

Acts Chapter 17 v 10 - 15

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[0 : 00] from scriptures and I'd love you to follow along with me. It's Acts chapter 17 and from verse 10. Acts 113 in the church Bible, 1113.

Acts chapter 17 and beginning to read at verse 10. We're joining the account in Acts during the second missionary journey as Paul is going from place to place proclaiming the gospel with his friends.

Acts 17 verse 10. As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

[1 : 48] I just want to read to you an article by John Piper, and it says, Let me tell you about a most wonderful experience I had early morning, March 19, 2007, a little after 6 o'clock.

God actually spoke to me. There's no doubt that it was God. I heard the words in my head just as clearly as when a memory of a conversation passes across your consciousness.

The words were in English, but they had about them an absolute self-authenticating ring of truth. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God still speaks today.

I couldn't sleep for some reason. I was at Shalom House in North Minnesota on a staffed couples retreat. It was about 5.30 in the morning, and I lay there wondering if I should get up or wait until I got sleepy again.

Ever felt like that? In his mercy, God moved me out of bed. It was mostly dark, but I managed to find my clothing, got dressed, grabbed my briefcase, slipped out of the room without waking up Noel, and in the main room below, it was totally quiet.

[3 : 21] No one else seemed to be up, so I sat down on a couch in the corner to pray. As I prayed and mused, suddenly it happened. God said, Come and see what I have done.

There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that these were the very words of God. In this very moment, at this very place in the 21st century, 2007, God was speaking to me with absolute authority and self-evidencing reality.

I paused to let this sink in. There was a sweetness about it. Time seemed to matter little. God was near. He had me in his sights. He had something to say to me.

When God draws near, hurry ceases, and time slows down. I wonder what he meant. Come and see. Would he take me somewhere, like he took Paul into heaven to see what can't be spoken? Did see mean that I would have some vision of a great deed of God that no one had ever seen? I'm not sure how much time elapsed between God's initial words, come and see what I have done, and his next words.

[4 : 30] It doesn't matter. It was being enveloped in the love of his personal communication. Sorry about the pause there. Whenever I see the word enveloped, I always want to say enveloped, but I know it's not right.

The God of the universe was speaking to me. And then he said, As clearly as any words have ever come into my mind, I am awesome in my deeds towards the children of man.

My heart leapt up. Yes, Lord, you are awesome in your deeds. Yes to all men, whether they see it or not. Yes. Now what will you show me? The words came again, just as clear as before, but increasingly specific.

I turned the sea into dry land. They passed through the river on foot. There they rejoiced in me, who rules by my might forever.

Suddenly I realized that God was taking me back several thousand years to the time when he dried up the Red Sea and the River Jordan. I was being transported by his word back into history to those great deeds.

[5 : 33] This is what he meant by come and see. He was transporting me back in these words to two glorious deeds before the children of men. These were awesome deeds he referred to.

These were the awesome deeds he referred to. God himself was narrating the mighty works of God. He was doing it for me. He was doing it with words that were resounding in my own mind. There settled over me a wonderful reverence.

A palpable peace came down. This was a holy moment and a holy corner of the world in northern Minnesota. God Almighty had come down and was giving me the stillness and the openness and the willingness to hear his very voice.

As I marveled at his power to dry the sea and the river he spoke again. I keep watch over the nations. Let not the rebellious exalt themselves.

This was breathtaking. It was very serious. It was almost a rebuke. At least a warning. He may as well have taken me by the collar of my shirt and lifted me off the ground with one hand and said with an incomparable mixture of fierceness and love never, never, never exalt yourself.

[6 : 46] Never rebel against me. I sat searing at nothing. My mind was full of the global glory of God. I keep watch over the nations. He had said this to me.

It was not just that he had said it. Yes, that is glorious. But he had said this to me. The very words of God were in my head. They were there in my head just as much as the words I am writing at this moment in my head.

They were heard as clearly at this moment as if I had recalled my wife saying, come down for supper when you are ready. I know those are the words of my wife and I knew these were the words of God.

Think of it. Marvel at this. Stand in awe of this. The God who keeps watch over the nations like some people keep watch over cattle or stock markets or construction sites this God still speaks in the 21st century.

I heard his very words. He spoke personally to me. What effect did this have on me? It filled me with a fresh sense of God's reality.

[7 : 51] It assured me more deeply that he acts in history and in our time. It strengthened my faith that he is for me and cares about me and will use his global power to watch over me.

Why else would he come and tell me these things? It's increased my love for the Bible as God's very word because it was through the Bible that I heard these divine words and through the Bible I have experiences like this almost every day.

The very God of the universe speaks on every page into my mind and your mind. We hear his very words. God himself has multiplied his wondrous deeds and thoughts towards us.

None can compare with him. I will proclaim and tell them yet they are more than can be told. And best of all they are available to all. If you would like to hear the very same words I heard on the couch in northern Minnesota read Psalm 66 verses 5 to 7.

That's where I heard them. Oh how precious is the Bible. It is the very word of God. In it God speaks in the 21st century. This is the very voice of God.

[8 : 59] By this voice he speaks with absolute truth and personal force. By this voice he reveals his all-surpassing beauty. By this voice he reveals the deepest secrets of our hearts.

No voice anywhere anytime can reach as deep or lift as high or carry as far as the voice of God that we hear in the Bible.

Let's just pray as we come to consider God's word this evening. Father God we thank you that we have your book the Bible in front of us.

We thank you that these are indeed the very words of God spoken to us in 2019. And we pray just like the Bereans received your word with great enthusiasm we pray that you'd give us an ear to hear your word to us tonight.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. I wonder what you think when I talk about the word or describe something as noble.

[10:07] I wonder what you would think of that. Because if you look in the dictionary there's sort of two meanings of noble. One is to do with birth so you're high born you're an aristocrat you're born with rank or title you're born into the nobility.

Now that's not what we're talking about in Acts 17 and verse 11 where it says now the Bereans were of more noble character. It's interesting the NIV actually inserts the word character just to clarify it because it's not there in the Greek it just says noble.

And most definitely the second meaning which of course is about your character apparently the definition if you look it up would say something like this having or showing fine personal qualities or high moral principles.

It's having a noble character that we're considering here in verse 11. These Bereans as Paul went to this place Berea it's there that he met people it says that they were of noble character.

So Luke as he's describing this second missionary journey and as he is writing inspired by the Holy Spirit he tells us that the people in Berea were of more noble character than the Jews in Thessalonica and if you remember in fact I think it was the last time I was here we looked at the first part of chapter 17 where they really did not receive the gospel.

[11:44] There were many that were trying to stir up the crowd and they said look this man's turning the world upside down let's get rid of him and indeed they chased Paul in Berea as he was preaching and seeing people saved.

We're told that these people in Berea were more noble minded that they had a good attitude to the message that was being brought to their ears. there's an implication there that there was something about them something about their character or something about their attitude that pleased God. Something about the way they listened to the message as it was proclaimed that pleased God and I don't know about you but I find that exciting because we often ask don't we what is it that God really wants of me?

What is it I can do that would please God? And this passage gives some answers not all the answers but it gives a very helpful answer in reminding us that what God wants is a character or an attitude in our hearts that receives God's message with enthusiasm eagerly listening and eagerly ready to put it into practice.

So we're really looking at chapter 17 and verse 11 and into verse 12. In the order of the verses these are the three things that I want to think about.

[13:10] Firstly that God wants us to receive his word eagerly. Secondly that he wants God God wants us to check everything that we hear with the Bible.

So when we hear someone purporting to explain the word of God we need to check it with the Bible. Second part of it verse 11 and then in verse 12 that God wants us to believe him.

Verse 12 many of the Jews believed as did a number of prominent Greek women and Greek men. So if you want to be noble in God's eyes this evening if you want to please him if you want to know what God wants of you start with these three things.

I'm going to deal with them in slightly different order. Firstly I want to speak about God wants us to check everything that we hear with the Bible. That's what they did. the Bereans heard this message and it says they examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

And let me say it straight away whenever I'm standing up here and I'm sure it's the same with Peter or anyone else who stands here if you become convinced from the Bible that what I'm saying is wrong I want you to tell me.

[14:27] I want you to come up to me probably afterwards unless it was an absolutely massive thing but probably come up to me and say are you sure you're or even if you doubt it come and ask me because I think that's healthy attitude to have about someone who's preaching that you're listening and checking what they're saying with the Bible.

Equally when you hear other people in other churches when you're listening to something on the TV whether they're preaching or not whether you're listening to a message on MP3 or you've got the internet on or you're watching God Channel I want you to or God wants us to check everything that we hear against the scriptures.

Our pastor when we were worshipping in Middlesbrough in Berwick Hills Baptist Church used to say I love to hear the pages flicking in the Bible when I'm preaching people checking what I'm saying

you know when I first started preaching I found it a bit disconcerting when I'd look up and I'd see some experienced old Christian in the back flicking backwards and forwards in the Bible and I'd think oh crumbs what have I said but it's a healthy thing isn't it it's good to hear people flicking through their Bibles checking what's being said the Bible is our final authority it's our final authority I'm going to read you those verses from 2 Timothy 3 16 all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching rebuking correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work Jesus prayed in John 17 17 sanctify them by the truth your word is truth now this has got some really practical implications to consider it means we do not test what we hear by our feelings because there are sometimes things that are said that are false that appeal to our feelings we must not judge what people are saying what we feel about scripture by our feelings we're then producing a God of our own imagination equally of course the truth can be something that we don't like the feeling of when we feel it convict us or we feel it speaking to us so we must not test what we hear by our feelings be careful if you're listening to someone who's really perhaps encouraging you and you're really feeling carried along don't get off guard always come back and say is this what the bible says what I'm listening to it also means that we don't test what we hear by our traditions our traditions come under the final authority of the scripture many I'm not decrying tradition tradition has many valuable things to teach us but ultimately all of our traditions also stand or fall before scripture so we don't judge what people say or what word they're bringing to us by our feelings or our experiences of the past and our tradition we bring it to scripture and ask does it match up we don't test what we hear by what other people say and ultimately and I do mean ultimately yes of course there's there's elders and pastors to listen to but ultimately it's not those or favorite preachers or people that you love to tune into that are the absolute source of authority the source of authority is God himself and therefore is in his inspired word let me even say dare I say this we don't test what we hear by creeds or statements of faith either valuable though they are

I'm very quick to say valuable though they are ultimately we mustn't rely even on those documents we rely on the scriptures itself I dug out what the FIEC say about this in their statement of faith so I went to the statement of faith and found this the Bible God has revealed himself in the Bible which consists of old and new testament alone every word was inspired by God through human authors so that the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the word of God without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine here's the sentence the Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief faith and practice yes creeds and statements of faith etc are very helpful to us but ultimate authority is in the Bible alone we may know all of the things and many of the things

[19 : 43] I've mentioned will be helpful to us even our feelings will be helpful to us but we must make sure that they all come under the authority of scripture now if you want to know why this is so important speak to someone that you know is not a Christian or go out of the buildings tonight and accost someone who's not a Christian and ask them a meaningful question what do you think happens when you die and when they give you an answer they think we change into fairy dust or whatever they might say ask them why and just keep asking why and keep listening to what they're saying and at the bottom line you'll find that the source of their authority is in here or in a book they've read or some video they've watched or a TV program they've watched whatever but it's not the authority of scripture and that's what we should be standing on as believers the authority of the Bible it's firm and secure now pastors and elders we have a special duty to protect the church from false teachers we have a special role

I heard a guy once say that the shepherd or the pastor of the church has three tasks first one is to care for the sheep the second one is to evangelize the goats and the third one is to shoot the wolves I thought it was quite a natty way of putting what a pastor has to do but the truth is whilst pastors and elders have a special responsibility we all have a responsibility to check what we're hearing against the scriptures just like these Bereans were listening and checking with the scriptures the things that were being said no doubt Paul as he spoke to these Jews was referring them back to those Old Testament prophecies he was showing how the Lord Jesus was fulfilling all those prophecies the things that had happened to him had happened in their lifetime and he was explaining it to them and so they were rifling through their Old Testament scriptures to check whether what he was saying was the truth this friends is the mark of nobility this is what pleases

God let me just say you children as well I do want you to listen to your parents don't misquote me but ultimately it's the Bible is the truth that we're going to hold on to and as you go through life it would be one of the greatest things that you could do is match everything that you hear every argument that's given to you every voice that you hear from society and from church you weigh it up against the scriptures of the Bible it won't it will set you up well in your lives as young people that's what you do as a principle in your life you're always checking against the Bible whether what people saying is the truth and it also reminds me that we as Christians need to keep growing in our understanding of the Bible we can never say that we've made it we can never say that we know enough of it we need to have that hunger after God's word and with that I'll move on to my second point which is

God wants us to receive the word eagerly from the second part of verse 11 they receive the message with great eagerness so we need to be cautious about what we hear and check it against the Bible but that surely does not mean that we become dry or academic or divisive or arrogant or proud or unteachable or self righteous well I was reading that earlier I added the word censorious I thought that sounded I don't know if I thought I was sound clever or something but overly critical because we can is it not a tendency in our hearts some of us to find a great pleasure in in pointing out someone's error in their ways or to find or find or find some argument or just to love being in that place of arguments and it's about being proud and we need to be careful there's a danger that we must be careful with for we do need to be people who eagerly receive the word let's be careful in trying to make sure that the

I's are dotted and the T's are crossed that we don't lose that eagerness to hear the message of God to our hearts someone described this word eagerness as humility with a desire to know the truth or being ready to learn sometimes perhaps the way we behave or speak might give the impression that we've got nothing to learn and we need to be ready to hear God's message when it challenges in fact the King James version there says with all readiness of mind what a wonderful experience it must have been for Paul as he proclaimed the gospel to a group of people who were eagerly listening to what he said and checking that what he said was right with scripture what a delight it is to bring a message to a group of people who are hungry for the word of God now I've experienced both

[25 : 20] I can remember many times and I used to describe it I think I might have used this illustration before but there's a thing that young people used to do I don't know if they do it anymore I really hope not but when someone was saying something they didn't want to listen to they'd say talk to the hand because the face don't want to know and there's been times where I've stood at the front of a youth group and I've been speaking the truth and I've looked down and I've thought they don't want to hear they don't want to hear and there's been another time with young people that sticks in my mind where it was completely the opposite there was a memorial service I was sort of helping as a schools youth worker a Christian youth worker in Unity Academy in Middlesbrough and one of the year nine pupils died had an asthma attack and the next assembly after that they asked me to lead the assembly and I tell you that morning every single student was listening to what I said normally it was a battle to get them to listen but on that day they were hungry to hear the truth think for a moment about other words that might describe sometimes how you listen to a message because we're not always eagerly listening to messages are we perhaps the word apathy would describe the way sometimes we listen to a message or disinterested or dutiful or hard hearted distracted have you ever sat in church and been wondering about what's in the oven and thinking about what's on telly or wondering what's happening with the Grand

Prix whatever it is that distracts you perhaps you've been obliging you've sat there very attentive and thought you've done all that was necessary but really you haven't been eagerly listening to God's word they show some of the obstacles that are in our own hearts don't they some of those descriptions that often our hearts are set on worldly things often there's a laziness to think things through there's a tendency to prefer our own way rather than God's way but to be noble to please God he wants us to listen eagerly to the word preached I'm not asking you to fake it if you're struggling then ask God to give you the hunger to eagerly receive his word to give you that desire when the word is preached when it matches with scripture when it's applied to a hungry heart by the Holy

Spirit then what a power that word has just a few examples of this in scripture to explain in the ways in which the word of God brings us such benefits the first thing I want to turn you turn with me if you

like to Romans chapter 10 and we'll see that the word of God brings faith just a few examples of the way and there's many more but why we should be so eager to receive his word Romans chapter 10 verses 14 to 17 makes it plain that this is the way by which we become Christians how then can they call on the one they have not believed in and how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard and how can they hear without someone preaching to them and how can they preach unless they are sent as it is written how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news but not all the Israelites accepted the good news for Isaiah says

Lord who has believed our message consequently faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ there we are folk this is the route by which we are saved and if you come tonight and you're struggling what on earth are you talking about this is where we start if you want to know God if you want to know what it is that needs to happen in your life if you want to know what this talk of salvation is all about if you want a place in heaven the place to go is the Bible the place to go is the message the word of God you will find truth there you will hear all sorts of things being told some of them will be true and some of them will be false but you can be certain that when you read the scriptures it's teaching you the truth and these are it couldn't be more important could it this is not just life or death this is eternal life or eternal death so friends if you're not sure where you are spiritually if you're not sure if you're a Christian or if you're not sure if you're saved the place to start is by hearing the message and measuring it up with the scriptures you've come to the right place this is a church that believes the scriptures the word of God is also deeply challenging

Hebrews Hebrews chapter 4 Hebrews chapter 4 verse 11 Hebrews 4 11 to 13 let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience for the word of God is living and active sharper than any double edged sword it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account this friends is where we are challenged this is where the word of God speaks deep into our heart challenging us provoking us judging our thoughts and attitudes reaches into the places that other books and other teachers do not reach the scripture comes to our hearts helping us to hear

[31 : 46] God's word in a way which will deeply impact our hearts God knows the way we think he knows the way we work and he can deal with us deeply by his word briefly Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 26 now those of you that know this scripture is speaking the heading is wives and husbands but you'll know that he goes on to say that he's actually speaking about Christ and the church the husband being Christ and the church is his wife it says from verse 25 husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy cleansing her by the washing with water through the word the word has a purifying effect the word of God is there to purify us it deals with our sins it speaks life into us where there is dirt where there is grime where there are things of darkness that need light shed on it it is the word that brings that light need me listen any more your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path psalm 119 verse 105 how practical is that when you're struggling with life and you don't know which way to turn you're facing a decision and you're not sure what to do there's a moral dilemma which you're looking at and you're thinking what on earth do I do here you're facing this week and there's some things that you know that are going to happen this week at the moment it's causing you deep anxiety you want to know the way your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path it helps us and protects us against sin

I've hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you God's word protects us from sin Psalm 119 verse 11 that is hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you that we know God's word has become so part of us it helps protect us from even getting involved in sin what about just lastly Psalm 1 there's many more that we could refer to but Psalm 1 where there's the description of this man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers but his delight is in the law of the Lord it's in God's word in other words and on his law he meditates day and night so what's he like he's like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season whose leaf does not wither and whatever he does prospers do you want to be someone who's fruitful do you want your life to be fruitful I don't mean fruitful by being super rich or by being famous

I mean fruitful by beginning to bear the image of Christ by living in his likeness by bringing forth those fruits of the spirit love joy peace patience kindness these are the things that we long for in our

lives where the way that you get those there's no shortcut we meditate on his law day and night this is what changes us this is what makes us fruitful God's word so please God this week by receiving his word eagerly and let me rush on just lastly with my last point God wants us to believe in him sorry to believe in verse 12 before we finish let's just remember that knowing the truth and listening eagerly to the truth is not the same as acting upon the truth Acts 17 12 reminds us that it says that and as a result many of them believed it wasn't enough for them to listen enthusiastically or even to check what they heard in the scriptures there was a need for them to respond so if I say to you as an example if you're a believer then

God will never leave you or forsake you you know that's true because it's in the Bible for example Hebrews 13 and verse 5 that's only the first thing though for you to know that that's a good thing to know but that's only the starting point the question is is whether you believe it when you're in the crisis and tempted to believe that it's not true when you're finding it hard when you look around you and you think where is God in this situation it's then that you come back to the scripture and say he is here because he's told me he will never leave me nor forsake me and so God's word becomes a comfort to us when we genuinely believe it and not just know it remember James he says we must be doers of the word not just hearers only now this is true isn't it of the person who's confronted by Jesus for the first time just like these Bereans they're hearing this message they're listening eagerly they're checking with the scriptures and then of course they need then to put their faith in the Lord Jesus you know I have seen people who have been interested who have responded eagerly when you've spoken but the honest truth is they haven't actually believed on Christ yet yet the knowledge itself doesn't save us it's acting in faith believing him it's also true of believers as well we mustn't be content to grow in our head knowledge of the truth it's a good thing to grow in head knowledge of the truth but we mustn't be content we want to see it work out in our lives it can take so many forms when we are satisfied just with head knowledge we can become half-hearted we can become lukewarm we can become legalistic we can become divisive and if you doubt it go onto the web if you've got access to the internet and begin to look at some of the Christian people arguing about theology and there is all sorts of arguments that go on and it's so plain that the fruit of love and patience and kindness is not there these are people that are just wanting to split hairs and be nasty with each other and prove their point rather than apply it to their own hearts and lives so all of us must be eager to hear God cautious to check with scripture quick to believe and apply the truth in action so these are these are some encouragements if you want to please God if you want to be noble today if you want to have a noble character in

[39 : 21] God's eyes we need to listen to these three things check everything in the Bible be eager to hear God's word and believe it and put it into practice just one final last thing I want to say if I said that more than once don't think that doing that will make your life all smiley and wonderful because if you carry on reading in Acts those next few verses 13 to 15 you'll find that persecution came straight away they faced trouble straight away these people who had done everything that God wanted who God was called they're called noble these are people who have done something that really pleased God but still they face troubles and trials and so friends you will too but still be eager let me ask you do you read your Bible do you hear

God speaking through the truth open our ears to hear him and to apply let's pray together father God we thank you for your word sorry that we take it for granted so often no doubt we've got not just one copy but several copies in our houses and sometimes we go a whole day without even opening the scriptures we pray Lord that you'd give us a deeper and greater hunger for your word we pray that you'd help us to want to read it to have a hunger to apply it into our lives and put it into practice we pray Lord that when we hear other people speak about spiritual things that you'd help us bring to mind scriptures that help us to know whether this is the truth or not we pray Lord that you would lead us in your truth sanctify us we pray in your truth in Jesus name we pray amen let's pray father father father father father in a world that's so confused and so confusing we thank you for the security that you give us of the truth of your word we pray you'd help us to stand upon it and to live by your word in

Jesus name we pray amen amen amen