

## Some Bereans Believe!

Acts 17:10-15

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### *Introduction*

How far would you be willing to travel to read the Bible? We are incredibly fortunate to have the Bible easily available in bookshops or online but back in 18<sup>th</sup> century Wales Bibles were scarce. So, 10-year-old Mary Jones would walk two miles once a week to a nearby farmhouse to read the only Bible in her area. Thankfully the shortage of Welsh Bibles was being solved and the now 15-year-old Miss Jones had an opportunity to own her first Bible. The only problem was she would have to trek twenty-six miles over the mountains of Cader Idris, 900m in elevation, along stony mountain paths. And that's exactly what she did! And she did so without any shoes on so that they would be presentable when she arrived at her destination. Of such great importance was the Bible to this young girl.

How important is the Bible to you? I want to convince you this morning that the Bible deserves to be treated with the same value and effort that Mary Jones gave it two hundred years ago. But I won't be doing so alone.

In our gospel services over the past few months, we have been looking at conversion stories in the Gospels and the book of Acts, and today we're in Acts chapter 17 looking at a group called the Bereans. The significance of the Bible in their conversion cannot be understated and it remains incredibly relevant to all people.

I'm going to start by clarifying some of the details of our short story and then I want to share just two points about the Bible.

### *Context*

Our story starts in verse 10. *'As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea.'* If you don't know who Paul is, he is the great missionary of the early church. He spent about thirty years of his life travelling around modern-day Turkey and Greece preaching the gospel and planting churches. Here in Acts 17, Paul and his team have been travelling through Greece when they encounter a problem in Thessalonica. We heard in verse 5 that opposition to Paul *'rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city.'* (v5). So, this small team is sensibly sent off in the cover of night to nearby Berea for their safety, about 45 miles away.

Paul does not get discouraged by this frightening incident, and he is not deterred from his mission. Verse ten continues, *'On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.'* Verses two and three give us an insight into Paul's plans. *'As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said.'*

We must remember here that the New Testament didn't exist in Paul's day. It wasn't written yet. So, when I say that Paul preached the gospel, he is not reading from Matthew or Mark, for example. Instead, he is going to the Jewish communities and using their own Scriptures, what we know as the Old Testament, to prove that Jesus is the Messiah.

And that leads me nicely into my first point: the Bible is the message of our salvation.

*The Bible is the message of our salvation.*

Messiah is not a commonly used term in 21<sup>st</sup> century vocabulary so Paul claiming that Jesus is the Messiah certainly holds less weight with us than it would have for the first century Jews. It isn't one of the names of Jesus that we often talk about, but it is intrinsically linked to Jesus' earthly mission to save us.

Messiah literally means 'anointed one.' In the Old Testament, anointing would regard someone as chosen by God for a special task, like a priest or a king. For example, in 1 Samuel 16, we read, '*Samuel... anointed [the future king David] in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David.*' (v13).

The Messiah, then, is identified by God's special task for him. He will be THE anointed one with THE most special task on his shoulders. Throughout the Old Testament, we see hints being dropped as to who this special person will be. Isaiah writes, '*the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us')*' (7:14). Daniel says, '*His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*' (7:14), and God says in Jeremiah, '*I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land.*' (33:15). He will be called '*The Lord Our Righteous Savior.*' (33:16).

Saviour is a far more common term today and I wonder what images it conjures up for you. Maybe it's the scorer of a last-minute goal that saves your team's season, or someone who subs you a couple of quid for the car park, "Ah, you're a life saver." As the Jews were meditating on God's promised saviour and his indestructible kingdom, they pictured a mighty warrior who would end the Roman occupation of their land by military force.

So, Jesus confused them. He ticked all the boxes of the Messiah (born of a virgin, from the line of David, preaching about the kingdom of God, performing miracles etc.) but he wasn't who they thought the Messiah was going to be. They had failed to see The Messiah's true purpose. He would not bring an earthly kingdom as a conquering soldier, but a spiritual kingdom as a suffering servant.

Isaiah writes one of the most awe-inspiring descriptions of Jesus the Messiah as he prophecies Jesus' sacrifice on the cross:

*He was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,*

*and by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.  
(Isaiah 53:5-6)*

Humanity's greatest problem has never been financial insecurity or too few Instagram followers or even the restriction of our freedom. It is our sin. John even writes, *'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves.'* (1 John 1:8). We have turned away from the good God who created us and loves us and protects us with his perfect laws, and we are rightly due a penalty for our fault. But, as Jesus hung on that cross, he took our penalty on his own back and suffered it in our place that we might be seen as perfectly clean before God. Jesus didn't come to bring peace by defeating the Romans, he came to die to restore our peace with God.

But Jesus' salvation mission goes even further than that. Remember Paul also says the Messiah would rise from the dead, and Jesus did just that! Three days after his crucifixion and burial, Jesus appears to his disciples again in the flesh. In Jesus' resurrection we find further hope. Not only can we be reunited with God, having been cleansed, but we can also be with him forever. The book of Romans says, *'Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.'* *'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'* (v8, 23).

This is the message Paul had for the Bereans and it is the same message the Bible has for us today. Jesus is the Messiah. The anointed one tasked with saving humanity. Jesus died to save us from our sins and give us hope of eternal life with our loving heavenly Father.

Why does Paul carry on preaching in synagogues despite opposition? Why bother translating the Bible into a thousand languages? Why walk over a mountain barefoot to buy your own Bible? Because the Bible is the message of Jesus and our salvation. And there is nothing worth more than that.

*The Bible deserves to be studied.*

If this is the case, then the Bible deserves to be studied, which is exactly what the Bereans do. Verse 11 says, *'Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.'*

Whether you have been a Christian for many decades, or you have just started seeking more information about the Christian faith, the Bereans set us a worthy example to follow. And I'm going to break down their noble response into three parts.

First, *'they received the message with great eagerness.'* What is our instinctual response to reading the Bible? Do we criticise it or do we embrace it? Is reading the Bible a chore or do we look forward to reading it? I know the Bible is not always easy to read or understand but

that shouldn't stop us. And it will be a lot easier to take in if we approach it with the right attitude. Two athletes can take on the same training regime but one come away having learnt more and trained better simply because of their attitude. In a similar way, let's approach the Bible with an open mind and an enthusiasm to hear what it has to say. We can ask God as Psalm 119 instructs us, *'Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.'* (v18).

The Bible is not just the source of salvation, but it is also the Christian's source of all teaching and encouragement. Paul writes in 2 Timothy that *'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'* (3v16-17).

Whether you are seeking to know more about Jesus, or you have questions about following him, or you need encouragement for the daily battle, the very words of God will be sure to have the answers, and we will find them if we open ourselves to them.

Secondly, they *'examined the Scriptures every day.'* I imagine many hearts in this room drop when they hear those words. I know from conversations with many of you and from my own imperfect example that Christians find it really hard to read their Bibles every day. It may be convicting to hear but we must keep encouraging one another to spend part of every day in God's word. Again, consider yourself like an athlete. You have to approach your training with the right attitude, but you also have to train consistently. An athlete who trains once a week is not going to be as prepared for their discipline as the athlete who trains three times a week. How much of our sorrow could be warmed in daily reassurance from his word? How much better prepared for our task of following Jesus would we be? How many more answers would the seeker find if they studied the Bible regularly, rather than give their questions a quick google?

Notice though that *'they examined the Scriptures every day.'* There's a suggestion in this passage that this budding community of converts studied the Bible together. They are always talked about plurally. Again, I know many in the room, myself included, find it much easier to study the Bible in a group. That's a big reason why we run home groups and midweek Bible studies.

So, if you recognise this about yourself, I encourage you to find someone to study the Bible with on a regular basis. It's radical and daunting but the practical action of studying with someone makes you accountable to them and it's a great way to build consistency. If you live with Christian family, consider starting your day together with a short Bible study. Tori and I have started that and, though I must confess it has been inconsistent, it's been a great motivator and encouragement. If you are the only Christian in your house, who could you phone up or video chat? Don't worry about formalities. Just phone each other up, read the Bible and then head on to your other duties. Even 10 minutes is a great start. Maybe you are seeking answers, rather than Bible study, and don't know where to start. Well, there will be plenty of Christians who will be happy to chat about the Bible with you over a coffee or lunch and many will be in this room. So be courageous and ask.

Thirdly, the Bereans check *'to see if what Paul said was true.'* Hear me out on this, don't trust your pastor. I am joking of course but, if your pastor is your only source of the Bible, you will only be as godly as they are. When you have a faithful man like Roy as your pastor, you can relax. But what if Roy were to drift in his teaching? That seems doubtful but he is human. And he wouldn't be the first pastor to drift from the Bible's teaching. Reading the Bible for yourself and double checking what your pastor or your favourite podcaster or an online teacher said is a really good practice to get into. Remember that 2 Timothy said the Bible is God-beathed. This book is flawless, I am not. This book is the perfect word of God, Roy and Pete aren't. The Bible is the final authority on spiritual matters.

One testimony I was fortunate enough to witness was that of an elder at my dad's church. He and his wife were walking past my old church in 2014 and they turned to each other and said, "I think we should go to that church." They've described it as their Kingston Road experience. So, they started coming along to church, and in their words, 'We listened intently to the sermons. We took notice, we listened, and we tried to understand and bit by bit the stories connected together.' I remember my dad getting excited about how they would go home and read the sermon passage for themselves to understand it better. And by God's grace, they were converted, became church members, served as secretary and elder, and are now seeking the Lord's will for them in ministry.

If the Bible's message really is our salvation, then the Bible should be our highest priority. And, if the Bible is what it says it is (that is the word of God), it should be our final authority. The Bible deserves our time and our full attention.

#### *Conclusion.*

The Bible is the message of our salvation and so the Bible deserves to be studied. The Bereans discovered this, put it into practise and, *'As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.'* (v12)

If you are not a follower of Jesus here this morning, imagine you have been fatally poisoned. I don't know why but you have. By good fortune, you find the recipe for the antidote. What do you do next? You obviously concoct the antidote and recover from the poison.

The Bible is not just a nice story about salvation, it is a recipe for recovery. Paul would later write in Romans 10, *'Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.'* (v17) Reading the Bible doesn't make you a Christian, but it does get you one step closer to knowing Jesus and putting your faith in him and being saved from the punishment of our sin. And it goes something like this... I pray that your study of Jesus will lead you this moment.

*'If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."'* (v9-13).

It would be unwise to read all that the Bible says about us and then ignore it. And the same goes for followers of Jesus. If we give the Bible the full effort and attention it deserves, we will enjoy a life of growing in grace and walking with God through the hills and valleys. If we treat God's word casually, life will be like walking against the wind. Jesus says in Luke 11, *"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."* (v28).