

Sermon Title: **Religion vs Relationship**

Written: October 29, 2016

Preached: October 30, 2016 at Waterville FBC

Vessel: Russ LaFlamme

Scripture Reference: Acts 17:22-31

Thesis: **Paul attempted to introduce a religious group to a relationship with the Living God;**

Purpose: **Our God is not calling us to a religion, but to a relationship.**

Key Word: "God's Church"

I) Introduction: Scripture Reading is: **Acts 17:22-31**

A) The Setting:

1) **October 21-22 was the ABCOM Annual Meeting.**

- (a) Each year on the third weekend of October, the body of the American Baptist Churches of Maine meets to elect new officers and be uplifted around a theme.
- (b) The theme for this year's conference was "**Making Disciples, Building the Church**"
- (c) The scripture for our theme came from what we are going to be looking at in a few moments in **Acts 17:23**.
- (d) This year we met at the Thomaston Baptist Church as they celebrated their 200 year of incorporation.

2) **I plan to attend these meetings every year because we belong to the ABCOM.**

- (a) Time to renew old friendships
- (b) Time to exercise our votes as a delegate for those we feel God is leading us.
- (c) Time to be refreshed and encouraged by wonderful speakers as we focus on our next year of ministry.
- (d) Each year I feel I should report back to you in the local church what is happening in our affiliated churches since most of you are unable to attend.

3) **This year's speakers included our Go-Global missionary Tim Long**

- (a) Tim shared about ministry opportunities to thousands of Christian Haitians who have migrated from South America in hopes of coming to America.
- (b) Many of them left their homeland to find work in construction and around Brazil for the Olympics and now the work has dried up.
- (c) The churches of Mexicali are opening their doors to feed, shelter, and help these refugees as best they can.
- (d) Asking for prayer and any help that people can offer.

4) **Our Keynote Speaker was Rev. Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer**

- (a) He is known as an American theologian and current Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.
- (b) He challenged us to live out our Christian doctrines before the world as a means of discipleship.
- (c) The world is our theater and we are the cast of characters who are being observed.
- (d) The improvisation of us living out our faith may be the only Bible people see before coming to have a relationship with the living Lord!

5) **We heard testimonies:**

- (a) From Peter Barrett, the Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fairfield.
- (b) And from Justin Frank, the pastor of Penney Memorial Church in Augusta.

6) **The choir from Thomaston Baptist Church was spectacular and they did a short concert after the banquet dinner on Friday night.**

- (a) Their Choir Director even led the entire body singing hymns during the afternoon session.
- (b) Just imagine a church about the size of ours filled with representatives from our American Baptist Churches of Maine lifting our voices in song and worship.

7) **In short it was powerful, a great time, uplifting and everything we hoped it would be.**

- (a) I hope someday you get the opportunity to experience it for yourselves.
- (b) Many come for just the one day if they can't do the overnight.

- 8) **So, having given you the Reader's Digest version here let us move on to the message inspired from my time at this years convention.**
- (a) The Apostle Luke is explaining the happenings of the Acts of the Apostles following the death, resurrection and assertion of Jesus to the right hand of the Father.
 - (b) If this had been famous radio commentator, Paul Harvey, he would have titled this "*the Rest of the Story.*"
- 9) **Paul is in Athens and as he has looked around this city known for all of it's monuments and shrines to every God, he finds one that is to an "unknown God."**
- (a) The Athenians prided themselves in being all inclusive making sure that all Gods were included.
 - (b) And just in case they missed one, they erected a statue to an unknown God.
 - (c) **Paul saw this as an opportunity to introduce them to the Living God.**
- 10) **Athens was much like a college town for us where the great thinkers and philosophers gather to exchange their ideas.**
- (a) Many did nothing except hang around the Aeropagus or market place if you will, to talk and debate the latest ideas.
 - (b) So, it was not difficult for Paul to gather a crowd to hear his new thoughts.
- 11) **Therefore, let us pick up the story in our text reading for today in Acts 17:22-31.**
- B) *Sermon Prayer*
- C) (The Hook)
- 1) **What kind of God do you have?**
 - (a) Wood, stone, clay, flesh or spirit?
 - (b) Is your God alive? Actively working in your life?
 - 2) **If we are going to build the church and make disciples we first have to know the God whom we worship.**
 - (a) Otherwise there is no need.
 - (b) God is not interested in a religion; God is interested in a relationship!
 - 3) **So, before we can begin to talk about building the church we have to ask do you have a relationship with the Living God that Paul is speaking of here?**
 - (a) In a relationship you have active communication.
 - (b) In a relationship you have give and take
 - (c) Caring, support, and encouragement when you need it.
 - (d) Rebuking and correction?
 - 4) **Is the God you worship; actively working in your day to day life?**
 - (a) Marriages where only one person is doing all the giving do not work well.
 - (b) If you don't have this kind of relationship with God then something is drastically wrong.
 - (c) You are missing out.
 - (d) **Like taking a job and not taking any benefits.**
 - (i) Nope, don't want any insurance, I'll just pay the bills if something happens?
 - (ii) Most of us wouldn't or couldn't do that would we?
 - 5) **Well, asking Jesus to be the Lord of your life is the best insurance you could have?**
 - (a) He knows what is best for you.
 - (b) He Cares for you.
 - (c) He Died for you so that you could have a relationship with him through His Spirit.
 - 6) **Christ is the ROCK upon which the Church is built.**
 - (a) And the followers of Christ are the Church, not the building.

- (b) There have been many churches without a building.
- (c) In fact, this church began without a building; the building only came along about 5 years after the church was incorporated.

TS: **So, how do we become the church; it all began when . . .**

II) Body: (Key Points)

A) Key Point #1: **The Church was given the Great Commandment** (Matthew 22:37-40)

- 1) **Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."**
- 2) **We cannot become the church until we love God with all our hearts, souls and mind.**
 - (a) **In other words, we must love God with our whole being.**
 - (i) Heart is physical
 - (ii) Soul is our spiritual part
 - (iii) Mind is our intellect and understanding
 - (b) Together this makes up our whole being.
- 3) **This is the beginning of our relationship with God.**
 - (a) A real loving, intimate relationship
 - (b) A relationship that is at peace with God and has the peace of God.
- 4) **But it is not enough to just love God.**
 - (a) For we are to obey His commandments
 - (b) But how can we do that, for thousands of years the Israelites had all the commandments of God and found they could not keep them; what chance do we have?
 - (c) And besides, didn't Jesus die on the Cross so we didn't have to worry about keeping them?
- 5) **Well, yes and no.**
 - (a) While we have received the Grace of God when we accept Jesus as Lord and have our sins forgiven; we are still commanded to keep them as best we can.
 - (b) The difference is it is not out of a sense of keeping the rules;
 - (c) But out of our Love for God, not wanting to disappoint Him.
 - (d) And if we are a child of God; we want others to have that same grace we have experienced.
- 6) **Isn't there people in your circle who you can think of right now that you want to experience God's Grace and forgiveness?**
 - (a) Then show them the love of God by praying, caring, sharing, and doing for them as you would want others to do for you.
 - (b) This is loving them as yourself.

TS: **Next . . .**

B) Key Point #2: **The Church was given a Great Commission** (Matthew 28.18-20)

- 1) **As Jesus was leaving this earth He came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**
- 2) **First of all notice that Jesus has ALL the Authority.**
 - (a) Jesus grants authority to go and make disciples.

- (b) Baptizing and teaching all that was commanded by Jesus.
 - (c) And Jesus promises to be with them always.
 - (d) That means even when they can't see Him or feel Him.
- 3) **This is the mission of the church.**
- (a) To proclaim the good news, the Gospel that Jesus is Lord and has made a way for them to experience a REAL relationship with the Living God.
 - (b) We make disciples through our relationships and the help of the rest of the body of Christ, the church.

TS: **For . . .**

- C) Key Point #3: **The Church is a Living Body** (1 Corinthians 12:18)
- 1) **"But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased."** (1 Corinthians 12:18)
 - 2) David Jeremiah wrote in a recent devotional, "One hundred thousand miles of blood vessels. The ability to remember 50,000 aromas. Unique fingerprints and tongue prints. Ability to distinguish between 10 million different colors. Eyes with the equivalent of 576 megapixels. Four pounds of bacteria; more bacteria in your mouth alone than people in the world. Those are just a few facts about the amazing human body."
 - 3) Is it any wonder the apostle Paul used the body as a picture of the Church of Jesus Christ—a mysterious, interconnected, and interdependent community of organs and functions?
 - 4) **Picturing the body of Christ as a community-body analogy is important for three reasons:**
 - (a) Every Christian is a part;
 - (b) Every Christian is necessary to the other parts;
 - (c) And in times of stress, all the parts of the community-body work together to protect the whole.
 - 5) **Every member is important for the health and defense of the whole body.**
 - (a) We, as the body, must continually pray for a greater and stronger community among all Christians.
 - (b) We must all do our part and our body seems to be missing some parts.
 - (c) So what can we do about it?
 - 6) **When someone loses a part of their body they can wallow in self pity . . .**
 - (a) They can hide in shame and fear that they are of no use . . .
 - (b) Or they can accept that part of themselves and do what they can with what they have.
 - 7) It is no different with the Body of Christ; remember, **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."** (Philippians 4:13)

TS: **So, in . . .**

III) Conclusion (Life Application)

- A) **When Peter stated that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus said, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."** (Matthew 16:18)
- 1) That leads us to the question; What is your part in the Body?
 - (a) Are you contributing your part?
 - (b) Are you willing to pray for others and pray about what Christ would have you do for the Body, for this Body?
 - 2) **If our purpose as a Body is to Make disciples and build the church, then we must each ask ourselves what are we doing as our part?**
 - (a) What part do we play in fulfilling the great commission and the great commandment?
 - (i) Are you praying for the oneness and unity of the community of Christ worldwide?
 - (ii) Unity is the essence of the body of Christ and a healthy sign that the Body is working together.

- (b) The church is not just the pastor; it is a body working together.
- 3) **I have to honestly admit that we are not all working together.**
 - (a) Some of us have oars in the water; but we aren't rowing in the same direction.
 - (b) I bear some of that responsibility for that; but not all.
- 4) **If we want to see God at work here we must commit ourselves to working together to build the church and make disciples.**
 - (a) This means we need to not just come to church; but we must be the church.
 - (b) We must seek out what God is doing here in our community and get involved.
- 5) **One thing we learned at the Annual meeting is that God is already actively working in this community.**
 - (a) But are we looking for it?
 - (b) Are we asking God to use us, you and me to get involved?
 - (c) We don't see God because we are not living like we are relying on God?
 - (d) If we make all our plans without God; how do we expect to see him actively working in our midst?
- 6) **Last week we had Pastor Richard Berry, who shared how God is working in his church?**
 - (a) It all started with a willingness to listen to what God was asking?
 - (b) So, are we asking and expecting God to work here in our midst?
 - (c) Or are we just running it on our own strength?
 - (d) We need to commit ourselves, myself included, anew to finding out what God wants for this church.
- 7) Will you pray with me?

IV) Invitation: **Let us Pray!**