

Acts Chapter 17

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome to our January 23 class, and it is cold. If you will take your seat for Scripture, we are concluding, or trying to conclude, Acts chapter 17.

It's full of a great deal of really contentful material, so we'll try to give it due attention. But I want to remind you that we are going to pick up our speed a little bit, because most of what is included in Acts from here on will be more narrative than it is doctrinal, and will not need as much detailed explanation as what some of the content has been given in the past.

So I am looking at Scripture sheet that is numbered 548 down in the corner, and we've worked our way so far to verses 9 and 10 there in the left-hand column.

We see that there has been quite a stir raised in the city of Thessalonica, and now Paul and Silas are coming to a new town not too far away by the name of Berea.

And here is where the concept is going to be birthed about the need for all of us to be a Berean. And the thing that characterized the Bereans was that they were willing to give ear to what was being spoken, and then they would go to the Scriptures to see if it could be supported.

[1 : 36] And they established for themselves an historical reputation of being the kind of searcher of truth that all Christians ought to be.

We are all supposed to be Bereans, and we will see as we go through the text how they arrived at that name. So we read in verse 10 that the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea.

And the reason they did, of course, was because they had to do it under the cover of darkness. The heat was on where they were in Thessalonica, and they had already been treated very badly.

So those who believed and those who attached themselves to Paul and Silas made arrangements to slip them out of town after dark.

That's exactly what is happening. And now they arrived at Berea. And we are told that who coming thither, they arrived in Berea, and what's the first thing they do?

[2 : 39] They went into the synagogue of the Jews. And the reason they did that is the same as why they always did it. They had this tremendous message that they were under divine burden to share and to deliver.

And those to whom they were most focused, upon whom they were most focused, were the Jews in the synagogues. Because Jesus Christ was a Jew, came to the Jews for the world.

But the Jews as a nation were in a negative mode regarding Jesus, and the vast majority of them rejected him. But they saw the importance of the message going to the Jew first, and also to the Greek or the Gentile.

So we read that they arrived at Berea, and coming thither, went into the synagogue of the Jews. And these were more noble than those in Thessalonica.

And that's an interesting expression to be used. What does that mean? More noble. Let's read some of the alternate renderings that have been given that expression. We are told by the TCNT, that's the 20th century New Testament, these Jews of Berea were better disposed than those of Thessalonica.

[4 : 02] Weymouth says they were of a nobler disposition. Goodspeed says they were more high-minded. Phillips renders it, they proved more generous-minded. New English Bible says they were more liberal-minded.

Rew says they were finer spirits. Knox renders it, they were of a better breed. These people were more deliberate, more thoughtful, more willing to listen to something they had never heard before, and give it honest consideration.

The Bereans distinguished themselves for this characteristic. And, fellas, this is the way we always ought to be. Be willing to give something a respectful hearing, without being so naive that you'd just swallow the whole thing, jump on it.

Be gullible. No, no. No Christian ought to be gullible. Every Christian ought to be thoughtful, introspective, willing to listen to something that they are not familiar with, weigh it, evaluate it, check it against the Scriptures, to determine whether you believe it is valid or not.

So, everybody deserves a respectful hearing. You may disagree with them completely, but they need to have an opportunity to have their say. And this is one of the things that's very distressing sometimes when a speaker, and we've seen this happen time and again, particularly in the political scene.

[5 : 32] Someone will go to a podium, and they are the featured speaker, or the scheduled speaker for the time, and they stand up, and they start their speech, and there are hecklers in the crowd who try to shout them down and shut them up.

Why would people do that? Well, in the first place, they are opposed to what that speaker is going to say, and they're trying to shut them up, which is a pretty low-life way of handling things.

If someone has the floor, in other words, they are in the position of having the platform. They are the recognized speaker. The audience has a responsibility to sit there and shut up, to give them a courteous opportunity to express themselves.

You may disagree with them completely, but let them have their say. And if you want to confront them afterwards, and sometimes people like that make themselves available to talk to people afterwards, you can go up, and in a respectful way, you can express your objections to what they said.

Nothing wrong with that. But to try to shout somebody down and not even give them an opportunity to speak is unbecoming of a believer, and it ought not to be done.

[6 : 53] So these people are described as more noble. In other words, they would at least give them a hearing in that they received the word with all readiness of mind.

They were willing to hear something, give an audience to it, even though it was strange to them. Different. Never heard anything like that. Similar situation is going to develop later in this chapter when Paul goes to Mars Hill and talks with the Athenian philosophers.

They too are going to give it a hearing, at least a respectful hearing, and they say, we'll hear you again on this. In other words, their wives were cooking dinner and they had to leave.

So they broke up the meeting, and we'll see that when we get to it. But these people at Thessalonica, Thessalonica, or at Berea, really are sterling quality people.

They searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so. And we are told that they accepted the message eagerly, examined it, made a daily study of the Scriptures.

[8 : 00] And, fellas, this ties in with the idea that they were there delivering a message because truth was available and truth was being communicated.

And when it comes to declaring or receiving the truth, we ought to take the position that something you are not familiar with deserves a respectful hearing, and you check what they are saying against the authority of Scripture.

And if what they are saying is true, it can be validated by the Scriptures. If somebody is teaching something that is not true, then you need to be able to discern and evaluate it and look at what is true in the Scriptures and say, I don't accept that.

I don't buy that because chapter and verse says thus and so. And if what we are teaching is true, it should stand the test of scrutiny.

If what we are teaching is true, it should be verifiable. You ought to be able to validate it. And if you can't, then there's your red flag.

[9 : 29] It's probably not true. If truth is communicated, it will stand the test of scrutiny, and truth has nothing to fear.

We need to really keep that in mind and focus on it. And this, of course, is with the assumption that there is such a thing as absolute truth. And for people who tell you there is no such thing as absolute truth, you should ask them, is the statement that you just made then true or not?

You see, it comes back on itself. There is absolute truth, and not everything is relative. There is truth to be known, and it will stand the test of scrutiny.

Anybody whose doctrine or position refuses to be investigated or evaluated, avoid them like the plague. Have nothing to do with them.

Anybody who is afraid for people to ask him questions about what he believes, if he will not allow people to ask him questions, one can only conclude he's got something to hide.

[10 : 41] He's afraid of the questions. And we ought to always be eager to question whatever or whoever teaches anything. We've done this at Grace since our inception, back in 73, and I must admit I'm not as good at it as I ought to be.

But at the end of each message, unless I gobble up all the time, which has been known to happen, but I try to allow time for Q&A; from the congregation and those of you who are there know what I mean.

And I do this because it helps me be accountable. It helps people to say, in your message, you said thus and so and thus and so, I'm not sure I agree with that.

Where do you get the basis for that? And then that puts me on the spot. And that's a good thing. Because if I cannot validate what I am teaching, I ought not to be teaching it. And people have a right to question what the speaker says.

And it's not disrespectful or dishonorable or anything. Because when we gather together for an exposition of the Word of God, our goal ought to be, whether we're in the pew or in the pulpit, our goal ought to be for the discovery and embracing of the truth.

[11 : 55] That's what we're after. And we need to follow the truth wherever it leads us. That's what these Bereans were willing to do. When people buy whatever somebody says, buy it wholesale, don't question it, don't challenge it at all, because we somehow think that person is the authority.

And who am I to question the authority? Well, you have a brain. You have a mind. And there's nothing wrong with a respectful question that challenges what the speaker says.

If I teach something that isn't true, and you know it isn't true, and you sit there and let me do that and expose all the rest of these guys to something I'm teaching that isn't true, shame on you!

We need to respectfully challenge one another as regards truth. And it isn't being nasty or impolite or anything, unless, of course, you've got a bad attitude in doing it, but we're here to express the Word of God and to encourage one another and anything that can be done to provide an element of truth is welcome.

And that's why my shoulders are not big enough to bear the responsibility that everything I teach is true.

[13 : 25] Someone has said, and this is one of my favorite sayings, every preacher ought to have two major fears. One is that people will not believe what he says.

The other is that people will believe what he says. Because there are enormous implications both ways. And when I welcome your comments, questions, criticisms, objections, that takes some of the pressure off of me.

It lets you in on it as well. And we're in this thing together. And I think that's the attitude that these Bereans had. Roger? I like Ronnie's quote, trust but verify.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Reagan is one of Reagan's favorite sayings in connection with the Nuclear Arms Treaty. And with us disarming our nuclear stockpile and the Soviets disarming, reducing their nuclear stockpile, sure, we trust you to do that.

But we want to see the evidence that it has been done. And of course, they felt the same way. We don't trust the Russians. And the Russians don't trust us. It's a mutual mistrust society.

[14 : 40] And we need to be alert to wherever truth is proclaimed. We need to have this attitude toward it. We're talking about the Jews of Korea and all they had was the Old Testament. Right.

Yeah. That's all they had was the Old Testament. Keep in mind, New Testament hadn't even begun yet. Well, Paul might have written on his second missionary journey. I think he wrote to the Romans when he was at Corinth.

That was about 57 AD. But it had not been adopted or accepted into the canon of the New Testament and it hadn't been formulated by that time. So, they received the word with all readiness of mind.

That means they weren't naive and they weren't gullible. They are not the kind... You all know some people who believe everything they hear. And these are the people who set themselves up for all kinds of scams and everything else.

We need to have an investigative, thoughtful, probing mind that is willing to consider. But you don't buy it. You don't buy everything somebody says unless you can validate it with the Scriptures.

[15 : 49] And that's what it means to be a Berean. They searched the Scriptures daily. Received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so. Therefore, many of them believe. Well, I guess. Ha! I guess. Because if you search the Scriptures daily regarding the message that Paul and Silas delivered concerning the person of Jesus Christ, there are going to be a lot of believers come out of that exercise.

And that's exactly what happened. Because in the Old Testament, Christ is portrayed from Genesis through Malachi. And these people were simply looking up those references and comparing Scripture with Scripture.

And as a result, many of them believe. Also of honorable women which were Greeks and of men not a few. What it was for the most part that made these women honorable women was the fact that they were married to influential men.

Women did not ordinarily possess much honor on their own. In the culture that existed in the Mediterranean at this time, women were looked upon as pretty much second class citizens.

[17 : 05] Their testimony was not acceptable in a court of law. There were many ways that they suffered put downs and discrimination against males or by males.

And these honorable women were women of influence because their husbands were men of influence. And when it says that they were Greeks and of men not a few. And we talked a little bit about that.

Last time I referred you to Acts 6. I'm going to go there again because there was some question about the identity of these people being Gentiles or being Jews.

And I think they are of the same caliber as we find in Acts chapter 6 with the same kind of setting. We read in chapter 6, I'm reading now from the King James.

And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.

[18 : 08] And we are suggesting here as well, these Grecians are not native Greeks as such. they are Jews.

The Grecians are Jews who are Greek-speaking and have adopted the Greek culture and they were living here as Jews, worshipping as Jews because there being Grecians did not change their Jewishness.

The Jewishness, of course, was not only biological and genetic but it was religious as well. And the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. This daily ministrations was their welfare system. It was a built-in welfare system whereby the haves took care of the have-nots.

And in this case, these were widows. And the reason they were widows in need was because they were widows and they didn't have any kind of social security or funds set up for women who were widowed.

[19 : 21] They were taken care of by the church, by the assembly, as were the orphans. And the tendency was for those who were Aramaic-speaking Jews to kind of separate themselves from the Greeks because you've got to understand something that there was an attitude of discrimination that existed between the Jews who regarded themselves as purists and they spoke Aramaic or Hebrew and they were more stringent in the customs of the law and of Moses and everything.

But the Grecian Jews were also Jews but they were heavily influenced by Greek thought, Greek philosophy, Greek art, Greek culture, etc. That did not detract from their Jewishness but it gave them a little different mindset that many of the full-fledged Jews they would be considered didn't share.

Yes, Joe. This would go along with what that thing you tell us about, you know, the time, who to, and so forth. Yeah, it does. The timing here, they haven't really gone to the Gentiles yet, have you? Oh, no. No, no. The witness has not gone to the Gentiles so therefore they can hardly be Gentile Greeks in, can they? I don't believe that they were Gentiles at all. I believe that they were Jews. And the same way in Acts chapter 2 where we have that long list of people from all over the world where they came on the day of Pentecost. These are all Jews. That's why they were there because it was a Jewish feast.

[21 : 01] It was the feast of Pentecost. And these Jews came from all over the Mediterranean world. What were they doing all over there? Well, they were scattered. They were the diaspora. They were those who were scattered abroad whom God said he would scatter back in the Old Testament.

If you do not obey my law, the Lord said, I'm going to scatter you throughout all the world. That's exactly what he did. And these people came under persecution and that's one of the big reasons that they were scattered because the heat was on where they were.

And there were pogroms, there were persecutions against the Jews and many of them took off and just fled the area and went to other countries. And then years later they come back for the feast days to keep the feast of Tabernacles, to keep the feast of Passover, Pentecost, etc.

That's why they were there. So these are all Jews and they are of the same background as these people here in Acts chapter 6.

This is another reason why they were ministering to them. You see, the Jewish community, wherever it was, unless of course you're talking about in Israel itself, but the Jewish community, wherever it was located, in other parts of the world, was always a minority community.

[22 : 17] Just like it is here. We have Jewish people living in Springfield, but they are a distinct minority. They have a synagogue. It's a reformed synagogue.

And they make up a very, very tiny percentage of our local population. That was the way it was just about everywhere throughout the Mediterranean world except in Israel itself.

So whenever they would go to a city, whether it's Corinth or Rome or Athens or wherever, and they go to the synagogue, there was a very good likelihood that just about every Jew in town would be there because most of them were more religiously observant 2,000 years ago than they are now.

And you go to the synagogue and that's where you would find just about every Jew in the area. And that, of course, is what they always did. So, yeah. What would be correct to say that the Greek Jews were a little more liberal?

Probably. Yeah. And therefore, they're more accepting primarily because of the culture that they were... And therefore, they would say, hey, we'll listen to this guy. He's...

[23 : 28] Listen, what do you have to say? I think that would be a safe assumption. And that would be another reason. That would be another reason why the... what we would call the mainline Jews would kind of hold at arm's length these Grecian Jews because they did tend to be more open and more liberal and less demanding.

I think that that would play very well. And, you know, it's the same way today. In Judaism, in Judaism, there are the Reformed Jews, there are the Orthodox Jews, and, of course, the Orthodox Jews do not have the highest of regard for the Reformed Jews because they see them as a very liberal element.

And they do not keep kosher, and they do not do this, and they do not do that. And then there are, of course, the ultra-Orthodox, the ones with the curls that don't cut their hair and wear the black garb and all of that.

They are the... the most extreme right-wing Jew of all. So they have their differences, too. So let's... Boy, the food's about ready to come.

Let's get into this. Many of them believed honorable women, which were Greeks and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica... Now, these are the same ones that gave them all the hassle in the town that they just left under cover of darkness.

[24 : 53] They left them behind and they're in Berea. But eventually, word gets back to the Jews at Thessalonica who had given them a very cold reception and they had to sneak out of town under cover at night.

Word gets back to these guys. Hey, you know the guys that were here that raised all the ruckus the other day? That Paul and Silas character? They were preaching about Jesus being the Messiah. Remember him? Yeah, we remember him. He got out of town last night. Well, they're in Berea now. Are you kidding me? They went to Berea to spew that stuff there?

Let's go get them. So, they come to Berea. And they were told in verse 13, And the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the Word of God was preached of Paul at Berea.

They came hither also and stirred up the people. They would stand up and say, Don't listen to these guys. They were in Thessalonica the other day.

[25 : 55] They stirred up everything. They upset people. They taught a bunch of heresy and stuff that wasn't true. Run them out of town. They succeeded in stirring up the people.

And then immediately, the brethren sent away Paul to go, as it were, to the sea. Everywhere this guy goes, someone has said, wherever Paul goes, he has a riot or a revival.

And, fellas, keep in mind that the crux of this whole thing and all of this opposition was an opposition to the truth of the Word of God.

And wherever it is preached with boldness and with conviction, there are going to be people who stand up and say, I don't buy that! That's not true! This is nothing more than the response, the predictable response, of spiritual blindness.

And the spiritual blindness is spelled out in detail. 2 Corinthians 4, verses 3 and 4, If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, whose minds the God of this age has blinded, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

[27 : 20] Spiritual blindness is a very powerful opponent. When the truth is preached, spiritual blindness will not accept it, will not buy it, does not want it to be taught.

That's exactly what we have here. And then, as far as Berea goes, Paul is sent away again. But Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

And they, of course, were probably tolerated by the Thessalonians because they were not the chief speakers. They were not the ones who were doing most of the teaching.

That was Paul. So Paul was their target. And he has to leave town. And Paul has been chased out of more towns than you can imagine. And it's all for proclaiming the truth.

And it's an interesting thing. It's a phenomenal thing. But you would think that men would be automatically open to hear the truth. And they would be if it were not for spiritual blindness.

[28 : 24] And when people hear something that contradicts what they've always believed, what do they usually choose to go with? What they've always believed.

And they see this new thing as heresy or as danger. And you know what? Maybe it is. But it needs to be evaluated. It needs to be thought. And when you detect something that is not true, what it will do, the net effect is when you discover something that is not true, it just confirms you in what you do know to be true.

And it makes you even stronger in it. So it's a good thing. Joe? But we saw these different types of Jews, liberal Jews, you know, we see today in our Christianity. That's why we've got different denominations.

Yeah, absolutely. Because they don't do it right and the Baptists, no, you don't do it right.

Absolutely. You should be doing this. You're not following things the Bible says there about all these disagreements between ourselves.

Yep. Every group, every religious group, I don't care if it's Christianity, Islam, Judaism, whatever, they have those on this end and those on this end and some in the middle.

[29 : 38] And that's the way it is with just about every faith. None of them is an exception. We see this all the time, particularly now, and we're more sensitive to it, in Islam. We talk about Islamic extremists.

They are of the terrorist kind. These are the people that blow themselves up with bombs. And then we see the other extreme of Muslims who are very peaceful and they were opposed to the bombing of the Twin Towers and the suicide bombers and all the rest.

And they're at the other end and, of course, there are many who are someplace in the middle.