approaching two fishermen who are casting their nets into the Sea of Galilee. Jesus says to Simon Peter and to his brother Andrew,

“Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” (Mark 1:17 [ESV](#))

Out of the gate, Jesus teaches us that being a follower of Jesus means that we are committed to telling others the Gospel. A disciple who does not seek to influence others with the Gospel falls short of the definition of a disciple. If we remove “evangelism” from the core responsibilities of following Jesus, we change Jesus’ definition of “following”. To be aloof to evangelism is to be aloof to God Himself.

This morning our church family begins **the third-part of a three-year journey** in being faithful to our Lord Jesus’ call to become fishers of men.

In 2024, we began a Stage 1 of the campaign. In Stage 1, we simply asked our church family to “Pray the Miracle”. As elders, we know that many find the leap from believing in Jesus to being a witness for Jesus to be an overwhelming one. So we asked you to begin in your pursuit of following by simply talking to God about people you know who need to hear about Jesus. Talk to God about opening doors, giving you boldness and giving you a spiritual ability to speak the Gospel clearly.

In 2025, we began a Stage 2 of the campaign. In Stage 2, we simply asked our church family to “Listen to their story”. We encouraged you all to find out where people are in their relationship with God. As elders, we believe that fishing for men by listening to where they are in their journey is a foundation for knowing how and when to share the Gospel with others. We kept this kind of listening in front of our church family last year by asking you to write names on ping pong balls when you hear someone tell their story. Praise God! The Ping Pong numbers tell us that you all heard over 1700 stories last year! I know that many heard stories and did not record them on a ping pong ball. So I think it is likely that 2500 conversations about spiritual life occurred with unbelievers last year.

Today, we begin the third and final Stage of this effort. This year we are asking you to **“Share Your Hope”.** As elders, we realize that this is the most

challenging step to being a fisher of men. This year we are asking you to communicate the Gospel with unbelievers.

Stage 3 requires for God's Spirit to give us virtues that we do not naturally possess.

Sharing the Gospel requires the courage to speak a message that is offensive.

Sharing requires faith to believe that God will use weak little you as you do it.

Sharing requires the spiritual focus to push away lesser topics.

Sharing requires compassion for people who otherwise will die in their sins and perish.

And sharing requires a zeal for Jesus that yearns for Him to receive glory even in the face of persecution.

If we use Jesus' fishing analogy, Stage 1 is like the purchase of a fishing pole, some hooks and some worms. We cannot fish without this foundation. Stage 2 is like going to the lake and observing what kind of fish are in the lake and where they might be living. Stage 3 is the baiting of the hook and the casting into the lake to catch the fish.

As we considered sermon topics for January, we asked, "What might be most helpful to people who are ready to cast the line into the water for the first time?" We decided to set aside January to simply teach the MESSAGE. What is the Gospel?

If we gain greater clarity on what God's Gospel is, we will be more ready to talk about it to others.

So WEEK 1: We are going to teach about God's Person.

WEEK 2: We are going to teach about Man's Desperate Condition.

WEEK 3: We are going to teach about Jesus' Atoning Sacrifice.

And WEEK 4: We are going to teach about the human RESPONSE that places God's gift of salvation in our hearts.

Main Idea: God is the Gospel. We proclaim the Gospel when we talk about God. So the more we know about God, the more we have to say about the Gospel.

We open our Bibles to Acts 17, where Paul travels to Athens with the express purpose of proclaiming the Gospel there. Athens is an awesome city that is the intellectual capital of the world in his day. Athens has been home to

philosophers that still impact our thinking . . . people like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Athens is home to many, many majestic and impressive Temples that are dedicated to various Greek gods. Athens is home to science and arts . . . the people of Athens are established, prosperous and proud.

Into this sophisticated city, steps a Jewish man with a message that no Greek philosopher had yet heard. When Paul arrives in Athens, not one person in the whole city is a follower of Jesus.

Paul knows WHY God places him in Athens . . . God sets Paul there to bring the Gospel to those who do not yet believe. You may remember that when Paul is first converted, the LORD enlists Ananias to come alongside and help him. Ananias first protests that Paul persecutes people like him and throws them in prison.

“But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” (Acts 9:15 [ESV](#))

No doubt Paul is unique in many ways in his mission, but God commissions us to this good purpose too!

Truth: God places us in our location for the express purpose of bringing the Gospel through us to people who live around us. This labor is central to who we are as followers of Jesus.

In Athens, Paul does not wait for people to come up to him and ask the question that the Philippian jailer asked him, “What must I do to be saved?”

I sometimes wish that God would call me to proclaim Jesus only to people who ask me questions about Jesus. Sometimes God does that!! He did it with the jailor and his family. **But MORE often, God has us go to talk with people who are not yet asking the big questions.**

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons,” (Acts 17:16-17 [ESV](#))

Paul’s custom in proclaiming the Gospel is to initiate conversations with Jewish people in every city. He first goes to the Jews who meet in synagogues where he uses the Old Testament scripture to point people to Jesus as the Messiah who is the fulfillment of God’s promises.

After first proclaiming Jesus as Savior and Lord to the Jews, THEN Paul speaks to the Gentiles about Jesus.

“So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.” (Acts 17:17 [ESV](#))

Paul speaks to some people who read the Bible. There is a need for evangelism among people who are in church. Do not think that everyone who sits next to you on Sunday understands the Gospel. Talk to one another about the Gospel!

Paul also speaks to people who do not know the true God at all. God calls us to talk to people who have VERY DIFFERENT views about God and life than we do.

Truth: People who follow Jesus do not isolate, but personally engage with those who have beliefs that are contrary to the Gospel.

Here, those in the marketplace, all have religious beliefs that they are comfortable with. They are not discontent with the gods that they worship. They do not ask Paul to tell them about his God. Yet Paul makes a point to engage them with the Gospel of Jesus. And look, many become miffed at him when he does begin to proclaim Christ.

“Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.” (Acts 17:18 [ESV](#))

Ridicule does not dissuade the disciple from pressing forward with the Gospel.

And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.” (Acts 17:19-21 [ESV](#))

God opens doors when we are faithful to His call.

This does not mean that everyone will like what we say or that everyone will like us if we say it with love. But it means that God will use us for His glory and will work through us to bring His Gospel to the hearts that He elects to redeem.

Question: But WHAT am I to say? What is my message?

I want you to notice that Paul simply speaks the truth about the God He knows. His message is God-centered. He leans in to describe the God who is and who is willing to save those who come to Him.

One of my favorite John Piper books is one entitled, “God is the Gospel”. In it Piper writes,

“The ultimate good of the gospel is seeing and savoring the beauty and value of God . . . The ultimate aim of the gospel is the display of God’s glory and the removal of every obstacle to our seeing it and savoring it as our highest treasure. “Behold Your God!” is the most gracious command and the best gift of the gospel.” John Piper

So it should be no surprise that the message of the Gospel is largely a message about WHO God is.

In this sermon, Paul unveils 10 qualities about God that the Athenian philosophers need to learn. The Athenians are not much different from our culture. They are wealthy, self-sufficient, independent, proud, content without God kind of people. AND TO THEM, Paul preaches who God is to them.

Ten Qualities of the God Who Is

Quality #1: God makes Himself known.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:22-23 [ESV](#))

The smartest people in the world become content with not knowing God. Yet God is a God who makes Himself known. The reason that people do not know God is

not because God has left us with insufficient information and revelation. The reason that God is unknown is that we are spiritually blind . . . we turn our hearts away from the light that the LORD provides for us to be able to see Him.

In our witness, let us tell others that God has made Himself known! Give them hope that it actually IS POSSIBLE to know God . . . not because we are really smart or because we are really good. But it is possible to know God because makes Himself known to us.

Application: Tell others how God made Himself known to everyone through the world that He created and through the Book that He wrote. Tell others how God made Himself known to you!

Quality #2: God made everything.

“The God who made the world and everything in it,” (Acts 17:24 [ESV](#))

God is His own first witness. The Lord first witnesses to man about Himself through the world that He created.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” (Psalm 19:1-4 [ESV](#))

Paul gives a great model for our witness. Telling others that God created them and the world that they live in is an important place to start in sharing the Gospel. It is also an easy place. It does not have to be a controversial place.

Illustration: Going for a walk in a park. Seeing a person’s baby. Watching children play. Pointing to the beauty of a sunset or a flower. Observing the frequent happenings in the sky with the sun, moon and stars. Sooo many ways to include statements about God as our Creator. But the idea is that we believers do not stop with observations about creation. We give voice to the connection between creation and Creator. That is an important part of fishing for men.

God purposefully begins His Book of Good News with the statement, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” With that truth, the foundation for every other truth about God is laid.

Truth: What we believe about God as Creator sets the baseline for everything else we know about God. If we accept Him as our Creator, we will find it easy accept every other truth about Him.

Illustration: I can’t believe the Bible because it tells of a man who is swallowed by a great fish and lives in the fish for three days and nights.

Really? That is what causes you to stumble over the Bible? How about “God created the heavens and the earth.” If you believe that God created the heaven and the earth “out of nothing” as the Bible teaches, no other miracle is unbelievable. This is Jeremiah’s point:

“Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.” (Jeremiah 32:17 [ESV](#))

Question: Do I have to study Apologetics in depth to be a witness to a post-Christian culture? Apologetics may help, but that answer is “No.” Apologetics has its place, but not if it produces emotional argument and distress. The Gospel is the Gospel of peace. While we are right to reason with people about God, we are also right to avoid angry arguments.

Notice that Paul does not say, “I believe that God created the heavens and the earth.” Notice Paul does not make a philosophical argument about God. Paul simply states that God created the heavens and the earth.

We are not asking others to base their faith in our subjective belief. We are asking others to believe in the truth that God has revealed about Himself. I know it is more confrontational to say, “The Lord made the heavens and the earth.” than it is to say, “I believe that the Lord made the heavens and the earth.” But this is the example that the apostles set before us over and over and over again.

Application: Witness by giving voice to the connection between the creation we see and the Creator whom we do not see.

Quality #3: God is Lord of all.

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth,” (Acts 17:24 [ESV](#))

God does not create the world and then stand separate from it. God does not yield His authority as Lord of all creation to other gods or to people. The Good News is that God created the world and He rules and reigns as King over it. He is the authority under whose rule we live.

The people of Athens believed in gods like Zeus and Apollo and Athena who yielded control over various parts of heaven and earth. So they made sacrifices to these gods and sought to acknowledge them in their daily life. Yet Paul declares that there is only one God and He is the Lord of heaven and earth. The Gospel shifts our focus away from our own autonomy and reminds us that God is the One who makes the rules and to whom we give an account.

Quality #4: God is independent.

*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, **does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything,** since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:24-25 [ESV](#))*

The true God is very different from the gods that man creates. Paul presents the Gospel by making both positive statements and negative statements.

Truth: The Gospel tells us WHO GOD IS NOT as well as WHO GOD IS. Because man makes idols, sharing the Gospel requires us to confront false ideas that people have about God.

Here Paul says, “not live in temples made by man, not served by human hands, not needing anything from man.” Why does Paul say that? Because the Greeks believed in gods who were dependent upon people for their happiness. They needed temples built to live in, they needed to be served, they needed what man supplied. But the LORD is not like those false gods.

The true God is completely INDEPENDENT. That is to say that the LORD does not need us. We need Him! **The Lord is not waiting for us to give to Him what He needs to survive and thrive. We are dependent upon the Lord to give us what we need to survive and thrive.** I love Paul’s phrase, “as though He needed anything.” He is not dependent upon us.

The Gospel tells us that God does not need our money, our service, our labors, our efforts, our attention in order to be happy. This is one reason why the prosperity God is such an abominable lie about God. God is never OBLIGATED TO US on the basis of what we do for Him. The LORD is never our debtor. We can never act in such a way as that God owes us something good in return.

True, God pursues His own glory because He is worthy of our worship. Our good is connected to bringing glory to Him. But the Lord is not dependent upon us for His own happiness or His own well-being. For all eternity past, the LORD was very content in Himself. God did not create the world because He was lonely. He is satisfied completely in Himself.

The Gospel tells us not of a God who needs something from us, but of a God who desires to give something to us. Whatever we say about God, it is right for us to emphasize that God is independent of us and is not seeking to receive life from us.

Quality #5: God is the giver of every good gift.

*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, **since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*** (Acts 17:24-25 [ESV](#))

The Gospel tells us of a generous God who willingly gives to us every good gift that we enjoy in this world. God is a good good Father. He loves every person whom He creates in His image . . . both great and small. And He gives specific gifts very personally to us.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:16-17 [ESV](#))

Illustration: How are you doing? “Thankful”. “Why are you thankful?” “I thank God because He is so generous to me.”

Truth: Sharing the Gospel means that we share that God is good and that He gives good gifts to man. Reminding others where their good gifts come from is part of fishing for men.

Illustration: Lots of gifts to open at our family Christmas gathering. Question: Who gave this gift to me? I want to know!

Quality #6: God determines what happens here.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.” (Acts 17:26-27 [ESV](#))

Paul tells the Gospel by reminding the Athenians of their beginning. “He made from one man.” Again, this is not a demand that we debate evolution with people, but it is a demand that we tell this part of God’s story as we share the gospel.

Paul also tells the Gospel by reminding the Athenians that human history is marked with God’s fingerprints and determined by His plan. God is purposefully ACTIVE in the affairs of this world. He is not aloof to national or international affairs.

Every nation owes its existence, its borders, its place in history to the LORD. While God uses leaders and natural circumstances to guide human history, He is the One who is working in our times to bring us to His desired end. Our story is written by God. **Everything that happens in our world finds its origin in God’s will and purpose.**

We tell the Gospel when we speak God’s sovereign working in the daily affairs of our world . . . affairs like the arrest of a Venezuelan leader, affairs like wars in Ukraine, affairs like persecution of Christians in Nigeria, affairs like hurricanes and floods.

God is working. He is always successful in His working.

What is God’s goal in His working?

that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.” (Acts 17:26-27 [ESV](#))

God brings us to the end of our own abilities to solve our problems so that we might feel our way to Him and find Him.

Quality #7: God is not far from anyone.

Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.” (Acts 17:27-28 [ESV](#))

We sometimes speak about people who are “Near to me, but far from God.” And that can be a helpful way to think about the people in our life as we consider their exposure to spiritual truth revealed by God in the Bible. When we describe people who are “far from God” we are describing them as people who have had little opportunity in their lives to hear much about Jesus. Here, the people of Athens are as far from God in this sense. Yet notice that Paul says that God is not far from them.

Paul is not thinking that maybe in two or three years, some Athenian will maybe come to believe in Jesus. No. Paul speaks to them with confidence that God is near to each of them . . . **that God is accessible to them today.** He speaks with the confidence that they are very close to believing in the God who is close by and who is willing to do the miracle of opening their blind eyes to see Him through Jesus.

Friend, I do not know the details of your life, but I know that God is NOT FAR FROM YOU! I am confident that you will be transformed, not because of my gifts of persuasion, but because of God’s closeness and willingness to give you life.

Quality #8: God commands everyone to repent.

*Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but **now he commands all people everywhere to repent,**” (Acts 17:29-30 [ESV](#))*

The Gospel reminds us that God is so very patient with us in our worship of false gods. But that God now commands “all people everywhere to repent”.

God is offering us a way to escape the punishment that our sins deserve. The response that God requires for us to receive the benefit of His mercy is repentance. To repent means to TURN FROM our own way of living life . . . our own way of relating to God and to TURN TOWARD God for mercy and direction and life.

Consider Paul's audience. They are the intellectuals of the premier intellectual city of the world! Yet Paul speaks to them as simple sinners. He does not act as though they needed more human logic. He talks to them as people who need to turn from their sins. This is THE MESSAGE EVERY PERSON NEEDS TO HEAR.

PROTEST: Maybe someday.

First, to refuse to repent today is to disobey God's clear command to you. But second . . .

Quality #9: God appoints a Day of Judgment.

"because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:31 [ESV](#))

Proclaiming the Gospel requires that we tell others about the judgment of God. Yes, we emphasize the love and grace of God in Jesus! But we do not neglect this hard part of the Gospel too.

Four statements about a future accounting:

1. There is a day of Judgment.
2. The Day of Judgment is fixed.
3. Every person will be judged in righteousness on that day.
4. The Person whom God appoints to be our Judge is Jesus.

Truth: We fish for men when we tell them about the Day of Judgment.

Quality #10: God sent His Son to deliver us from death and to give us life.

"because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."
Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them." (Acts 17:31-34 [ESV](#))

Right at the end of his sermon, Paul speaks about Jesus . . . his death, his burial and his resurrection. It appears that Paul's message is cut short here. And that happens when we fish for men.

But Paul is driving to this great solution . . . to Jesus who is our Savior . . . to Him who died and rose again. This is the Gospel!

Truth: We fish for men when we tell them that Jesus came to die on the cross for our sins and that He rose from the grave to give us life.

Conclusion:

PROTEST: Some of you may be looking at the list of 10 qualities of God that Paul preaches and think, "That is A LOT TO SAY! How can I remember to say all of that?"

Answer: Do not try to say all of that. If you are born again, you know truths about God that others do not know. Simply tell something that you know to be true about God! Put your hook in the water!

God does not call us to say everything about Him that is true, but He does call us to say something.

Main Idea: God is the Gospel. We proclaim the Gospel when we talk about God. So the more we know about God, the more we have to say about the Gospel.

Truth: To fish for men simply means that we say something true about God that others do not know and need to know!

What is the use? I have tried to witness and nothing comes from it?

Notice the names in verse 33, "Dionysius". "Damaris". Real people with real salvation.

Know that your labor to fish for men is not in vain. You are part of God's big story of bringing His Gospel to the world! Nothing is more exciting than that!

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14 [ESV](#))