

Examine the Scriptures \* Acts 17:10-14

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I have kind of a funny question for you here this morning - when you think about your Bible – do you think of it like a plunger - something you use only in emergencies? Is it like a thigh master - something you bought with good intentions but now hardly ever use? Is it like a nice coffee table book, nice to look at on your shelf? Or is your Bible like a toothbrush, something that you use every day for your health and well-being?

For the people that we're going to look at today, it was the last one. The Bible was of vital importance to them. In fact, they're known for it. If I say in 1492 Columbus did what - you know he sailed the oceans blue. Well the people were going to look at today, the Bereans - they examined the scriptures daily. That's what they're known for. What did the Bereans do? They examined the Scripture daily.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Acts 17. Acts 17 in your Bibles and we'll talk about the Bereans. At this point, the Jerusalem council has happened and Paul's travelling around Greece spreading the good news about Jesus and as Acts 17 opens, Paul lands in Thessalonica. Things do not go well for him in Thessalonica. Clearly things turned out well in the end, because Paul would later write 1 and 2 Thessalonians to them but here in their first meeting, Paul was driven out of town for telling people about Jesus.

His next stop was a little place called Berea, an 'off the beaten path' kind of place according to contemporary authors, and I'd like to think that it's kind of like us here at Langford.

So here's what happened, Acts 17, verse 10 – Paul was sent out of Thessalonica to Berea and the first thing he did when he arrived was go straight to the Jewish synagogue.

Now think about this – Paul has just been in danger at the hands of a Jewish mob and in the very next town he comes to, where does he go? The Jewish synagogue. He clearly believes that the Gospel is worth sharing.

And here in Berea, Paul found a more receptive audience. Verse 11 -

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Lots of details there, so let's unpack that.

The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians. Why? Because they were better people? Better social class? No – it's because they received the Gospel with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. They spent a lot of time reading their Bibles (their Old Testaments) and thinking about the implications for their lives and that led them to listen with interest to what Paul had to say. That made them 'noble people' in God's eyes.

And I'm suspicious that that's what explains the difference between the Bereans and the Thessalonians here. I can't prove this, but the way Luke's written this makes me think that the Bereans' study of Scripture made them open to God what was doing, where the Thessalonian's resistance to the Gospel was probably because they didn't really spend much time in the Scriptures. Where the Bereans'

perspective was shaped by the Word, the Thessalonians was shaped by the world. And that I think is why the one welcomed them with eagerness while the other chased them out of town.

But even then, the Bereans were not about to swallow what Paul had to say without giving it a second thought. On the contrary, they examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true. They weren't just going to listen to the newest thing coming into town and base their lives on it. No, they went back to God's Word to see if this 'Gospel thing' was really from Him. And, according to verse 12.

12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

So the Church is growing. Sadly though, a bunch of the Thessalonians found out that Paul was preaching at Berea and so they went and stirred up trouble for him there too and so Paul left town and began his ministry at Athens (vss. 13-15).

Now that's a story for a different time but for now, let's think about the Bereans. Why do we remember them? We remember them because they examined the Scriptures daily. They engaged with God's Word and thought carefully about what it meant for them. Not only that, they allowed the Bible to shape their perspective, so that rather than being swayed by tradition or public opinion or the hottest new idea, their worldview was founded on the Word of God. That's a noble way of life.

And it challenges us I think to ask ourselves – are we that committed to the Word of God? Are we that firmly established on the foundation of Scripture? We need to make personal Bible study a non-negotiable priority in our lives. Because when we study the Word, we grow in faith.

Just think about the Bereans. As they 'examined the Scriptures daily,' they grew to know God more and more. And when Paul came to them and shared with them the assertion that Jesus was the Messiah that they'd all been waiting for, they went back and weighed that against what God had already said. And they found out that God had indeed promised a suffering servant who would die a substitutionary death like a Passover Lamb to set His people free from slavery to sin. It was all there. And they came to faith and grew in faith because they examined the Scriptures.

That needs to be true for us too – We need to study the Word to grow in faith.

Johann Spangenberg, one of the German reformers, put it like this - following the example of those in [Berea], we should gladly read Scripture. For Scripture is the only rule and foundation of our faith. If a carpenter or mason is to build something ably, then he must have a plumbline. If a goldsmith is to test gold, then he must have a touchstone. So then, if we Christians are to judge what is God's Word or human teaching, then we too must have a touchstone, and this is holy Scripture. From Scripture we must learn about Christ ("Brief Exegesis of Acts 17:10-15.6," *Acts*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture).

I want to encourage you to set aside time to study the Word, to really dig into it and engage with it. Bible study helps like Daily Bread are good and by all means, use them, but don't neglect the source. Spend time reading your Bible, even a chapter at a time, and even more importantly, spend time thinking about what what you've read means for your life. Apply what you've read to the way that you live and when you do that, you will definitely grow in faith. Be like the Bereans – study the Word to grow in faith.

**BENEDICTION**

22. 2 Pet. 3:18 - (May you) grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.