

**The Commitment of the Jews in Berea
Acts 17:10-15**

It's always fun to see the kids come up and share with us. That's the future of our music ministry. Right? So we want to see a preview. That's great.

We're studying Acts 17:10-15 this morning, so I encourage you to turn there. We will be looking at a text that speaks of a church that is better than some of the other churches we've seen as we've gone along in the journeys of the book of Acts. By the time we get to Acts 17, we've moved from Jerusalem to Judea Samaria and now through Asia, and now we're into Europe. In fact, this is the section of the second missionary journey, Acts chapters 15:36 to 18:23, which is the second time that Paul goes out with others and brings the message of Christ to other places, and churches are established.

This morning, we will see a church that's doing better, and, yeah, you like to be at a church that's doing better. You like to be at a good church. You know, how do people figure that out? What is a church that makes it good? You know, is it the parking lot? Is it the toilets are clean? Is it we have great kid's music? Is it we don't smell as bad as the people at the other church? What is it that makes for people to think that it is a church I want to be at, that it's a good church? Well, this morning, we'll look at a church that's described, comparatively, as better, and we'll look at what is the reason for this description. So, I think it'll be helpful for us.

So, I'm going to read verses 10-15 from the New American Standard version, and you can read along in your Bible. Acts 17:10; "The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as

possible, they left.” So, this is where the journey lands in Berea and what happens in the town of Berea.

Now, we’ve gotten here because of, basically, persecution. In Acts chapter 17, we find that Paul and Silas, having fled the persecution in chapter 16 from Philippi, went to Thessalonica. And then guess what? They hit more persecution, more opposition, in Thessalonica. That’s why verse 10 says, “The brethren...” (and that’s “The brethren...” from Thessalonica) “... immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea...” And the implication is Timothy joined them later in Berea.

So, we arrive at Berea, which is along this journey that Paul has taken from Asia into Europe (and the northern part of Greece is called the area of Macedonia), and as we move along Macedonia, we’ve landed in Philippi and traveled through a couple of quick places, Apollonia and Philia, and moved to Thessalonica. And the first part of chapter 17, we saw the difficulties that the church in Thessalonica encountered by the Jews that had stirred up opposition against them, and that caused Paul and Silas, now, to flee to Berea, which is pretty close, I’d say, about fifty miles from Thessalonica, southwest. And as they moved to Berea, about fifty miles, most likely by foot... Berea is inland of the sea. It’s not by the coast. And if you looked at Berea today, it’s not like Philippi. Philippi today is kind of in ruins. Thessalonica is like a major city, a metropolis. Berea today is maybe half the size of Lancaster. It’s a city, but it’s not in ruins. It’s got quite a population of maybe a hundred and fifty thousand or so. So, about fifty miles southwest... It was described by a writer, a Greek writer, named Cicero about a hundred years before Luke wrote the book of Acts. It was described as off the beaten path or, in other words, off the path known as the Aegean Way, that was, in our way of looking at it, it was kind of a trail. It was one of the Roman roads that had been established by the Romans throughout the Roman Empire - hundreds even thousands of miles of these tracks that you could take around. Well, Berea wasn’t along this path. It kind of follows along the fleeing from Thessalonica. So, they took an offshoot of this over to Berea, more inland.

So, as we find, they arrive in Berea. They go to where they go as is their custom, as we read, with the Thessalonians. They arrive at the synagogue of the Jews, going first to the Jews who already have an understanding of the Old Testament and the prophecies, hopefully, that they can build on. They

arrive in Berea and there's a description of the Bereans; "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica..." What does that mean? "...noble-minded..." is probably not in your vernacular. You don't tend to talk about your buddies as being "...more noble-minded..." Well, let's look at this. As we examine the text here, "...noble-minded..." is a compound word - some words put together - with a meaning well-born, if you will, from the word well and the word family or race, and it connotes, technically speaking, a noble, being a person born into a higher class, an aristocracy. Some translations, probably rightly, just translate it noble; "... they were more noble..." We read of that word being used in 1 Corinthians 1; "...[there's] not many wise... not many mighty, not many noble..." in the church. You know, we're kind of, like, average people; not many of you are from the aristocracy.

Now, when Paul uses it, he's not talking their physical standing, their social standing, he is talking about how they are in their spiritual character. They were more responsive than the Thessalonians, and this is a demonstration. This is a characteristic of people who are children of the King, if you will. People who are demonstrating their place as being noble in a spiritual sense are like the Bereans. That's why when you were to find a church called the Thessalonian Church, Thessalonian Baptist Church, you know... it's hard to find a church called Thessalonian Baptist Church. It's much easier to find a church called Berean Baptist Church. You know, lots of people want to name their organization or their church, Berean, because the Bereans are better than the Thessalonians or the Corinthians or other places.

Now, the English Standard version does a pretty, real good job, I think, of their translation because they avoid making the "...great eagerness..." the reason why they were "...noble-minded..." If you read the New American Standard, it kind of does this. It says, "...these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness..." Other translations are even more, kind of, definitive in this, and they'll say, "...these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, since they received the word [of God] with great eagerness..." The English Standard version just kind of sets it out there, just plainly, without making any statement one way or the other of there being a cause and effect relationship. And it does a real good job because, I think, that's what the Greek text had. We have two statements, just sort of side by side. I think, from memory, it will say, these "...were more noble-minded than the Thessalonians... they

received the [word] with great eagerness...” When you want to study more carefully, you want a more literal translation, and the more literal translations will do a little less interpreting for you to help you understand it better. So, maybe, gets a little harder to understand, but it’s more accurate about what the text really says in Greek. So, you don’t have to go learn Greek. All you have to do... hey, is speak English. You can gather together different translations, and it will help you out. And, in this case, I think the English Standard version did a good job in this.

So, the text, the Greek text, does not state whether the eagerness of the Bereans... why they were spiritually “...more noble-minded...,” what the cause and effect was. It doesn’t make any statement that they were “...more noble-minded...” because they had “...great eagerness...” I think that’s kind of a leap that certain translations will want to make. So, which is it? What is the cause and effect? And there’s kind of an interpretative analysis that you might do. And my interpretative analysis here would be based on the doctrine of election. This is really God’s work in the lives of people. It’s better to understand that their eagerness came from God’s work in them. And like Romans 3:10 says, “There is none righteous, not even one...” “...There is none who seeks for God...” This doesn’t just happen because people will it to happen, that they just become more eager. It happens because God is working in the peoples’ lives, and because of who they are, and that God made them this way. God infused His grace into their life to draw Him to themselves; their manifesting this self, and their manifestation is with more eagerness.

But the Greek text doesn’t make any statement one way or the other. So, just to be clear about that. But they were “...more noble-minded...” They were more spiritually minded. They were more eager for the word. The difference between the Jews in each city, between Thessalonica between Berea, the difference between these and why one’s “...more noble-minded...” and one’s not is not because of Paul’s ministry per se, it’s because of the hearer. Paul didn’t change his ministry, as he went from one city to the next city, to get better at it or to use a better strategy or technique. He did the same thing as he went along trying to communicate the word of God to each place. So, our goal must be the same, to communicate the word of God, not to manipulate, not to try to use tactics and strategy in order to get people to do something that we want them to do, because we cannot create this. The ministry of God is the work of God, and our responsibility is to

communicate, on the Lord's behalf, what He says and to do that faithfully, to do that well, to do that clearly - not mess it up.

But what the result is - whether people are more responsive and "...more noble-minded..." or whether they're having some difficulties and are confused - well, we don't want to make people confused - but some people are just going to not be as eager. They're not going to be as interested, and they're going to encounter more difficulties regardless of what we do. So, our goal is just to be faithful in the ministry and the communication of God's word, which brings us to the frequency of God's word - how this is done here. The people in Berea were receiving "...the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily..." They did this often. They responded to the teaching in a way that was eager, and their eagerness resulted in their desire to be engaged in it. So, the frequency involved in the Scripture is a means to an end, and the end is that they examine "...the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." So, they are looking to figure out the truth of God in the teaching of Paul. You know, there is no understanding apart from frequency, but just because you're frequent that assures nothing. There's lots of people that are actively engaging themselves in the Scripture, and they don't even believe it. They're doing this for academic purposes. You know, "...knowledge puffs up..." the Lord edifies.

But there's no escaping the fact that if you are actually eager for something and you're interested in something you're going to be participating. Jesus said, "...man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord." A natural result of an eager desire for the word of God is to want to engage it. These people did that, "...examining the Scriptures daily..." because if you're really going to know it, this isn't a passing thing once a week. You know, I'll drag my Bible off the shelf. I'll kind of wipe the dust off of it. I'll open it up and listen to the person that's up here talk about it. No, it's something that you are engaged in and you're interested in because you have the desire to learn. And this isn't just something that gets accomplished on Sunday morning, this frequency, this eagerness. So, a great example for us to be like if the Bereans who were of "...great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily..."

When the Greek text uses the word "...examining..." it's using a judicial word here. It's using a word that describes a legal process, a process that, like, with a trial, you are interacting with the facts and making a

consideration. We, like, if we're in a trial, weigh teaching that we hear against the standard of Scripture. You know, if you get kind of summoned onto a jury, and you are picked, and you have the responsibility to examine the information, but unlike with the jury, you have to, maybe, figure out, well, what's true. Well, here, fortunately, we, actually, have the standard of the Scripture. We, actually, have God's word for us. So, our standard is something that we match up what we hear with, and we examine whether the teaching that we hear corresponds and is supported by the Scripture itself, verses just what someone says, or what people like to hear. They might have a large following. They may speak well and eloquently with rhetoric, but that doesn't win the day. What wins the day is whether what is being taught is aligning itself with what the Scripture says, and like a trial, that is on you because individuals have the ability and the responsibility for correct interpretation of God's word. This is on you. You can't subcontract it out. You certainly can't pass it along to your neighbor. You certainly can't pass it along to your church. Well, my church teaches this, therefore that's what I think.

The Scripture is requiring you, like the Bereans, to know it and understand it and follow it so that you can evaluate whether you are in the best place or not. Ultimately, when we look at churches and we're going to go find a church that would be a great church for us to be involved in and to participate in, what would describe that church? What would make a church be that's the church for me, that's a better church? And I would say this stronger churches are filled with people who are eager for the truth of the word. They are corresponding with the church in Berea. They are more noble. They have a more spiritual edge to them. They are receiving "...the word with great eagerness..." They are "...examining the Scriptures..." They are deciding "...whether these things were so..." And it's not the church, it's the people in the church. Stronger churches are filled with people that are eager for the word and are able to do this, and, you know, I think that's true of us, frankly. You know, if our elders are going, say, out to dinner, and we get hit by a bus, I'd hope you'd miss us. Maybe, you even might be sad, but we will move forward as a church because our church is, actually, filled with people that are like the Bereans who have a "...great eagerness..." for the Scripture and actually examine "...whether these things are so..."

I, actually, think the reason we have this isn't because we got lucky or we put ourselves on just the right street corner so those people would come by and join our church, or we painted our church the right color. I think it's because, for at least forty-something years, hopefully, even since the founding of our church, we have been doing the same thing. We have been opening the word of God. We have been teaching the word of God. And you know what happens when you do that? The people that are interested in the word of God come, and the people that are not so interested in the word of God, well, they might come for a little while, but, eventually, they kind of think this is boring, and they go find something else to do - maybe it's another church, maybe it's, you know, some sporting activity - who knows what they do, and they don't continue. So, gradually, kind of piece by piece, we end up collecting people that, actually, are really eager for the word of God and are thinking that it's the standard by which truth is measured in the spiritual realm. And they're so interested in this, they like just the going through the Scripture and being taught about it, and they think that's a great thing, and they want to do that to other people.

That's why we have ministries going on all over the place this morning with people that are teaching the word of God faithfully. We don't need a video of me over in the two-story building to teach the adults over there. We have people that can teach the word of God. We can always use more. Hopefully, as you're hearing this and you're thinking, yeah, I want to know about the word of God. Well, you're in the right place first of all, but let's get busy engaging it, in what it says. What you will find is it begins to transform us. It's like a use or lose sort of thing. The people that are not so eager about the word of God don't really read it, don't think it's that important, don't really have it change their lives. And it ends up being, ho hum, what else is there to do? But the people that actually engage it discover that it's "...living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword..." and enable to pierce the soul and the spirit, and it changes us, and we become conformed and transformed to "...the image... of God..." and we become moved toward more righteous living and the desire to be served and not to be served, and all this stuff; and our church becomes stronger as a result of this. And more and more people will become that kind of person, that person who's desiring, like the Bereans, to examine the Scripture and know what it says and not be "...carried about by every wind of doctrine..." or just because somebody says something and it sounds good to some people. They're protected against that. That should be the kind of church that we are, filled

with people eager for the word of God and "...examining the Scriptures... whether these things were so." And they did this even with Paul.

I'm going to give you a... kind of a concept here, and I may even give you a vocabulary word (I didn't misspell this word). The locus of inspiration is the text, not the author. So, the Bereans didn't just say, oh, Paul says this; it must be right. He's the apostle Paul. They went to the Scripture to examine "...whether these things were so." The locus, in other words the place of inspiration, is the text. That's what 2 Timothy 3:16 says; "All Scripture is inspired by God..." You know, obviously, Paul wrote lots of things. Yeah, he probably wrote a grocery list for all I know. The Scripture's not saying everything Paul ever wrote was completely accurate and without error. The things that God inspired became the Scripture, and it's the Scripture that is completely accurate without error and able to guide us toward the person that God wants us to be like, fully "...equipped for every good work." And that's what the Bereans went to was the Scripture. So, there you go - the locus of inspiration is the text.

So, we can just recognize that the fervency for the word leads for a frequency in the word, and as we have this eagerness, this fervency, that brings us to the word, again and again and again, that imparts to us the facts of the word. We become more aligned with the truth of what it teaches. And this should be true for us even more than the Bereans themselves. And why is that? Because when we think about what it is that the Bereans were looking into, they did not have the New Testament. The only book of the New Testament that was written was Galatians that Paul wrote in his first missionary journey (after his first missionary journey), probably James was written. They had the Old Testament. If the Bereans were eager in their examination of the Scripture with only the Old Testament, how much more should we be when we have the entire Bible? We don't just have Paul and his teachings as they did: we have James; we have Peter; we have Luke who wrote this; we have the gospels. We have so much stuff that has been given to us to examine whether what we hear is true and not be diverted.

Now, the Berean church is interesting because, unlike some of the other churches we find, these people never, to our knowledge, got a letter written to them by Paul. There is no evidence that Paul ever wrote a letter to the Bereans, and it's kind of curious. What happened? Why not? You look at the letters: there's a letter to the Philippians; there's two letters to the

Thessalonians; there's two letters to the Corinthians; letter to the Galatians. Why don't the Bereans get a letter? Well, you look at some of the churches that Paul's writing these letters to and some of the challenges that these face and even as we go along in the book of Acts, and we find these churches, we discover they had some challenges. So, my guess is Paul didn't write a letter to the Bereans, most likely, because it wasn't necessary. And why wasn't it necessary? Because they "...were more noble-minded than..." the church at Thessalonica.

Or, later on, a few months to come, not my months - I meant in the chronology of the book of Acts months - soon Paul will be in Athens, then he will be in Corinth, and he will have the struggling Corinthian church. Paul ended up needing to give some extra attention to certain churches that were getting confused, and that's where we get the letters from. Struggling churches received more attention. Churches that were stronger like the Bereans - they were part, more quickly, of the co-laborers that Paul had. It's kind of curious. So, what happens in verse 13? Well in verse 12, we find that the responsiveness of the Bereans, that many were believing. "...a number of prominent Greek women..." - there's the women again, as I mentioned when we taught about the church in Thessalonica. We keep having this statement in the second missionary journey of the women, and the prominent women that are believing.

Verse 13 - we then go to the agitation that occurs from the Thessalonian Jews; "But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out..." So, there's this agitation that the Jews brought traveling from Thessalonica. The Thessalonian Jews came after Paul in Berea because their goal wasn't met. They were trying to shut Paul up. And he got away by night, and now, he's popped up again in Berea. So, they're going to chase him down to silence him, to shut him up. That's the same thing that they... the same way that they sought to do this in their home town of Thessalonica; they got the crowds all stirred up. We saw this happening in Philippi, too, where the crowds got stirred up, and they're doing this here in Thessalonica. They came and they're agitated. They stir up the crowds to get the crowds opposing Paul, and so he has to escape. That even happened in the first missionary journey if you remember back when we were going from Pisidian Antioch to Iconium, and Paul was being chased out by the Jews,

and he arrives in Lystra in Acts 14:19. And the Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium chased him down to Lystra and stirred people up against him there, and he had to flee to Derbe.

This is a typical approach that his opponents are taking, and he has to flee. What ends up happening because he flees? Guess what? The word of God moves forward. So, the word of God is spreading, not just in spite of the persecution, because of the persecution. God's plan for the word to move forward is happening by the very means of these people that are trying to stop it. So, in verse 14, we see "...the brethren..." ... "...the brethren..." are doing what brethren do. They try to help Paul out, and they "...sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained..." in Berea. So, when it says, "...as far as the sea..." it kind of depends on your translation, but, essentially, the Greek text doesn't tell us whether he actually sailed or he didn't sail. It's unclear whether he traveled to Athens by ship or he just went out toward the sea, and then moved down by land. Nevertheless, he moves from Macedonia (this section in the north of Greece) to the southern section called Achaia. And the rest of this journey will be in the southern part as Paul has now fled to Athens.

We find Paul fleeing to Athens, particularly because of the danger that was in Macedonia. He kept getting chased out, but there's another reason why he ends up going to Athens, and it's not only because Athens is a major place to be; it was sort of the cultural hub of the Roman Empire, maybe not the military hub or the political hub, exactly, but culturally. This is the Greek culture... Athens was the capital of it. But more than that, there's a reason he ends up there, and that's because of the geography - the geography. So, if you were to look at a topographical map of Greece, you have this kind of mountainous area in the center. So, we move from Thessalonica, inland, to Berea. We start to run up against this kind of mountainous region, so the more able way to travel would be south and east toward the sea and to move downward away from the area of Macedonia, and then you end up in Athens. So, this is another reason why Paul ends up going to Athens.

As we find the journeys go from place to place, it starts to make sense why they end up going where they go because that's the natural kind of place that you would go if you were looking to get away now, and not just get away, hide in the hills by yourself. And that's not what Paul did, to go be a loner. He was looking to continue on his ministry. That's why he goes to Athens.

So, there's a delay. He says (and we see), "...those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left." So, there was a delay for Timothy and Silas to join Paul in Athens, and the reason there's a delay is because there was still a church in Berea that needed to be ministered to; so, until the church of Berea got to the point of being stronger, they stayed there. Remember, so Paul was only there (it's probably, like, the winter) maybe even just, like, one month he was in Berea before he had to flee. He was at Thessalonica longer. He will be at Corinth much longer.

And when we track these people, Timothy, Silas, we see, now, when Paul is in Athens (he goes to Athens), we now enter a time that... for the first time, we see the original missionary team completely split up. And we learned this and we kind of touched on this last time when we looked at the church in Thessalonica. But if you turn to 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, we find about what happens, where Paul writes, "Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone [so there's a time when he's in Athens all by himself], and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith..." So, Timothy is sent to the Thessalonian church. Where's Silas? He's not in Athens. (Paul's alone in Athens.) He's still in Berea, so the original team that went from Asia to Europe (landed in Philippi) consisted of Paul, Timothy, Silas, and Luke the author of the book. Remember, Luke stays in Philippi. We saw that in Acts chapter 16. Luke's in Philippi. They move to Thessalonica. Then Timothy ends up ministering to the Thessalonians as we just said. Silas is remaining in Berea, and Paul is by himself in Athens.

Each of them had been guided and responding to the need of the churches and have split up - what a serving ministry of people giving of themselves to serve the churches as they went along. And, hopefully, that's us. And we don't know where God has for us to be, but wherever we are, we should be eager, serving with the word of God, examining "...the Scriptures daily..." able to encourage one another with the word of God, so that all of us could be seeing whether these things are true, whether it corresponds with the Scripture, and not be side-tracked. So, may we be willing to serve the Lord, regardless of where the Lord may lead us.