

WHY HAVE NEIGHBOR LOVE?, ACTS 17:22-34

Art of Neighboring #1

◆**Intro:** Have you ever had that feeling of not belonging? Maybe at a new school where you're no longer the reigning 8th grade class but now at the bottom of the High School heap. Maybe in the first week of college at a new location, having left home for the first time in your life. Maybe on a new sports team, or at a new job. Or maybe in an old place but just now realizing that you are quite different from the rest of the folks there. And so you ask, "What am I doing here?" It's a question that wonders about purpose and meaning in the universe. Your purpose. Your meaning. Why am I here? Well, our text has some deep foundational answers to those questions.

◆**1. I am where I am, by the plan of the Son of Man!**

Basically that means Jesus (Son of Man, God) is the determining force behind my existence, and location in time and space! This is a very encouraging text and I want you to hear it! You have God's word on it. In a very fundamental way, you belong! You do not just happen to be here on this planet in the year 2021, on a plot of land called Indiana. You are here, you are now because God wants something for you. Some folks call life fate. Some call it destiny. Other's think it's chance. Christians witness that it is a person with a plan.

◆*...all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! Psalms 139:16-17 (NIV)*

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◆A. Now no matter which location, or which generation you find yourself, there is a universal reason behind your being here: that you know and love your God and Maker (v27). God wants you to relate with him. The Westminster Confession, written about 500 years ago, puts it "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever!" God is not something we made up, rather we are the something he made up! (v29). And that makes your life and my life essentially about finding our true Father/Inventor. This is really why you are alive. Not to put in 40 hours. Not to find new entertainment. Not to escape our boredom or depression, but to find our Father.

◆B. There is this slight problem of course. Our first father Adam stained our whole race with sin. And we can't, won't find our Heavenly Dad on our own, or by trying to be good enough that he'll take us back. But there is a way to find our father. Verse **30-31** tell us the secret: repent of sin, believe on Christ Jesus who took your place and died for your sin, and was raised to life again. The very Son of God, and our perfect brother!

◆"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 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 all men by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:30, 31, NIV.

◆This is who Paul was talking about when he wrote elsewhere,

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◆ *"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."*

1 Corinthians 15:22, NIV.

◆ **C.** You, my friend, are going to die someday because of your ancestor Adam and the sinful nature you inherited. But you were created to live and know and love your loving Creator. The only way to make that happen is to let Jesus, your only sinless brother, pay your way in. What job you have, what city you live in, what century you were born into, what month you die – it's all for this central purpose: are you relating with your Heavenly Dad? Have you asked him to forgive your sins so you can begin eternal living? You can do it while I'm talking! Nothing else is more important. Everything about you being alive is aimed at this. God put you here on purpose, to love you. And Jesus makes it possible.

◆ Also, this text clearly implies that ...

◆ **2. God puts people near me on purpose.**

◆ We know that our neighbors were designed and created by the same God that made us and for the same reason (v24)! We know that the nice car they drive was given to them by the biblical God whether they know him or not (v25), and that like us, God has no need of them, but that like us, God wants relationship with them, (v27) or in other words, to be family with them!

◆ Small wonder then, that, as the Hebrew people knew, loving your neighbor as yourself pretty much caught all the intent of

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God's laws in the Scriptures. That's how important our neighbor is in our living out life with God. Paul put it like this:

◆*"The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Galatians 5:14, NIV.*

◆Well, let's face it. Nobody will ever love their neighbor as much as they love themselves -worry about whether their socks match or they're having a good hair day, or if they're hungry, or getting along with their siblings or.. So we know that being a good neighbor is not a law of God we can keep or hope to earn his attention with. But we do it as a response!

◆*"We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." 1 John 4:19-21, NIV.*

◆**B.** Love of God must lead to love of neighbor. The way we love God, who we cannot touch or see, is by loving his offspring who we can touch and see. This means then that lovers of the true God are also lovers of their neighbors. Our recent covid pandemic raises an interesting observation from other plagues.

◆The Antonine Plague of the 2nd century may have killed off 25% of the Roman Empire. Christians cared for the victims and "offered a spiritual model whereby plagues were not seen as the

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work of angry and capricious deities but the product of a broken Creation in revolt against a loving God.”

◆ During another plague in the 4th Century, the pagan Roman Emperor Julian complained about “the Galileans” taking care of people who did not agree with their beliefs.”

◆ When the bubonic plague reached Wittenberg, Germany in 1527, Martin Luther did not flee the city like many did, but stayed to minister to his fellow citizens. His daughter Elizabeth soon died from the disease. In a tract entitled “Whether Christians Should Flee the Plague,” Luther wrote: “We die at our posts. Christian doctors cannot abandon their hospitals. Christian governors cannot flee their districts. Christian pastors cannot abandon their congregations. The plague does not dissolve our duties: It turns them to crosses, on which we must be prepared to die.” Source: Lyman Stone, “Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years” Foreign Policy, (3-13-20)

◆ What has marked Jesus’ followers from the beginning is their willingness to take on the burden of their neighbors and to so love God by loving them. I am hoping to stir within us this godly desire. Perhaps you really want to display this love.

◆3. Warnings for people who want to love their neighbors.

◆ A. I must not let my blessings keep me from loving my neighbors.

◆ Let’s be honest, we’re blessed here in America. I pondered it while away learning to paraglide. I stayed in our pop-up

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camper at a County Park a few miles from the airfield. The “camp ground” was filled with portable villas. Some folks call them recreational vehicles, but they are not “vehicles”. In fact, almost everyone living in their portable estates also brought a golf cart! Not to go get water (had that in the recreational chateau!), or use the central bathroom. Their rolling guesthouses have facilities). No, the golf carts were just so they didn’t have to walk anywhere. **(insert video of camp ground)**

◆ Oh and there was a horse park too **(insert horse pict)**, with Steeplechase course, and stables. And it occurred to me, we are so blessed that what used to be a common tool of economic survival (horse) is now only an expensive toy we play with and enjoy! And what used to be a common life (cooking over fire and going to fetch water daily) is now a recreational hobby!

◆ Here’s the thing. If we are not appropriately grateful and recognize them, our blessings can make us lazy. Why should I make a fire when I can push a button on the microwave? Why should I meet my neighbor. I’ll have to put down my beer and get off my couch! Yet I reality if you are blessed, it is *so that* you can bless others as well.

Proverbs 3:27-29 (NIV) Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back

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tomorrow and I'll give it to you"— when you already have it with you. Do not plot harm against your neighbor, who lives trustfully near you.

◆B. I must not let the overwhelming need of the world keep me from loving my neighbor. You know how it goes, right? You see a stranded motorist and think, "Somebody should help that guy. Maybe I should stop." And then, oh look there's another one! I'm only one man! What about that kid who's dog got away? Did you see all those people on the news who got flooded out in Louisiana? Maybe we should go there. Did you know there are kids starving in China? Somebody really ought to volunteer at Lafayette Urban Mission. Trinity Mission needs mentors! And the Salvation Army? There are people in our city who don't have houses!" (Pant pant)

◆When overwhelmed we opt for what **Pathak and Runyon** call invisible neighbors, or metaphorical neighbors. My neighbor is somebody "out there", everybody out there, and I have a general sense of well-being for my fellow man. This must mean I love my neighbor! But it doesn't.

◆C. I must not let differences in people can keep me from loving my neighbor.

◆*Leviticus 19:34 (NIV) The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as*

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yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

◆ I saw a guy some years ago with weird hair. I mean, super short everywhere (almost bald) but super long on top and slicked all back with “product”. My first reaction was, “That guy’s a little odd, now isn’t he. I’m not sure we’re in the same group. I’m not entirely sure I would want to have a conversation with that guy... When I finally did talk to him I said, “Mom has lunch ready. Call your brothers and we’ll eat.”

◆ Have you ever noticed how at a BBQ the men tend to gather in one spot and the women in another. Or that when setting up your lawn chairs at a parade you tend to pick curbs with other people that kinda look like your own type? Latinos don’t rush over to dutch people groups. Some white folk will avoid sitting near black folk. Listen, God’s followers intentionally break barriers of difference because they know we’re all God’s kids.

◆ Verse 26 told us every nation came from the same one man (Adam). That’s right. People with smaller eyes. People with big teeth. People with pale skin. People who know judo. People who can jump, and people who can’t. We are all humans, tracing our line back to the same exact starting point.

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◆ Take it further than creational difference like race, or color that we can't change. How about being able to love a neighbor with moral differences, or political differences? Now I'm not saying that Christians accept other religions, or say that "love is love" no matter who. That's just not true according to God's precepts. But it does mean that we are family even with people who are disoriented in some ways. It is our family across the street that needs to know our Dad in Heaven as much as we do. So we are to love them!

◆ **Conclusion:** We can give various theological answers to the question of who is my neighbor, and we'll do that more next week when we look at Jesus' answer in the parable of the Good Samaritan. But for now, what if we just simply take Jesus command at it's most literal level, that is, that my neighbor is the person who lives next to me. Hence, the BLOCK CHART on the wall. We have magnetic ones available at the welcome center too. Fill them out after our worship time, today. We'll be coming back to them at the end of our study.

◆ Let's not miss it friends, one of the primary purposes we exist on this planet is to find our Dad, and to love him back, and to love our neighbors/ his kids too. As a church, Gods word is inviting us make a start by actually knowing something about the people who live next to us!