

<b>Series:</b> Proclaim	<b>Reference:</b> Acts 17:22-34	<b>Title:</b> Redemptive Analogies	<b>Date:</b> 06.05.2022
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
<p>Today we look at the fact that God has prepared the way for the Gospel to go out to all peoples. He's planted a redemptive analogy among peoples in their cultures to bridge them to the Gospel! This is illustrated in Acts 17, and in many other missionary stories! The first church proclaimed that the unknown God had become known through Jesus. All truth is God's truth; there are many things in this world which can encourage faith &amp; lead unbelievers to Jesus.</p>			

## COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

In 1972, Neil & Carol Anderson left Spokane, Washington, for Papua New Guinea to be missionaries to the Folopa, an isolated people group who didn't have a written language. The Andersons helped to create an alphabet, written words, a dictionary, then taught them how to read. In translating the Bible & getting to John 6, where Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life," they encountered a problem. The Folopa people didn't eat bread. The staple of their diet was sweet potato, and so they ended up translating the verse as Jesus saying, "I am the sweet potato of life."<sup>1</sup> In some cultures He's been preached as the rice of life given that is their staple.

When the Andersons decided to translate Jesus's words differently, they weren't corrupting God's Word, but rather were making it accessible to a culture foreign to the Jewish culture of the Bible. It's important to remember the good news is Jesus, not our culture. This type of evangelism is what we see Paul doing in the last proclamation of this series, found in Acts 17.

Turn with me to p758 in your pew Bibles to Acts 17:22-34 and follow along as I read. A little background...Paul's in Athens, distressed at all the idols he sees, preaching the Good News of Jesus & the resurrection to a bunch of people who love to discuss philosophical ideas. They're confused & invite Paul to come share more at the Areopagus which translates, 'hill of Ares'. A site which came to denote the highest governmental council or judicial court. They would meet there to discuss ideas & issues.

*It begins...Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus & said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup>For as I walked around & looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship - and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.*

*<sup>24</sup>"The God who made the world & everything in it is the Lord of heaven & earth & does not live in temples built by human hands. <sup>25</sup>And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life & breath & everything else. <sup>26</sup>From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history & the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup>God*

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia de Leon, "Spreading the Word," *Spokesman Review*, February 4, 2007, <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2007/feb/04/spreading-the-word/>

*did this so that they would seek him & perhaps reach out for him & find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup>'For in him we live & move & have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'*

*<sup>29</sup>'Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by human design & skill. <sup>30</sup>In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>31</sup>For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.'*

*<sup>32</sup>When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." <sup>33</sup>At that, Paul left the Council. <sup>34</sup>Some of the people became followers of Paul & believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.*

The early church proclaimed the unknown God has become known through Jesus. All truth is God's truth; there are many things in this world which can encourage faith & lead unbelievers to Jesus.

So...Paul goes to Athens observing numerous idols & shrines to different gods (17:16) encountering philosophers & adherents to multiple worldviews (vv. 17-18). He's invited to speak at the Areopagus (v. 19). Paul proceeds to give us a great example for how to connect with people far from God.

He begins by complimenting their religious devotion (vv. 22-23). Zeroing in on the altar to an unknown god, he declares that what they worship as unknown, he'll reveal as being the God of Israel - the creator of the world (v. 24), which is immediately different from the handcrafted gods of the Greek pantheon. Neither is God dependent upon humans for anything (v. 25). Rather, He's the God who guides history (v. 26). Then Paul states God made humans in such a way that they yearn for & seek after Him (vv. 27-29). But the time of ignorance has passed (v. 30), the unknown God is now known in Jesus!

A young new pastor to a small country parish had a visit from an elder one day. The elder seemed uncomfortable but went ahead & delivered the message. "You quote too many different authors & need to focus on just quoting Scripture. Let the Bible speak for itself," the elder said. The pastor was taken aback but promised to think & pray on what was said. Upon reflection, he remembered, the New Testament's filled with quotations from non-Christian authors. In each instance, these authors were quoted to illustrate a point about the Christian life or about Jesus. The pastor compiled the list & shared it with the elder board saying he'd continue to quote other sources just as Paul & the early church had done.

*We reach the world by interacting with their sources & showing how elements already imbedded in the culture point to Jesus. We see Paul doing that in his speech to the Areopagus. While speaking to Greek scholars in Athens, Paul draws on two sources they*

would be familiar with, Epimenides of Crete & Aratus's poem "Phainomena" (Acts 17:28).

In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul wrote, "*I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel*" (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). He illustrates this principle here in Acts 17 drawing on his knowledge of Greek culture to build a bridge to them. Wanting them to see how things they've been reading & writing in their everyday life are actually bits & pieces of truth, propelling them toward that unknown God.

As John Calvin would later write, "All truth is from God; and consequently, if wicked men have said anything that is true & just, we ought not to reject it; for it has come from God."<sup>2</sup> Think about that statement, 'All truth is from God'. There are untruths out there, springing from sinful hearts, but as creatures created in image of Creator, we do have a remnant of God's influence on our thinking & hearts. Sometimes even the atheist gets it right! The proclamation of the church reflected a recognition that while Jesus is the truth, there was truth out there that could be used to point people to Jesus. That's what Paul is doing here in Acts 17.

And once again, the culmination of this proclamation is the resurrection of the dead (vv. 31-32). In our culture today, when many believe in some sort of nebulous life after death, resurrection isn't very shocking. But during the time of the early church, a belief in resurrection wasn't common. Even within Judaism, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection; you lived & died (Mark 12:18). That's it.

In a day & age when Christianity & Islam, two of the largest world religions, both teach life after death, how do we distinguish the Christian message from others? Acts 17:18 specifically mentions Paul preached Jesus, and at the end of the chapter, Luke lists some people who joined them & believed in Christ (v. 34). And we know that Paul very clearly taught that you must believe in someone (Acts 16:31), and shared Jesus with them. We're called to this as well. The centrality of Jesus & His relationship to the resurrection for those who believe must be the focus as we witness to a world deaf to the wonders of resurrection.

"The term 'redemptive analogy', was popularized by Don Richardson's book *Peace Child*. I met Don, he was the father of my boss when I was a missionary. At a retreat in Indonesia they set up ten chess boards, Don singlehandedly played ten games simultaneously winning them all in record time! Brilliant guy.

The concept of redemptive analogy is used within the study of Christian missions to refer to a practice or belief native to any given culture which distinctly parallels or illustrates the gospel. Redemptive analogies surface in cultures all over the world standing as natural bridges for communicating the full depth of the story of the Bible, or

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<sup>2</sup> quoted in Keith Mathison, "All Truth Is God's Truth: A Reformed Approach to Science and Scripture," *Ligonier Ministries*, May 11, 2012, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/all-truth-gods-truth-reformed-approach-science-and-scripture/>

a key aspect of it, in terms which really penetrate the heart.”<sup>3</sup> Don Richardson believed that God has implanted redemptive analogies into every culture in order to communicate the Gospel of Christ to them - just gotta find it.

“In 1962, Don took his wife & seven-month-old baby (my later boss) to work among the Sawi tribe, in what was then Dutch New Guinea. The Sawi were tribal people known to be cannibalistic headhunters. Don felt God had called him to work among the Sawi. And explains in one video how God had assured his safety by implanting a belief in the Sawi that one day they would welcome a tall white European, what they called a Tuan, and that he'd help them & they wouldn't harm him - this all happened even before they sensed their own calling! Miracle #1!

They had to overcome a great language problem, on top of being under constant threat of violence & exposure to various diseases. Don had to study the language of the Sawi to a level of proficiency enough to allow him to share the gospel.

After months of daily study, he was able to tell the Sawi stories about Jesus. But, he came to a dead end in telling them the gospel in the story of Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Amazingly, the Sawi started to cheer & hail Judas as the hero of the story since their's was a culture which honored treachery & betrayal. So the Sawi regarded Judas as hero, and Jesus as 'the dupe to be laughed at'. It seemed impossible to bring them to an understanding of the redemption & salvation of Christ in an atmosphere of such a twisted worldview. Until...he discovered their Redemptive Analogy which pointed to Christ - the Sawi concept of the Peace Child.

When Don & his wife had moved to live among the Sawi, they were very well received, highly regarded as the 'magic people' with medicine which could treat disease & tools making work easier. Upon arrival, three Sawi villages relocated themselves to live right next to the Richardsons. They danced & drummed for three straight days & nights in full ceremonial dress encircling their house. However, these were warring villages having a long standing feud with one another. There was constant fighting among the tribes; fights occurring almost every day right in their yard. The Richardsons considered moving away so the Sawi could go back to where they lived, separate from one another. But, the Sawi didn't want them to leave.

To secure peace, there was only one way. A father from one village had to give his son to a father from the enemy village to be brought up there. As long as the son was alive & well in the other village, there'd be peace. The sacrifice was too sacred to be looked upon lightly by the other village. They would honor the sacrifice & the peace treaty. This concept was known as the sacrifice of the Peace Child.

One father from one village took his son & went towards his enemy village to give him up to the other village as the Peace Child. But he only had one son. He took the baby &

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<sup>3</sup> <https://hpcmadison.com/2013/10/03/the-power-of-a-redemptive-analogy/a>

ran through his village, trying to see if any other family who had several sons would give one up instead. No one would.

He had no choice but to keep going. With tears in his eyes & a heartbroken wife left behind, he handed over the Peace Child to the other village. Everyone watched as the receiving father brought the child to the men from his village. Each man laid hands on the child & received the child into their village, and peace was secured. This was an even greater & more sacred sacrifice than usual because the father had given up his one & only son.

As this was unfolding before his eyes, Don discovered the key to the Sawi's understanding of redemption & salvation! He began telling the Sawi about the great sacrifice of the Father in order to bring reconciliation & redemption to us. He told them about Jesus, the Peace Child. As they began to understand the gospel, they said if they'd known Judas had betrayed the Peace Child, they wouldn't have considered him the hero. Although they admire those who are masters of treachery, they'd never condone someone who betrayed the Peace Child & the honor code of peace he brings.”<sup>4</sup>

In another story, “A Christian missionary was working with a people group in North Africa at war with another tribe over livestock & crops. She asked if there was any way peace could be achieved with this other faction. After some discussion & thinking, the people remembered an old rite they could perform with the other tribe.

In this ritual, the two enemy tribes would meet on the opposite banks of a river with a goat for sacrifice. They'd wade into the river, slit the goat's throat, plunge it underwater & bathe in the river as the goat's blood washed over them in the current. After washing in the river & the blood of the sacrifice, the two tribes would come out of the river, on the same side as one family & since one can't kill his own family, the warring would cease forever.

Amazingly this parallels God's own work of making peace with us. The story of the Bible is that we were at war with God. We couldn't have peace until God provided the sacrifice - His own Son, His own self - and met us in the river. When we meet Him in the river & wash in the blood of the sacrifice, we can exit with God as family & we have everlasting peace with Him.”<sup>5</sup>

And finally, when I was in Lampung, Indonesia there was an ancient rite like this which I stumbled upon buried in some old writings. If a man raped a woman it was punishable by death. But, if he had a servant, he could offer that guy as a replacement which they called the Irawan. They would take the servant to the home of the woman, tie him to a stake, cut his throat & drain his blood into a bowl. The offender would disrobe & wash his whole body in the blood of the sacrificed man effectively washing away the sin he'd committed & peace would be restored. I shared this with all my church planters out in

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<sup>4</sup> <https://privilegedtoserve.wordpress.com/2011/06/30/the-peace-child-a-redemptive-analogy-for-the-sawis/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://hpcmadison.com/2013/10/03/the-power-of-a-redemptive-analogy/a>

villages & instructed them to use it whenever possible, their work continues today & the Lampungese church is growing!

So, again... The early church proclaimed the unknown God has become known through Jesus. All truth is God's truth; there are many things in this world which can encourage faith & lead unbelievers to Jesus. Culture has residue of its Creator within it - sometimes people get it right which we can positively exploit to bring Jesus into the conversation.

There are bridges to the Gospel, if we're intentional to look for them. Are we listening for the bridge God has provided in the personal experiences & culture of our listeners as we seek to share Christ with them. Because, like the Richardsons, Andersons, that young female missionary, or the church planters in Lampung, God's provided open doors of understanding the death & resurrection of Christ to them. At our men's gathering Jack Sun shared how the Chinese symbol for 'righteousness' is the word 'lamb' overtop the word 'me', communicating that righteousness comes through the Lamb of God! Something imbedded in their culture & language! That's nothing short of amazing!

Many of our Redemptive Analogies in this culture come in the way of movies & stories with messianic plots & storylines which we produce. Story's powerful. Yours included, of what Christ has done in your life! We talked about the plot line of The Matrix a few weeks back. The Narnia book series & the movies weigh heavily in this. The Passion of the Christ, obviously. The Lord of the Rings movies as well. I'm sure you may have other examples. Churches in the past have done movie nights where they play a movie, invite friends, then discuss the messianic plot line & how it relates to the Gospel of Christ.

The question is, are we reading culture well with Bible in one hand, and news & stories of our culture in the other, bringing them together to communicate Jesus to those around us? The great sin on our part is that many an opportunity's lost, we don't take what God is saying to others, and press into it with them for the glory of Jesus & their salvation. Have you honed your own testimony to clearly illustrate what Christ has done in you so that you're ready to share your faith in a moments notice? (Handouts) I would urge you to do that, write it out, share it with other believers to ensure that you are communicating the repentance & faith in Christ necessary for salvation. That your story points to Jesus, and not yourself. Change it if need be, then practice it and begin to share!