

## The Discipline of Bible Intake Acts 17:10-15

We have gone through the opening nine verses of this chapter and we have seen regular themes throughout this book of Acts, which chronicles the establishment and growth of the early church. We realize the book of Acts is the continuation of the work of Jesus. He is truly building his church. And therefore we have seen two things. We have seen through the announcement of the gospel of Jesus Christ individuals come to Christ. God opens their hearts and they believe. They form these local churches for growth, worship and outreach. The other thing we see is opposition. Just like the world hated Jesus, they hate the followers of Jesus Christ.

And we saw Paul and Silas were forced out of Thessalonica, and by all indications when you read 1Thessalonians they were not in that city too long, so it was a church full of new converts. But here the believers realizing that it is too dangerous for Paul and Silas to continue on, and Paul and Silas realize it is too dangerous for the believers if they stay, so the believers basically smuggle them out of the city to go to Berea, which is a safe distance, about 75 kms away, about three days travel.

Look at verse 10, **“The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.”** I find this so fascinating and at the same time convicting. Listing these places they go, with all the things going on, and the smuggling out of these two, you would think that they would want to take some time and just chill or go where they know it's safe. But when they arrived they wasted no time and went into the synagogue, and began to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. In a day and age where we love our rest, and I realize we all need rest, but so often it is we just do not make time to really minister to others the truths of Jesus Christ crucified. Really, how overwhelmed are we with the glorious privilege of ministering to others in the name of Christ? And how many times do we make excuses but really we just can't be bothered? This is convicting. They are booted out of one city and come to the next, and preach Christ. He truly is supreme in their lives. May God give us a heart that truly wants to make him known.

And the activities in this city and the response, where some come and then there is opposition, is basically the same as we have seen throughout this book. We have had wonderful descriptions of people believing, and also descriptions of the hard hearted response of those who do not believe. But the one thing we have not had is a description of what they did with the truth, how through the Spirit of God caused those who believe to believe. And we really have that in verses 11-12. And I believe that there are a couple of reasons why we do not grow even though we might have been in church for years and years. Some of that is the fault of the preacher. There is so often very little Bible content — very little exegesis of the Word of God. In other words, very little nourishment and spiritual food for the sheep to eat. Many are preoccupied with social or political issues. Others are lazy when it comes to preparation, and would rather be doing other things. Still others have no confidence that these words are the very words of God, and certainly there is a calling to be a workman approved by God as you handle the Scripture.

But there is another reason why individuals do not grow, because they might have good, solid Bible preaching and teaching. But they just seem to languish; they

always seem to be stuck spiritually. They seem to be going nowhere as far as their love for Christ. In fact, newer Christians seem to grow right past them. And the reason why is that there really is an art and discipline to listening to the Word of God. There really is an activity that people in the pew are or should be engaged in as they sit and listen. But so often individuals in the pew never learn the necessary discipline of Bible intake and therefore languish. There truly is an art of Bible intake.

And maybe that describes you this morning. Maybe there seemed to be growth in your life when you first came to Christ, but now you just seem to languish. You know enough maybe to bluff your way through with others but you know you should be growing, but you just feel stuck. It just seems to be an endless cycle of the same sins of anger, lust, indifference to truth. And you see the excitement of others as they are learning and growing, and you want that in your life. Well, let me ask this question, do you practice the discipline of active listening? You see what we should be doing this morning is not a passive sitting but an active listening. And remember, this is all for the glory of Christ. Don't you want him to be the longing of your heart, to be able to trust in him in times of suffering and temptation? We need to learn and practice the discipline of hearing God's Word. And there are three parts that we see here among those in Berea.

1. If we are going to grow through the preaching of the Word we need prepared listening. V. 11a.

Now it is incredible when you realize what we are doing on any given Sunday. We are coming out to worship the King of kings, and Lord of lords. There is no one greater than Christ. There is no one more glorious than he. But often when we come out, we are already thinking about what we are going to be doing after, or we are looking at our watches hoping the sermon is not going to be too long. But we feel the disparity in the way we sing — we just repeat the words but there is a lack of engagement. We feel it in the preaching — you just get lost in the middle of the sermon. Yet others got so much out of that text, and they walked away glorifying Christ, or convicted about something that needs to change in their life. The Scriptures and Christ seem to be so active and alive, yet so dull in your heart. Are you there? Does that describe a typical service for you?

Because part of the problem is that maybe we just have not prepared our hearts about what we are to be engaged in this morning. We often think the pastor or Sunday School teacher might say something, and poof my life will be different. But maybe this whole process of sanctification through the Word being preached begins before we ever come out to church. Maybe we need to intentionally preparing ourselves before we ever walk into the church to gather with God's people.

Look at verse 11 again with that in mind, "**Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness.**" Now we see these Jews were more noble than the ones that were at Thessalonica, and this is referring to how they looked and handled the Scriptures. There was a nobility or reverence or seriousness with what I may call an anticipation about what was going to take place as they came into the synagogue service. So think of what is going on. They come and Paul preaches, and what does he preach? The text says "the word." And we realize that is synonymous throughout the Book of Acts with the gospel of Jesus

Christ. It is synonymous with the truths that he came, lived that perfect life and died that substitutionary death. Jesus is none other than the great Messiah.

And I love how this is worded, because it says there was a reception of God's word. The "received" has the meaning of taking in, embracing or making it your own. It is speaking of something not just academically but something personal. The God of the gospel is a personal God. And I love this because they received the Word with "all eagerness." Think of what is necessary to receive the Word with all eagerness. Remember Paul would have taught these truths about Christ with the authority of the Old Testament. So there has to be a belief that this is the Word of God. These Scriptures that we hold should be so precious to us. Think of it, because we know this but in a way we do not. God has spoken in a very specific way. He has revealed himself to us. And you think if we truly believed that we would be obsessed with and eager with knowing the Scriptures.

But think about it, did you come with eagerness and anticipation to hear the Scripture this morning? I had a friend who was visiting and coming out to church on Sunday morning. And he text me and asked what the Scripture passage I was going to be preaching from. He wanted to read it and get acquainted with it, and he wanted to pray for me through this passage that I would be able to communicate the truths of this passage for the welfare of his people and the glory of God. Now think about it, because if you want an eagerness in hearing, how much preparation have you done before you ever walk into service? Be honest. These believers were eager to hear, my friend was eager to hear, but that anticipation that is necessary for the reception of God's word doesn't come naturally. We need to prepare our hearts.

These are things to consider, what do you do Saturday night and Sunday morning? So often we say that I need Sunday. I need to be with God's people and hear God's Word. But if you stay up late, rush to get here in the morning, while the morning is filled with tension, and then roll into the pew with eyes half open. Then we have to use the facilities once or twice because we are just not ready to listen and receive the Word. Our eyes are rolling in the back of our heads because we are tired. We had a great time the night before, but we wonder why God is not real in our lives. We wonder why I am not growing spiritually? We wonder why I get nothing out of service or very little when others come out praising God. Have you prepared your heart? Have you prepared your soul for the important and glorious activity of receiving the Word of our living God? This really is a discipline of saying "no" to some things that we might say "yes" to our God. Receiving the word with such eagerness just doesn't happen. And please understand that I am not putting any legalistic requirements on you, but I am saying there needs to be some thought and preparation if we are going to glorify God and grow in his likeness before we ever come out to worship him with the people of God.

2. If we are to grow through the preaching of God's Word there needs to be a study of God's Word. V.11.

It is incredible that we have so many Bible tools to learn the Scripture. We have apps. Things like looking up a phrases or key words can be done instantly where it used to take so much effort with a concordance. We have daily devotionals that can be sent right to our emails, and preaching from those who are such a blessing. There are

Bible study aides of all kinds out there. Great books to read, and yet how often do we really spend time with the Lord? How much effort such as this week did we put into knowing God or knowing the Lord? We can make excuses but we certainly find ample time investing in so many other things but cannot find either ten or fifteen minutes in a day to spend with our God. And the reason why I put that out there is I find the people who profit the most from worship services, that walk out and are changed through the Word, strengthened and fortified in Christ, walk out encouraged in the faith are those who have a regular Bible intake during the week. No matter how short it might be. Their hearts are turned to Christ. They realize the Scriptures are not less than words, but they are living words. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the Father. We were never meant to live our lives with just physical bread. We were meant to feed on the Word that God has given us.

So look at the Bereans again here in verse 11, **“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”** Notice the activity here is to examine the Scriptures. And notice when they did this —daily. And this really puts us to shame because this would have been so much more difficult for them than for us. The Scriptures were on handwritten scrolls. They were long and because they were copied by hand, there were very few and they were expensive. So probably no one in this synagogue owned their own copy of any of the books of the Old Testament. So they would have to go to the synagogue. And it must have been a fascinating study that was probably done, but not one’s own but in a group. They heard the preaching of Paul, but now they go back to the source. They went to passages such as Isaiah 53, or 9:6. They studied about the life of Christ, also what the sacrificial system pointed. They saw their own sin and inability to keep the law.

And think of the whole goal — it was to truly not just to know whether Paul is telling them the truth, but also to think about who God is, how we come to him, who we are before a holy God. And they were not philosophers but had this conviction that the only way they could know and grow in that knowledge is through the Scriptures. You can imagine Paul coming out with them daily and teaching them the truths and illuminating the key texts they were studying. Can you imagine the excitement and the glory and the amazing in the love of God that he cared so much about a sinner like me that he sent the Messiah to pay the debt that I owe that I would be eternally with him?

And think of it because we have so many Bible tools study today that are at our disposal. Here is the thing, if you do not take Jesus seriously through the week, do you really think that for an hour or an hour and a half of listening to a preacher that your life will radically change more and more into the image of Jesus Christ? We are more disciplined by social media or You-Tube videos or entertainment or sports or politics or whatever because we spend far more time investing in them and do not have ten or fifteen minutes in a day for God. Should we be surprised that a worship service is not that meaningful? Should we be surprised that we walk out unchanged, un enamoured with Christ?

For these believers to know Christ and know the truth about our great God it took work. It took effort. There are so many who desire to have a real and living and vibrant relationship with Christ, and some do — they put in the effort and that effort after a while just seems so natural because they are growing to love Christ. They are

wanting to spend time with him. But for others, even though they have a desire, many just couldn't be bothered. The ones who get the most out of worship service, the most out of preaching of God's Word are those who have been relating and growing in Christ during the week. They look at coming out therefore with such joy and anticipation. How about you? How was your week? Was there any time for our Lord?

3. If we are going to grow through the preaching of God's Word than there has to be an implementation of truth. V.12

Think about it. Preaching, biblical preaching is not just teaching. It is not just a teaching this is what the passage says and means, but there is an application of the passage to the hearers. It is what you are to do with these truths. But here is where our minds come in — we have to actively take what is being taught and applied to our lives through the preaching and see how that intersects with our lives. You know what I mean. Let me give you an example. Listen to Hebrews 13:5-6, "**Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'**" So the preacher might call you away from a sin - the love of money. He might ask you to look how materialism controls your heart. We get our identity out of buying and owning. So after the application we have to ask — where is God telling me to turn from materialism? Where am I discontent with what I have? Where do I need to be reminded that my joy and identity is in him? We need to take that truth and seek to apply it activity.

There is also a promise. I do not need to fear others. God is my helper. Where in my life am I fearing others and being controlled by that fear of others opinions or whatever? Where do I need to realize God is with me? He is my helper. He will give me everything I need to delightfully fear him rather than man. I need to take the preacher's teaching and application, and make it personal. See how it intersects in my life and heart. See if there are things to turn from in order to turn to Christ, and see if there are promises I need to live in light of. And think of these things throughout the week.

Because look at the Bereans again in verse 12, "**Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.**" Do you see how their lives changed. Here they prepared and study and on the basis of hearing Paul — they believed. All of those things come together. "Many of them therefore (because they listen to Paul, because they were eager and prepared to listen and take in, because they poured over the Scriptures to know God and his will, here is the outcome —) believed." Now if they are not ready to listen to Paul. If they come out tired with red eyes that they can't keep open, or their minds filled with everything else and they argue on the way to church, if they are not willing to pour over the Scriptures than we do not read "they believed." We do not read about the change.

Now we know this change comes through the Spirit but the Spirit works through the Word he has given. This is not something passive as we come out but something active. Listen to Hebrews 4:11-12, "**Let us** (Let us is a command, it is something we do) **therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience** (we do not want to wander away or sin needlessly, so how do we strive, and how we strive is through the Scriptures). **For the word of God is living and**

**active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”** The word of God is able to penetrate places where none of us can go. Haven't we felt that at times? When our hearts are sensitive to God's word, the preacher preaches and it is just as if he has been in my life all week. We are encouraged or rebuke or amazed through this Word. And it changes us from the core of our being.

Here is the question: do you want the times we come together to be meaningful, glorious, life-giving and life-changing? They were in Berea. Do you really want to worship God in spirit and in truth? Well, there really is an art to listening. It really is an internal discipline in our lives. And it begins way before we ever enter the door of the church, and it continues after we leave. There is an intentionality. And through that intentionality God begins to change us from one degree of glory to another. God's word really is life altering because our Jesus and our relationship with him is life altering. My plea to you this morning is to be a Berean Christian. The more you learn the discipline of Bible intake the more your life will change to glory of our great God.