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SERMON TITLE: Their Voice Goes Out Into All Lands
SCRIPTURE: Acts 17:16-34
DATE October 16, 2022
Online service at www.fpcd.org/live

Read also Isaiah 55:1-7

Let's think about leadership this morning. Your Session board members are your leaders. How do they lead this church? They study a book each year at their monthly meetings. The books are always about spiritual leadership.

The Bible has a great deal to say about leadership. God accomplishes God's plans through men and women of faith. If we look at the Bible closely, we will see that God's people speak and their voice goes out into all lands.

Let's look at an overview of God's plan:

- God, who is above nature, **CREATES** the cosmos and human beings from a position of absolute sovereignty with calm and order. It is good.
- Something went drastically wrong. Humans disobeyed and lost healthy connection with God. The theological terminology is **HUMANS FELL**.
 - "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).
- God then **REDEEMS** human beings.
 - "All are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).
- God then **RESTORES** humanity. It was not just God's covenant people because there were no covenant people yet. **It was about all humanity**.
 - "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" (Isaiah 43:18-19)
 - "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-18a).
- God **RECREATES** a new heaven and earth.
 - "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Revelation 21:1a).

How does God go about accomplishing all this? Through the voices of men and women of faith. *Their voice goes out into all lands.*

GOD'S STRATEGY

In Genesis, God formed a covenant people through Abraham's family. In Exodus, that family of 70 people became a nation while in Egypt. God established worship at the Tabernacle

and standards with the Ten Commandments. The people were brought out of slavery and given land of their own.

In Samuel, God raised up prophets to speak to them—and in Kings, monarchies to lead. King David conquered many cities and built Jerusalem. In 2 Chronicles King Solomon built the temple so that ALL PEOPLES could come and pray to God. That invitation was spread because *Their voice goes out into all lands.*

Later after warnings from the prophets, God's covenant nation failed to be faithful to God, the nation divided, and both kingdoms fell. God's covenant people were exiled all over what would become Greek and Roman territory. It seemed like they would not survive.

Do you ever have setbacks that are so difficult they seem irreversible?

Do not give up! Turn to the Lord and stabilize yourself in Him, because God has a plan to prosper you to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah speaks to that hope:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (29:11-13).

That voice went out to God's people to encourage them after they were exiled.

Indeed, in Ezra and Nehemiah we learn of a great reversal. A king came into power who allowed God's people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

Four hundred years later, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John proclaim that Messiah has come, fulfilling the words that were spoken across the Old Testament.

Jesus grew up, taught and ministered to the people, and then he was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day, he rose from the dead. He ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit descended to earth, and fell upon believers like you and me.

Acts is the story of how people everywhere began getting saved, including a man named Paul of Tarsus. That man was so passionate, so thankful, so driven, that he began going out to others to tell them that Jesus is the Messiah. Many other converts spoke about Jesus—men; women; rich; poor; Jews; Gentiles.

Their voice goes out into all lands.

Paul planned to go to Asia, but received a call to go to Macedonia instead—and he did (Acts 16:10). But he kept being pushed out of every town. He must have been discouraged; exhausted by the rejection and hostility. *What's up, God? Didn't you call me to Macedonia?*

Do you ever feel like, man, *is anything ever going to go right or easy?* Do you ever feel exhausted by your efforts? Paul did. It was his friends who kept him going.

He kept going forward, trusting God—but not necessarily understanding, until he finally found himself in Athens, which was in southern Achaia. (see map) Achaia was a province of the Roman Empire. Athens was located there, and it was self-governing. Since the fifth century B.C. it was a free country and when Rome conquered it, they left it that way.

Athens is considered the birthplace of Western civilization; of democracy.

Paul is just there waiting . . . waiting on the Lord. Probably wondering, where is this leading? He wasn't supposed to be here, was he? He was waiting for his friends. He walked around. Here's what he found: READ Acts 17:17-34

This was the center of the cultural elites. This was Gentile territory, filled with Greek intellectuals, philosophers, pagan religious educators, and governmental councils, where public debates took place in the Acropolis, right across from the Aeropago, a marble hill named for the Greek God Ares.

Well, what was Paul to do? Sightsee? Go to the local bar every afternoon? Not open his mouth because he might get terrorized? That was not his way. Remember, even if you find yourself in the most unlikely place—unlikely job—unlikely situation or problem, in God's eyes, all those things are OPPORTUNITIES for *Your voice to go out into (wherever you are), that is, "all lands."*

It is important for people to hear about life with God. It is important for people to hear how when you have struggles, you pray. It is important when you wonder how to live, you read and are directed by the Bible. It is important for people to hear that you have support from people in your church. It is important for people to know that your church is not judgmental but we help each other. As Isaiah says, people are spiritually hungry and thirsty.

It is important for your voice to go out into those places wherever you are. We need to be able to talk to all kinds of people. Invite them to partake! That's what brings hope—and consider this: it brings truth.

All those intellectuals Paul encountered, philosophers, pagan religious educators, and government councils; God had said, "You will command nations and peoples unknown to you."

Paul had to realize the strategy of God. He could not get stuck in his own strategy or ease. It was not going to be Asia, but Macedonia; now no longer Macedonia, but Achaia. Actually, each step was an open door leading him forward.

Do you see your circumstances as being open doors? Or just frustrations until the "good thing" comes along?

I challenge you to embrace where you are right now! It might be just the thing that opens up an amazing future for you!

So how do you talk to spiritual people who do not have a clue about the Lord? Very creatively. "I can see you are interested in God. I want to tell you about the UNKNOWN GOD."

Be creative in sharing the Lord and connect with the people on a spiritual level, like Paul did. The Lord assigns you according to His Strategy, not your comfort and ease.

Their voice goes out into all lands. Whose voice is that? Someone else's? NO! *Your voice goes out wherever you are.*

God has a plan; God is the leader, the orchestrator, the director. Do you want to go against the director? Nyadia, how would your Community Chorus be if they went against your instructions? What if 20 people did? Ten? Two?

God uses you to accomplish his whole project.

God Creates
Humans Fall
God Redeems
God Restores
God Recreates

Your voice brings the greatest hope for an excellent future.

AMEN

