

The Bereans
Acts 17:10-15
Halifax: 27 January 2013

Introduction

Last week in our sermon series in Acts, we looked at the excellent example of the Apostle Paul.

- In particular, we looked at how he was indefatigable!
 - As an indefatigable encourager, we saw him going to the fledgling congregation at Philippi to encourage them, even after the ordeal he had been through.
 - We saw that like him, we need to find the Lord's encouragement in our afflictions and then encourage others as we have been encouraged.
 - As an indefatigable missionary, we saw him doing what God had called him to do again and again despite the hatred and hostility he met with.
 - We were reminded that we are called to be diligent in our callings, even if many hardships are involved.
 - As an indefatigable preacher, we saw how Paul preached until people responded one way or another.
 - He reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that Jesus is the Christ.
- Of course, we come short of all that we are called to be,
 - but how thankful we can be that in Christ we are indefatigable because He Himself was indefatigable and went all the way to the cross for us.
 - And now He lives forever to make intercession for us and will continue to work in us until we are brought into the eternal kingdom and are made indefatigable!
- This week, I want to look at another excellent example:
 - That of the Bereans!
 - Their example is so well known that most evangelical Christians know what you mean when you say that someone was like a Berean!
 - If you do not know, then you will soon, because today I want to show you how you ought to be like a Berean.

I. First, learn from the Bereans that you should honestly yearn to know the truth from God

A. This is the driving force of the Bereans

1. They wanted to see if what Paul and Silas said was true.
 - a. As soon as Paul and Silas got to town, they again went straight to the synagogue.

- Verse 10 says:
 - **Acts 17:10: Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.**
- 1) As we saw last week, they kept up the custom of always going to the synagogue first, even though they often met with ill treatment.
 - Even though they were just now escaping from trouble that arose out of the synagogue at Thessalonica,
 - they do not hesitate to go to the synagogue at Berea.
 - Just think, if they had hesitated (humanly speaking),
 - they might never have been able to minister to this synagogue at all because, as it says in verse 13, the Jews from Thessalonica came in pursuit of them.
- 2) There were two reasons that they always went to the synagogue first.
 - a) First, because it was God's will for them to go to His covenant people first.
 - The Lord wanted them to do this in order that those who were elect among His people might hear the good news that they were waiting for!
 - That the Messiah had indeed come to save!
 - b) Second, they went to the synagogue first because the synagogue was a *wise* place to start—strategically.
 - It was in the synagogue that those who were honestly seeking the truth were most likely to be found...
 - Not only Jews who might be true believers under the Old Covenant, but also Gentiles who had already left idolatry...
 - who had been attracted to the synagogue because here the one true God who created the world and who had revealed Himself in history was worshipped.
- b. And here at Berea, we see in verse 11 that there were many earnest truth seekers—the Bereans stood out as truth seekers!
 - Verse 11 says:
 - **Acts 17:11: These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.**
 - Note in particular that last phrase...
 - This was their driving force...
 - They wanted to find out whether the things that Paul and Silas told them were true!

2. They knew that nothing is more important than to know God.
 - a. If God had truly sent the Messiah, they did not want to miss out on it!
 - If He had truly come and atoned for sin so that whoever believed in Him might be saved—they wanted to know it!
 - If He was truly appointed the judge of all men, they wanted to be sure that they were reconciled with Him.
 - b. To be in darkness about such things would be tragic!
 - To discover such things—if true—would be marvellous!
 - It would mean reconciliation with God!
 - It would mean eternal life—an inheritance with Christ!
 - It would mean complete justification.
 - It would mean resurrection.
 - It would mean peace and assurance and hope and new life!
 - c. These Bereans recognized that this was not something to be indifferent about!
 - It was more important, in fact, than anything else...
 - And they acted as if it were!

TRANS> Oh that there might be more people like this in the world today!

- People who really do want to know the truth!
- And what about you!
 - Do you recognize how important it is for you to know the truth?

B. You need to live as though truth matters—because it does!

1. Some people pretend to care, but it is all just a farce.
 - a. Paul describes such persons when he writes to Timothy as **“ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”**
 - You must have met people like that—
 - They claim to be truth seekers.
 - They say that they really want to know and that they have been searching for years, but all they turn up is more doubts.
 - They will tell you that it is all because they are too honest and won't just accept whatever they hear.
 - Sometimes they will claim to be drawn to a religion or philosophy that is really quite absurd.
 - Not to be rude, but really—like an eastern religion that denies good and evil, light and dark... or something like that,
 - And they will try to make it sound very profound...
 - Or maybe they have gone for the scientific propaganda of the modern universities...

- Maybe they actually are trying to cling to poor Darwin and to believe that the world evolved by purely natural processes...
 - It is really a most amazing thing that anyone could embrace such a thing!
 - I have met several scientists and teachers of science who were almost angry when they really looked at the theory they had blindly accepted.
 - But these so-called seekers I am talking about—they hang on to this theory as if it were plausible.
 - They try to make it all sound very profound and scientific too...
 - and of course they may know a lot of facts—but their philosophy of origins is the incredible part!
 - No genuine seeker could go on believing that!
- b. Such persons are not really seeking the truth...
- Their real goal is actually to avoid the true God.
 - It may be that they are scared of Him or perhaps they don't want to be restrained by Him.
 - But if they were really seeking the truth, they would not be so confused and gullible...
 - Of course God does awaken such persons!
 - The gospel, when accompanied by the Spirit, can open anyone's eyes, no matter how steeped they are in lies.
 - But don't let them get away with claiming that they are honest seekers.
- c. And then there are those who may be madly defending their own religious tradition...even though it is a tradition that would never satisfy a real truth seeker...
- 1) They defend it because they do not want to be ostracized by their family and by the others in the group.
 - To them, being accepted is more important than finding the truth.
 - For all their pretenses, they are not really seeking the truth or they would find it.
 - 2) And for others, it is pride that drives them to keep their traditions.
 - They do not want to admit that they have been wrong so they dig in deeper and deeper and won't let go.
 - No matter how many problems they run into with their religion or their philosophy,
 - they refuse to let it go.

TRANS> Those are the various kinds of pretended truth seekers you might meet.

2. But there many other people who do not even pretend to care about knowing the truth.
- These persons find ways to distract themselves from having to think about it—
 - sometimes they will have a few pat arguments to defend their unbelief and their lack of seeking truth—
 - but mostly they just try to avoid the whole subject by immersing themselves in other things...
 - a. Some of them actually busy themselves in good causes...
 - Perhaps they are busy fighting for some cause or trying to help the downtrodden—
 - It may be really good things—but they are doing it for a bad reason—so as to avoid their Creator!

TRANS> Others take a different route. Instead of good causes,

- b. They occupy themselves with the pursuit of personal excellence...
 - Maybe their whole life is about sports or their career or about excelling in the arts.
 - Maybe they are devoted to health or beauty—or perhaps educational pursuits...
 - Or maybe it is the amassing of wealth or something like that...
 - Maybe they are even trying to be the best mom or the best dad...
 - These are again not necessarily bad in themselves, but these folks are pouring out their lives for excellence to divert themselves away from God, and that is the problem.
- c. And then there are those who drown themselves in more base things...
 - They give themselves over to drugs, or to immorality, or to pornography, or to wine, or to crime, or even to lying—
 - some people actually lie just for the thrill of being able to pull one over on their neighbour—
 - These folks are often addicted to something—which really means that they love their sin so much that they will keep on doing it even though they know it is destroying them...
 - We all need to face that—the reason you keep giving yourself to some sinful practice is because you love it...
 - You may not like some of the consequences, but you love it so much that you refuse to give it up—that's the truth!
 - Ephesians 4:19 puts it bluntly:
 - **Eph 4:19: being past feeling, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.**

TRANS> So you see that some people avoid the most important thing of all...

- Seeking to know the truth...
 - some by pretending to seek the truth, and others by completely diverting themselves...
- 3. So what about you?
 - Do you really want to know the truth?
 - If you really do, you will plead with God to show it to you...
 - And you will not avoid embracing the truth even if it means that you will have to give up things you love...
 - Isn't that what causes the hesitation?
 - Believing truth is costly!
 - But unlike addictions that people hang on to, truth does not lie and deceive you and leave you empty—
 - It brings marvellous blessings!

C. God has a special promise to those who honestly seek Him.

1. It is a very simple promise given by Jesus—
 - He said, **“Seek and you will find.”**
 - That is it—if you really do seek, there is an absolute promise from God that you will find the truth.
 - Some of you may have thought it was arrogant for me to say that people who claim to be truly seeking but come to wrong conclusion are not honestly seeking...
 - But now do you see why I said that?
 - I did not say that on my own authority...
 - I said that because Jesus said that they will find if they are truly seeking.
 - If a person is not coming to the knowledge of the truth, he is not truly seeking.
 - In John 7:16-17, Jesus also said,
 - **John 7:16-17: “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.**
 - You see that He is very clear about it all... if you don't come to know the truth, you don't really want to know the truth.
2. You can see that Jesus' promise was fulfilled in the Bereans.
 - Verse 12 shows us what the outcome of their honest seeking was:
 - It says:
 - **Acts 17:12: Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.**

- In the Thessalonian synagogue, there were only some Jews that were persuaded—
 - but because these Berean Jews were honestly seeking—**therefore!**—many of them believed...
 - In both places many Gentiles believed—but in Berea there were many Jews that believed because they were honest seekers.
3. So you see how important it is to make sure that you are like the Bereans in this!
- God's promise is very encouraging!
 - It assures you that you will not fail if you honestly seek the truth!
 - No one has to remain in the darkness if they truly want to be in the light!
 - No one who truly wants to know God will be left in ignorance!
 - You do not need to be concerned that you will start out and never get to your goal.
 - You will know the truth and the truth will set you free—the Lord guarantees it!
 - See then, that you are an honest truth seeker, like the Bereans!

TRANS> Now let's move on to look at one of the things that characterised the Bereans in their honest seeking that we ought to imitate...

II. Second, learn from the Bereans to be fair-minded.

A. Luke tells us that the Bereans were *more* fair-minded than the Thessalonians.

1. It is interesting that he makes such a comparison.
 - We don't always like comparisons like this because it makes us uncomfortable to say that one people group was superior to another...
 - I think we don't like it because we don't want to be the ones who are not as far along...
 - But Luke is writing the Holy Word of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
 - And he makes this comparison and we need to think about it!
 - It needs to set you to thinking about the fact that some people are more fair-minded than others.
 - You need to ask yourself if *you* are fair-minded—like the Bereans.
 - In many things, it is not helpful to compare yourself to others.
 - People will compare things that they can't change or things that they shouldn't worry about trying to change.
 - Or they will look at people who are not as far along as they are in order to boast.
 - But it can be very helpful to look at some outstanding virtue in a people with a view to imitating it...

- Looking at it as something valuable that we want to pursue by the grace of God.
 - We look into God’s law, and we see ways that we need to change.
 - And when we look at those who living out God’s law, we see a living example of what we need to be.
 - And because we have a Saviour who forgives us by the cross and who gives us His Spirit, we do not need to be discouraged...
 - We can look at the virtue and ask the Lord to help us get there.

TRANS> So let’s look at this virtue...

2. What does it mean—that they were more fair-minded?

- The word actually means “well-bred” or “well-born...”
 - sometimes it speaks of aristocrats—the word *eugenics* actually comes from the Greek word that is used here...
 - but in this case it speaks of those who are noble-minded—
 - truly willing to think about a matter and to give it an honest look.
 - It means that they were willing to really listen and really evaluate what Paul was saying!
 - It means that they were not instinctively trying to avoid what was being said—but rather were trying to look at it fairly.
- Luke explains what he means...
 - He says that the Bereans were fair-minded
 - **v. 11 “in that they received the word with all readiness and searched the scriptures daily.”**
 - The word *received* conveys the idea of welcoming, even of showing hospitality to a guest...
 - These Bereans were hospitable to what Paul was saying—they were not turning it away at the door, but inviting it in.
 - The word *readiness* conveys the idea of eagerness and zealously...
 - And the addition of the word *all*—*all readiness* makes their eagerness all the more illustrious!
 - Hey, he was talking about the Messiah!
 - Of course they ought to have been eager to hear!
 - They were all ears!

3. Isn’t this the way *you* ought to be about God’s word?

- Should you not be especially eager to learn of Christ, our wonderful Saviour who left the glories of heaven to redeem us?

- Oh my brothers and sisters—I hope you have a warm welcoming place for the word of God in your heart!
- I hope you children are eager for family worship!
- I hope you are all alert and attentive when you read the scriptures!
- I hope you pray and prepare to hear the preaching of the word...
 - And that you welcome it into your heart!
- Do you remember when I talked to you about this when we were studying about it in the Catechism?
 - That you are to warmly welcome the Word when it first comes knocking at the door of your heart?
 - You are to open your heart and say, “Ah! The Word of God has come to me! I am so glad you have come to see me—please, come in and stay with me!”
 - And then you are to entertain the word—
 - It would be very rude to invite a guest in and then completely ignore him, wouldn’t it?
 - You need to converse the Word, you need to meditate on it, you need to continually interact with it...
 - Feed it, cherish it, and delight in its company!
 - Take it with you wherever you go!

TRANS> That is what the fair-minded Bereans did.

B. Fair-mindedness is a very rare quality—

- I think that is why Luke draws our attention to it—it stood out!
- 1. Don’t you find that there are many people who are not at all open to hearing the truth?
 - a. Have you not found in witnessing or even in talking to other professing Christians that many of them will not even listen?
 - You present the truth to them, but they do not really give it hearing.
 - While you are talking, they are trying to think up excuses and arguments—but they are not really being noble-minded...
 - They are not really interested in knowing if what you say is true.
 - Ian Hamilton, a faithful pastor in England, said that he often asked people he witnesses to what he has just said...
 - He said that he is often very surprised to hear what they heard—not even close to what he said...
 - He wants to say, “What, was I speaking in Swahili?”
 - It should be understood that he is in Cambridge and is himself a graduate of Cambridge University,

- and many of the people he speaks to pride themselves in their intellect...
- but when it comes to understanding truth—to really listening to truth—they are as dumb as posts.
- Not because of they are incapable, but because they resist the truth.

TRANS> Fair-mindedness is not so much about brain power as it is about a willingness to give a fair hearing to see if something is true.

b. Sometimes you even run into this when the other person initiates the conversation.

- I remember someone who strongly objected to the fact that I did not want to do something or another on the Lord's Day...
 - We had a very heated conversation about it, and then a short time after, it was as if she had completely forgotten about it...
 - I had to explain my position all over again as if she was only hearing it for the first time.
 - I wondered if she was even being honest about it!
- And have you ever had someone come and complain about something you believe—tell you that you are wrong...
 - And then you ask them to show you how you are wrong, or you start to defend your position,
 - only to have them say, “I don't want to talk about it.”
 - You want to say, “Well why did you bring it up then?”
 - They just wanted to tell you that you are wrong, but they are not interested in showing you how you are wrong,
 - nor are they interested in listening to see if you might have good reasons for what you believe!
 - They are just letting you know that they don't want that.

2. Jesus is very straightforward about the cause of this problem!

a. He says that it is because our deeds are evil that we hate the light.

- The light exposes us so we shun it.
- In John 3:19-21 He puts it like this:
 - **John 3:19-21: And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.**

b. My dear brothers and sisters, you must guard against having such a spirit in you!

- As a believer, you must see that you give the truth a fair hearing.
 - Yes, the light exposes you—of course it does—it exposes your sin!
 - But you don't need to make like a bug and run for cover under a rock!
 - You have a Saviour who was crucified!
 - You can come to Him for forgiveness and for reformation of your sinful ways!
- Be fair-minded the way the Bereans were!
 - Paul showed them that they were much worse sinners than they ever thought...
 - The gospel shows everyone that—
 - But he also showed them that God has salvation for us in Christ that is far greater than we ever thought!
 - The Gospel tells us that the very Son of God has been crucified to make atonement for us!
 - The truth cuts deeply, but it also heals completely!
 - Do not shun it or you cannot be healed!
 - Come with Berean open-mindedness to hear the truth!

TRANS> But come with the right kind of open-mindedness.

- Come with the foundation of truth that you already possess...
- This is the third thing you need to imitate about the Bereans...

III. Third, build on the foundation you already have—like the Bereans did.

A. If, by God's grace, you have honestly searched, you will have a foundation that is already begun.

1. You will have a foundation because of the promise I told you about before...
 - The promise of Jesus that if you seek, you will find.
 - If your seeking has been honest, you will have come to some conclusions that you know are true...
 - Truth is self-attesting once you embrace it—
 - As I explained to you last week—it is like getting a joke.
 - Once you understand it, you understand it and you can't not understand it.
 - The punch line has been given away.
- Coming to certainty about the truth, of course, is all by the grace of God... there are no grounds for boasting.
 - The Bible teaches that no one seeks after God unless the Father draws us
 - But He does draw us, and when He does, we come to the truth.
 - The promise that he who seeks finds kicks in, and we find!
 - And then we have this foundation that we can build on...
 - A foundation of things that we know to be true from the Lord.

2. Those seeking the truth will be at different places in their discovery of the truth.
 - Some will be farther along than others.
 - a. Those who are just starting out may only fear God.
 - 1) I say “only” in the sense that they have not yet advanced beyond what they have learned from nature...
 - By God’s grace, they began to seek—and in nature they came to clearly see God’s eternal power and divine nature.
 - They have come to see that there is only one true God and that He created the world and all that is in it.
 - Now, they cannot deny that we are sinners and that death and misery are an expression of God’s wrath against sin.
 - But neither can they deny His goodness that is seen in His mercies that are over all His works.
 - They have also come to realize that God holds their future, and that unless they are blessed by Him, they are most miserable indeed!
 - Once an honest seeker has come to see these things, nothing can shake them loose...
 - He has a foundation of truth on which to build...
 - 2) And he needs to begin to build on that foundation—to add to it.
 - He may be in a false, idolatrous religion when he comes to this foundation...
 - He will have to reject it because he sees that the foundation of that religion is not true—it denies the eternal power and divine nature of God.
 - Therefore, it would be foolish for him to continue to seek truth from that idolatrous religion.
 - As an honest seeker, he must move on.
 - That is what many of the Greeks who were at the synagogue had done...
 - They had left their idolatrous religion because they saw that it was not true.
 - b. When a person does this, they will soon come to more truth.
 - 1) As they continue to seek, they will soon come to see that the Scriptures are the word of God.
 - In this way, they will add to their foundation of truth.
 - Not only do they fear God, but now they see that He has revealed Himself through the Bible.
 - 2) That is what the Bereans to whom Paul spoke had come to see—both the Greeks and the Jews.

- Of course, only Old Testament was available to them...because that was all that God had revealed at that time.
 - but they had come to see that the Bible was a divine book.
- Here was a book of truth and it told of the Messiah that God would send.
 - Here was a foundation of truth by which they could test what Paul and Silas were saying to them.

TRANS> Now the Bereans show us how to make use of whatever foundation we have if we are truth-seekers.

B. Once you have a foundation, you ought to build upon it

1. See how the Bereans do this!

a. Here these two Jews had shown up to their synagogue, proclaiming that the Messiah had come.

- You can be sure that Paul's message would have been like it was to the Thessalonians...
 - He would show them that according to scripture, the Messiah must suffer and be raised again to save sinners...
 - And he would explain and demonstrate to them that Jesus who was crucified and raised is that promised Messiah,
 - and that whosoever believes in Him will be justified!

b. So what did these Bereans do with this preaching?

- Yes, they listened earnestly to Paul and Silas as we have seen, but that is not all they did!
- They took everything they said and they tested it by the foundation of truth that God had already given them!
 - They tested it all by scripture!
 - Luke commends them to us because they not only listened to the missionaries, but they **searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so!**
 - Notice, they searched the scriptures *daily!*
 - What Paul and Silas were telling them was extreme importance!
 - They must find out for sure...
 - And because they already knew the scriptures to be the Word of God, they had a way to test it!

2. My friends, that is what you need to do too!

- Use the foundation that you have to test preaching!
 - Use what God has already shown you to test what you are being told!
 - You can't believe everything that is preached to you...

- Search it out in the scriptures—
 - See if what you are being told is from the scripture!
- If you are not that far along in you seeking, then use what you know.
 - If you only fear God, but do not yet know the scriptures, then take a good look at them...
 - You will find that they alone are in agreement with what you come to know about God from nature.
 - And consider the gospel that is in the scriptures...
 - You will find that the way of salvation through Christ crucified alone is co-ordinate with what you know to be true of God.
 - Once you see what the gospel is actually all about, you will know that this is the only possible answer for sinners!
 - If you honestly seek, you will find.

TRANS> Use the foundation that you already have—the things you know—and go from there.

3. There is no reason to waste your time listening to those who have the wrong foundation.
 - a. The Bereans at the synagogue would not have listened to Paul long if he had come contradicting the scriptures that they knew to be God's Word.
 - They would have rejected him and told him that he was liar.
 - If he had not even claimed to believe the scriptures, they would have had no use for his doctrine.
 - They would have quoted Isaiah 8:20 to Paul and Silas...
 - **Isa 8:20: To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.**
 - b. Now why do I need to tell you this?
 - I need to tell you this to save you time!
 - Have you come to see God's eternal power and divine nature through the things that He has made?
 - Then if you are going seek truth, you have no business listening to those who are devoid of the fear of God.
 - Find those who have the same foundation and start there.
 - Have you come to know that the Bible is the Word of God?
 - Most of you here have!
 - So who should you listen to?
 - So called Bible scholars who know a lot, but who do not believe that the Bible is truly the infallible Word?
 - Why would you listen to them when they do not even have the foundation right?

- Oh sure, you might be able to learn something from them—but this is not where you go for truth!
- You must go to those who have the same foundation as you!
- I do not understand how it is that those who believe will unite with a church where the leaders doubt the scriptures...
 - They have placed their own wisdom above the Word.
 - They are on an entirely different foundation.
 - They aren't even trying to go by the Word.
 - Save yourself some time and listen to someone who is at least committed to the same foundation as you.
- And then, once that is established,
 - Do what the Bereans also did and test what they say by that foundation—see if it is true to the word.
 - And God's promise still stands—if you honestly keep on seeking the truth, you will keep on finding it...

C. Scripture itself advocates such advancement in the truth.

1. In Ephesians 4:11-16, the scripture tells us that we are to go on as truth seekers...
 - **Eph 4:11-13: And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;**
 - And you see that it is the truth that we are to grow up in...
 - Verse 14 continues: **that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.**
2. For the Bereans, this meant that they came to know Jesus Christ!
 - For you who know Him, it meant that as well—
 - By the grace of God, you sought the truth...
 - By the grace of God, you came to believe in the one true God...
 - By the grace of God, you came to believe the word and gospel and so put your trust in Jesus Christ...
3. And if you will keep on seeking like the Bereans—
 - seeking earnestly to know the truth that you might believe and obey the truth...
 - you will continue to grow and you will continue to make progress.

- You will grow up in all things into Him who is the Head—even Christ...
 - You will grow in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ!
 - It is all of His grace that you ever sought Him to begin with, and it is God's grace that you are growing up in Him.