

“BECOMING A BEREAN.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

January 10, 2021, 9 and 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Acts 17:10-13

Prayer: Holy Father, by the present power of your Holy Spirit open our blind eyes and deaf ears. Wake us up out of our slothfulness and complacency and remove the distractions, don't let the enemy of our souls hinder what you want to accomplish through your Holy Word. Make us ready and expectant to hear what you want to speak to each of our hearts this morning, for the sake of Jesus and His glory. Amen.

Introduction.

When I was just a little tike in first and second grade we lived down in Newport, Oregon and my parents attended First Baptist church. And they were good Baptists, they did what all good Baptists did. They carried their Bibles to church every week. They encouraged Scripture memory. In Sunday School and VBS they taught Bible stories. They made a game out of knowing your Bible and all the books of the Bible.

I remember playing a game called a Sword Drill. You would hold your sword closed and the teacher would call out a verse and you tried to be the first to find it. I think this was back before they invented Bibles with those thumb tabs on the side. You had to know your Hosea from your Hebrews and your Chronicles from your Corinthians.

Baptists like to talk about the Bereans, about being a Berean or becoming a Berean. Since it is my custom to begin each new year with a reminder and call to prayer and Scripture reading, I have decided to skip ahead in our Acts series and preach on the Bereans this morning to encourage us to take up our sword as eagerly and seriously as they did.

Thessalonica to Berea.

Just to give a quick context, when we left off in Acts in November Paul and Barnabas had returned back to their home church in Antioch in Syria from their first missionary journey in Turkey (Asia Minor).

Our text this morning finds Paul and Silas in the middle of their second missionary journey after they have just crossed over from Asia Minor into Europe, into Greece.

In Thessalonica things started well, but quickly devolved into a violent riot.

Acts 17:5 The Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

Our world isn't no different is it. Sinful people do sinful things, debate is shouted down, truth is trampled under rhetoric and lies and hate. Religion is run out of town.

Paul and Silas were smuggled out of town under the cover of darkness and make their way 50 miles south to Berea.

As was their custom they first went to the synagogue to share the Gospel about Jesus. Notice the folly of the Devil. He thinks by persecution he can stop the spread of the Gospel, but all he ends up doing is aiding the spread of Gospel. Don't fear the Devil, whatever he tries to do in your life, God will turn upside down and into good.

Luke tells us that the Jews in Berea were of more *noble character* than the Jews in Thessalonica for three reasons. But before I get to the three reasons, let's think about what it means to be of noble character.

A person who is noble is a person who always take the high road. They honorable, honest, upright, charitable, unselfish. They are the kind of people we admire and respect. They are not petty, meanspirited, dishonorable, coarse, foul, selfish. They subdue their baser instincts, they are self-controlled, they control their tongue.

Do you know someone you would describe as having noble character? Are we? Our world desperately needs people of more noble character, Bereans not Thessalonians.

Luke commends these noble Bereans for three reasons.

First, they received the Word with eagerness.

The noble Bereans were open minded, even eager to hear what he had to say. They received Paul's words with open ears. They listened attentively. They had a readiness of mind, willing to listen. They were not quick to quarrel, disagree, find fault, be dismissive.

Do you want to know what is noble? It is noble to listen to truth and to receive correction. It is noble to bend our wills to a higher will. It is noble to let iron sharpen iron.

And it is even nobler to seek correction, seek wisdom; to want God's Word to do in your heart what He has given it to us to do. But who is this humble, who is willing to lay down their pride?

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Notice one more reason they are called noble. Not only were they open to hearing and receiving the truth, truth about things they had not heard before. They were also more noble because they showed charity toward those they disagreed with or differed with.

How do we act towards those we disagree with or differ with, who hold a different opinion, who have a different view on a matter? Are we noble, charitable, showing kindness, benevolence?

Do we make allowances for one another, even going so far as to think more highly of others than of ourselves? (Are we noble in conversation about COVID-19, face masks, etc.?)

If Bereans were sitting in our pews they would be taking notes, receiving the Word, writing down what was said so they could go back to it later.

A Berean is a person in whom the Holy Spirit has given eagerness, who delights to read and hear the Word, who wants to get something out of it, who expects to get something out of, who is asking the Spirit on open their eyes and ears. Would you say you are eager to hear this morning?

Do we come expecting God to say something to us each week? *How you come will often determine what you get.* An elder at the elders meeting last Tuesday asked about last week's sermon if I had directed it at him? Well of course not, I had no way of knowing what he needed to hear, but the Holy Spirit did, so the Spirit directed my words to him in a specific way.

Come each week asking the Spirit to make the Word specific and real and applicable to you. Come expecting that, come leaning in and listening and taking notes ready to receive what the Spirit is saying.

If you don't have a particular eagerness or interest in spiritual things or love for the truth of God's Word then you need the Spirit's help and you need to ask for it. Like that Psalmist:

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Second, they examined the Word daily.

Luke commends them that they didn't receive the Word uncritically, or without testing to be sure what Paul was saying true. They don't turn their minds off, rather they ask good questions.

They checked to see if what he said based on the OT was really there, what was the context, did it square with what else the OT says. For them what they were doing was checking to see if this NT could be found in the OT. Where the prophecies and promises being fulfilled?

Not everything in the Bible is easily understood, some things are hard to understand and must be examined, studied, drawn out. Do you want a superficial faith, a shallow faith, or one that has dug down to bedrock and is firm?

I never come on Sunday morning and just shoot from the hip or make it up as I go, or even rely on what I remember being taught somewhere. I study and examine, I ask questions and chase rabbits, I follow leads, and check with several people far wiser than myself. My goal is never to be original or novel, but to be true and faithful.

I don't want your faith to rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power and wisdom of God (I Corinthians 2:5; see II Corinthians 4:7).

One thing being a Berean means for me is if I get some idea while preparing a sermon, something really different, cool, original, I don't just go with it. I test it, I force it through the filter of the rest of Scripture. I check what older, wiser, mostly dead people have said about it. I put it under the microscope, I put it in the furnace to check for impurities.

Paul shows his noble character by not taking offense by their questioning and checking what he said against the Scriptures.

This is a mark of true religion, it submits to being questioned and challenged, to being reasoned, explained, argued, proved. It uses persuasion, not coercion. It doesn't demand unthinking acceptance. Christianity bears scrutiny. Jesus bears up under the most intense of questioning.

Fact-checking has become a catch phrase in our day. There are people out there fact checking everything a politician says. That's good, things spouted as facts should be checked. We should not hold beliefs that don't have evidence to back them up.

We are all struggling with much of what is being said to us about COVID-19 because we can't seem to get a firm grasp on what is fact and what isn't. If we care about that regarding a virus, we should care even more about it with regard to our faith.

There are a lot of CSI type shows on TV, Crime Scene Investigators, people who search for clues, evidence from crime scenes, that they take back to their labs to examine.

If you hear me say something and you question it, you should be able to ask me to back it up from Scripture. And in the same way if you say you don't believe something I say, you need to back up why from Scripture.

Test the spirits, test the worldviews out there, test those who promise great things, test what is called new or novel. We are too quick to go along with what we hear on TV or read on the internet.

Matthew 22:29 But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.

There are some of us here who are saying or believing or doing things that are contrary to God's Word. Tremble at the thought. Everything in our lives should be a fulfillment of Scripture. To do that we have to know Scripture and believe Scripture is sufficient to speak to our daily lives. You should undertake nothing without first seeking the wisdom of God in His Word.

It guides us about raising our children.

It guides us about conducting our business.

It guides us about spending our money.

It guides us about who we should marry.

It guides us about sex.

It guides us about anger issues, about what pushes our buttons and what we should do about it.
It guides us about politics and what issues matter most.
It guides us about how to get along with our neighbors.
It guides us about how we should spend our retirement.
It guides us about how to be a faithful church full of godly and God-glorifying Christians.

I know you believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. But so what, if you don't believe in the sufficiency of the Bible, that it has practical application to your everyday life.

Scripture will equip you well for everything you face and have to do this year, at home, at work, at church, in life. Do you believe that? Test me in this and see if it's true, that God's will expressed in His Word is sufficient for every need in your life.

The Berean's eagerness is underscored by their desire to meet with Paul not just on the Sabbath but daily. *Daily* tells us they were not casual about these matters, not just occasionally. They didn't just consider Scriptural things once a week.

No one can live well on one meal a week, and that is true spiritually as well as physically. If we go from Sunday to Sunday not only will we not grow spiritually, but even that one meal will not be fruitful or profitable.

We should take the message from Sunday and meditate on it, ask the Spirit to apply it, and then add to it from God's Word each day. And come to worship the next Sunday with the pump primed, ready to receive the Word again. How many of us are doing life on a starvation diet: Don't let there be a drought for the Word in your home or heart.

How did they examine the Scriptures since they didn't have Bibles? They did it in community. They would gather each day at the synagogue where there would be a copy of the OT on large scrolls, kept by the rabbis.

This practice commends to us the benefit and blessing of gathering corporately for worship, to hear the Word preached in community and of gathering in Bible Studies. It is good to reason together, to ask questions together, to see if what we believe is true according to the Scriptures.

Growing our faith is a communal act. Being together is more important than we realize in our individualistic culture. We need each other to help us grow in our knowledge of God and His Word. Our very presence encourages one another.

Gathering for worship is as essential to our spiritual wellbeing as going to the grocery is essential for our physical being.

Third, they believed the Word in their hearts.

When the Word of God is received eagerly, examined daily, it is not found wanting, but always bears good fruit. Many believed and came to salvation in Jesus by the Spirit through the Word, both Jews and Greeks.

You have heard the term *means of grace*. There are certain things that are means of grace, tools of receiving grace, paths along which if one follows it they will find and experience of grace. There are some very common means of grace. Prayer, reading the Bible, worshipping God, hearing the preaching of the Word, receiving the sacraments.

God delights to give His grace to those who make diligent use of His means of grace. God gives His grace to those who diligently search and study their Bible, who read it, memorize it, pray it, embrace it, love it.

All these things are God's gifts to us to build our faith, to strength our love, increase our hope, to bring us God's blessings and benefits. When they are neglected, we become dry, our souls wither and perish.

Implications and application.

They heard the truth taught by the Apostles with eagerness and readiness of heart. They went back to the OT daily to verify what they were saying according to the actual passages. Then they believed.

They were not like the seed that falls among the thorns and is choked out by the fleeting concerns and pleasures of life and fails to thrive when there is no pressure from life to push them back to faith and God.

The call to be a Berean is a call to be in God's Word, to receive it, to study it, to believe it.

The Bible, in the hands of the Holy Spirit who inspired it, is a living organism, with the power to change your life, guide your life, and give you eternal life.

John 6:66-68 After this many of [Jesus'] disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*"

Psalms 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who

2 ... delight[s] is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water

that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Strive to be a Berean this year, and see if God's grace doesn't meet you in new and refreshing and surprising ways again and again.

Prayer: Our Holy Father in Heaven, we beseech you this morning to bless our seeking of you. Bless us with a deep and lasting hunger and thirst for righteousness, fan the flame of our zeal for the truth of your word, and a great love for you and for each other. Grant in our brokenness and imperfection that we would desire the fullness of Christ. Help our unbelief, forgive our wandering affections. Deliver us from our small desires and our foolish pursuits. I pray for your Fatherly blessing to be upon this flock. Make us faithful and fruitful for your glory. And above all, dear Father, grant that our lives will increasingly bring glory to your dear Son, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, in whose precious name we pray. Amen.