



## Summary

What does it mean to truly know what you believe and why you believe it? In Acts 17, we encounter the Bereans, a community of people so hungry for truth that they did not simply accept what they heard but searched the Scriptures daily to confirm it for themselves. This is more than a historical detail. It is a challenge to each of us. Our faith cannot rest on the emotional energy of a compelling speaker or the warmth of a moving story. It must be rooted in the Word of God, because only a faith grounded in Scripture will hold steady when tribulation, persecution, or doubt comes knocking. Jesus illustrated this exact principle in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, showing us that the condition of the soil in our hearts determines whether the seed of the gospel takes root and bears fruit or gets snatched away, scorched, or choked out. The Bereans represent the good soil. They heard the Word, they understood it, and they bore fruit. As we examine our own lives, the question worth sitting with is this: are we Bereans? Are we digging into Scripture for ourselves, building a foundation that no storm of life can shake?





## Points

Title: Knowing What You Believe and Why You Believe It: Paul's Mission from Berea to Athens

Sermon Summary: Drawing from Acts 17, this sermon examines Paul's missionary journey from Berea to Athens, highlighting two contrasting responses to the gospel. The Bereans are commended as a model for all believers because they received the Word with eagerness and then independently verified its truth through daily Scripture study. In Athens, Paul demonstrates the art of contextual gospel presentation, engaging a crowd of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on their own intellectual terms by appealing to creation, the unity of the human race, and the nearness of God rather than citing Old Testament prophecy. The sermon emphasizes that a faith grounded in Scripture will endure every season of life, while a faith built on emotion or another person's testimony alone will not. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is presented as the ultimate proof and the dividing line between those who believe and those who reject the gospel. The sermon closes with an appeal to repent of unbelief and receive the salvation God has already provided.

### Key Points:

- The Bereans are the model for every believer because they not only received the Word gladly but searched the Scriptures daily to confirm that what they were taught was true, demonstrating that genuine faith must be rooted in Scripture and not merely in emotion or someone else's testimony
- It is not enough to know what you believe; every Christian must know why they believe it, because only a faith founded on the Word of God will sustain a person through tribulation, persecution, and crisis
- Jesus's parable of the sower in Matthew 13 illustrates four types of responses to the gospel, and the Bereans represent the good soil that hears, understands, and bears lasting fruit
- Those who are deeply indoctrinated in traditional religion will often go out of their way to disrupt others from hearing and receiving the gospel, just as the Jews from Thessalonica traveled 45 miles to Berea to stir up the crowds against Paul
- When presenting the gospel to those who have no knowledge of Scripture, the evidence of creation and the observable order of the universe serve as a valid and powerful starting point, just as Paul used them at Athens



- Paul's declaration in Acts 17 that God made all nations from one blood is a scientific statement confirmed by modern genetic research, and it is one of many examples of the Bible's accuracy on matters that science only later verified
- God is not distant but near to every person at every moment, and all who genuinely seek him will find him, as affirmed repeatedly throughout both the Old and New Testaments
- The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone proof of the gospel, and its proclamation will always be the dividing line between those who believe and those who reject the message
- The Holy Spirit continues to work in the hearts of listeners even when a gospel presentation is interrupted or incomplete, and he is fully capable of finishing what a messenger could not
- The primary sin that separates a person from God and from eternal life is unbelief, and the call of the gospel is a command to repent of that unbelief and place faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ

#### Scripture Reference:

- Acts 17:10-34, the primary passage covering Paul's ministry in Berea and his address to the Areopagus in Athens
- Matthew 13:18-23, the parable of the sower as explained by Jesus, used to illustrate different responses to the gospel
- Mark 4:10-13, a parallel account of Jesus explaining the purpose of parables and the parable of the sower
- Jeremiah 29:13, which affirms that those who seek God will find him
- Isaiah 55:6, which calls people to seek the Lord while he may be found
- 1 Chronicles 28:9, which promises that God will be found by those who seek him
- 2 Chronicles 15:2, which warns that God will be found only by those who seek him
- Romans 1, referenced in connection with creation as a witness to God's existence when speaking to those unfamiliar with Scripture
- Genesis 1-2, referenced regarding the creation of Adam and Eve as the origin of all humanity



Stories:

- The parable of the sower from Matthew 13, in which Jesus describes four types of soil representing four types of responses to the Word of God, is used to frame the contrast between the receptive Bereans and those who reject or are distracted from the gospel
- The account of the Jews from Thessalonica traveling 45 miles to Berea to disrupt Paul's ministry is presented as a real-world illustration of the enemy's effort to snatch the seed of the gospel before it can take root
- Paul's address on Mars Hill to the Areopagus is examined as a masterclass in contextual evangelism, in which Paul begins with what his audience already believes, quotes their own poets, and builds toward the proclamation of the resurrection
- A personal story is shared about the pastor's father purchasing 40 acres of land in Mississippi after retiring and requesting that soil samples be taken from various points on the property, sent to an agronomy lab, and analyzed to determine what amendments were needed to make the soil fruitful, used as an illustration of what each person may need to add to the soil of their life in order to receive and bear the fruit of the gospel





## Scripture

Here is a list of all scripture references mentioned or alluded to in the sermon:

### **\*\*Directly Cited\*\***

- Acts 17:10-32 (primary passage of the sermon)
- Acts 13:15-41 (Paul's gospel message in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia)
- Matthew 13:18-23 (Parable of the Sower)
- Mark 4:10-13 (parallel account of the Parable of the Sower)
- Isaiah 6:9-10 (quoted by Jesus in Mark 4:12 regarding seeing and not perceiving)
- Jeremiah 29:13 (seeking God and finding Him)
- Isaiah 55:6 (seeking God while He may be found)
- 1 Chronicles 28:9 (seeking God and being found by Him)
- 2 Chronicles 15:2 (God found by those who seek Him)
- Romans 1 (creation as evidence of God, referenced in context of speaking to Gentiles)
- Genesis 1:24 and following, into Genesis 2 (creation of Adam and Eve, one blood)
- John 11:25-26 (Jesus as the resurrection and the life, He who believes shall never die)

### **\*\*Alluded To Without Direct Citation\*\***

- Acts 17:2 (Paul reasoning from the Scriptures at Thessalonica)
- Acts 17:5-9 (the mob at Thessalonica, Jason's arrest)
- Matthew 7:13-14 (the broad road referenced in the context of religion leading people to hell)



## Quotes

I believe, and this is sort of a key imperative in our ministry, it's always been sort of the desire of my heart if I could bring everything that we do down to one single point, especially about the gospel, okay? and Jesus, it is imperative not only to know what you believe, it's not just what you hear and what the guy at the front says, but why you believe it.

Only a faith founded in God's word will see you through every season of life, whether good or bad, whether triumph or tragedy.

There are very many very many, naturally gifted motivational speakers filling pulpits all around the world. Often in, most often in very large churches, able to manipulate their audiences emotionally and to whip them into a frenzy. But that is not foundational for living a Christian life.

We are all of one blood, he says in verse 26. That's a staggering statement, and we talk all the time around here about though the Bible is not a book of science, it's not, but there are many scientific statements that are contained within the Bible, and this is one of them.

The main sin that we involve ourselves in is unbelief, isn't it? There's all kinds of activities, all sorts of sinful activities. The sin that will keep you out of heaven is unbelief.

Everyone deserves to hear the eternal truth of God's plan of salvation, whether they want to or not.

There may just be those in even the hardest hearted crowd whose hearts have been broken before they even arrived there and prepared by God by life events, by divorce, by separation, by job loss, by car accident or whatever it may be, by disease that God has divinely arranged in their lives to go ahead and break that hard heart into pieces.



You know, it's funny when Paul talked about, you know, you might, in hopes that you might grope around and find him in the dark. It's not a very long grope, is it? When you come to that place of understanding that there is God, that he's right there with you.

I'm not asking for blind faith. I'm asking for the rock of faith and a foundation. rather than the fluff you've been living your life on, moving here, there, and everywhere, dealing with sin all over the place.

You're just a box of dirt sitting out there waiting to be amended. Amended, you need to be improved. You need to be added to the Holy Spirit of God.





## Discussion Questions

The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily to verify what Paul taught them -- in what practical ways can you cultivate the habit of confirming what you hear taught against God's Word rather than simply accepting it at face value?

The sermon distinguishes between a faith founded on Scripture and a faith built on emotional experience or another person's testimony -- how have you seen this difference play out in your own life during seasons of trial or crisis?

Jesus describes in the parable of the sower how tribulation and persecution arise specifically because of the Word -- what does it reveal about the nature of genuine faith that opposition is tied directly to one's relationship with Scripture?

Paul's spirit was provoked when he saw Athens given over to idols, and that provocation drove him to speak the gospel boldly even while alone -- what provokes your spirit in the culture around you, and how does that provocation translate into action?

Paul tailored his gospel presentation to a pagan intellectual audience by appealing to creation and their own poets rather than Scripture -- how might you adapt the way you share the gospel with someone who has no biblical frame of reference?

The sermon points out that Paul declared all humanity to be of one blood, a truth only confirmed by geneticists in recent decades -- how does the Bible's consistent scientific accuracy shape your confidence in its spiritual and theological claims?

Paul told the Athenians that God is not far from any one of us and that all who grope for him will find him -- what does it mean to you personally that God has always been present in your life, even in the seasons before you knew him?

The sermon warns that more people may travel the broad road of religion to hell than any other path -- how do you distinguish between a religion that is merely traditional and a living faith that produces genuine spiritual transformation?

Even though Paul was interrupted before finishing his message, Dionysius and others still believed -- how does this challenge the way you think about incomplete or imperfect gospel conversations you may have had with people in your life?

The sermon emphasizes that the one sin which ultimately keeps a person from heaven is unbelief -- how does framing unbelief as the central issue change the way you pray for and engage with people who are far from God?



## Small Group Guide:

### Based on Acts 17:10-32 -- The Bereans and Paul at Athens

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#### Overview

This week's sermon walked us through Paul's encounters in Berea and Athens, highlighting two contrasting models of receiving the gospel. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily to confirm what they heard. The Athenian philosophers, though intellectually curious, largely stumbled at the resurrection. Together, these accounts challenge us to examine the depth and foundation of our own faith.

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#### Key Takeaways

- 1. A faith founded on Scripture endures.** The Bereans were commended not merely for listening, but for independently verifying what Paul taught against the word of God. A faith built on what someone told you, or on how you felt in a moment, will not hold up under pressure. A faith built on Scripture will.
  - 2. Know not just what you believe, but why you believe it.** The sermon emphasized this as a central imperative. Being a "Berean" means being able to give a reason for the hope you have, grounded in God's word rather than in another person's testimony or emotional experience.
  - 3. The gospel must be presented with the audience in mind.** Paul used creation and the testimony of Greek poets when speaking to the Athenians because they had no frame of reference for the Old Testament. Effective witness requires knowing your audience and meeting them where they are.
  - 4. God is never far from anyone.** Paul declared to the Athenians that God arranged the times and boundaries of every person's life so that they might seek him and find him. He is near. Seeking him is never a long journey.
  - 5. The Holy Spirit completes what we cannot.** Paul was interrupted before finishing his message, yet some believed anyway. We are not solely responsible for the outcome of our witness. The Holy Spirit continues working long after the conversation ends.
  - 6. Unbelief is the defining sin.** There are many sins, but the one that ultimately separates a person from God is the refusal to believe that Jesus is the Christ who died for sin and rose from the dead. Repentance begins with repenting of that unbelief.
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## **Discussion Questions**

### **Opening -- Getting Into the Text**

1. Read Acts 17:10-12 together. What specifically made the Bereans more "fair-minded" or honorable than the Thessalonians? What does it look like practically to receive the word "with all readiness" while also testing it against Scripture?
2. The sermon pointed out that the Jews from Thessalonica walked 45 miles to disrupt the work in Berea. Have you ever experienced someone going out of their way to undermine a step of faith you were taking? How did you respond?

### **Going Deeper -- Faith and Its Foundation**

3. The sermon drew a clear distinction between faith founded on Scripture and faith founded on emotional experience or another person's testimony. Can you think of a time when your faith was tested in a way that revealed what it was actually built on? What did you discover?
4. Jesus described four types of soil in Matthew 13:18-23. Which type of soil do you think most accurately represents where you were when you first heard the gospel? Which type best represents where you are now? What changed, and why?
5. The sermon stated that "no true Bible teacher is ever concerned about their listeners independently studying the Bible for themselves." Why do you think some religious environments discourage that kind of independent study? What does it say about a teacher or a tradition when questioning is not welcome?

### **Engaging the World -- Paul at Athens**

6. Paul began his message at the Areopagus by finding common ground with his audience, acknowledging their religious curiosity and even quoting their own poets. How can we apply that approach when sharing the gospel with people who have no church background or familiarity with the Bible?
7. Paul declared in Acts 17:26 that all humanity is descended from one blood. The sermon noted that modern genetics has confirmed this. How does the scientific accuracy of Scripture strengthen your confidence in its authority? Can you think of other examples where the Bible made a claim that was later confirmed by science or history?
8. The Athenian philosophers were intrigued by Paul's message right up until he mentioned the resurrection. Then many mocked. Why do you think the resurrection is specifically the point at which many people disengage? How would you respond to someone who says they can accept Jesus as a good teacher but cannot accept the resurrection?

### **Personal Reflection**

9. The sermon used the image of a soil sample being analyzed to ask: what needs to be added to the soil of your life right now to make it more fruitful? What honest answer does that question produce for you personally?



10. The sermon described Paul being provoked in his spirit by the idolatry he saw in Athens. What do you see in the world around you, in your neighborhood, your workplace, or your culture, that provokes a similar response in you? What are you doing, or what could you do, with that provocation?
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## Practical Applications

### This Week, Choose One or More of the Following:

- **Start or recommit to a daily Bible reading plan.** As the sermon noted, reading three chapters a day will take you through the entire Bible in under a year. Choose a plan, begin tomorrow morning, and report back to the group next week on how it went.
- **Write down what you believe and why you believe it.** Take 15 to 20 minutes this week to put into your own words the core of your faith -- not what your pastor believes, not what your parents taught you, but what you personally know to be true and why. Bring it to the group if you are willing to share.
- **Identify one person in your life who is in the position of the Athenians** -- curious, perhaps spiritual in some sense, but without a biblical foundation. Pray for them daily this week. Ask God to show you how to begin or continue a conversation with them that meets them where they are.
- **Study one prophecy from the Old Testament that points to Jesus.** The sermon mentioned there are at least 300 such prophecies. Choose one, read it in its original context, and then read the New Testament passage that fulfills it. Come prepared to share what you found with the group.
- **Memorize Acts 17:27.** Reflect on what it means that God is not far from any one of us, and let that truth shape how you pray for and interact with unbelievers this week.

## Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by praying together for the following:

- Those in your lives who are intellectually resistant to the gospel, that God would prepare the soil of their hearts
- Faithfulness in daily Scripture reading and personal study
- Boldness to share the gospel in ways that are thoughtful, winsome, and suited to your audience
- Those who have heard the gospel but have not yet responded, trusting the Holy Spirit to continue the work

*"God who made the world and everything in it... has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth... so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." -- Acts 17:24, 26-27, summarized*



## 5-Day Devotional:

*Based on themes from Acts 17 and supporting passages*

### **Day 1: The Berean Standard -- Know What You Believe and Why**

**Reading:** Acts 17:10-12

**Devotional:** The Bereans did not simply take Paul at his word. They searched the Scriptures daily to confirm that what they heard was true. This is not skepticism -- it is spiritual maturity. A faith built on the Word of God will outlast every storm, every crisis, and every voice that seeks to pull you away from truth. When tribulation comes, and it will come, you will not be shaken if your roots go deep into Scripture. Make a decision today to not merely attend to the Word but to personally investigate it. Your faith must be your own.

**Personal Reflection:** When was the last time you searched the Scriptures to confirm something you were taught? Is your faith founded on God's Word or on someone else's experience?

**Practical Application:** Begin a daily Bible reading habit this week. Read three chapters each day. If you do not know where to start, begin in the Gospel of John and let the Word speak for itself.

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### **Day 2: Rooted or Rootless -- The Parable of the Soils**

**Reading:** Matthew 13:18-23

**Devotional:** Jesus describes four types of hearts that receive the seed of the gospel. Only one type produces lasting fruit -- the heart that hears the Word, understands it, and allows it to take deep root. The stony-ground hearer receives the Word with immediate joy but has no root. When persecution or tribulation arises because of the Word, he stumbles. The question is not whether difficulty will come. It will. The question is whether your faith is rooted deeply enough in Scripture to endure it. Shallow enthusiasm cannot carry you through a crisis of faith. Only the Word, planted deep, can do that.

**Personal Reflection:** Which type of soil best describes your heart right now? Are there areas of your life where the cares of the world or the pursuit of comfort are choking the Word?

**Practical Application:** Identify one area of your life where worldly concerns have crowded out spiritual growth. Bring it before God in prayer today and ask Him to cultivate the soil of your heart.

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### Day 3: The God You Do Not Yet Know

**Reading:** Acts 17:22-31

**Devotional:** Paul stood before the most intellectually sophisticated audience of his day and declared that the God they had labeled unknown was in fact knowable, near, and personal. God is not distant. He does not dwell in temples made by human hands, nor does He require human effort to sustain Him. He is the source of all life, breath, and existence. The staggering truth Paul proclaimed is that this God -- the creator of the universe -- desires to be found by every person who seeks Him. He is not far from any one of us. Creation itself testifies to His existence and His nearness.

**Personal Reflection:** Have you ever felt that God was distant or unknowable? What does it mean to you personally that God is described as not far from each one of us?

**Practical Application:** Spend ten minutes today in quiet stillness, without music or distraction. Acknowledge that God is present with you in that moment and ask Him to make His nearness real to your heart.

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### Day 4: Repentance -- Turning Toward What Is True

**Reading:** Acts 17:30; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Isaiah 55:6-7

**Devotional:** Paul declared to the Athenians that God now commands all people everywhere to repent. Repentance is not a feeling -- it is a decision. It is the act of turning away from unbelief and turning toward the truth of who God is and what He has done in Christ. The central sin that separates a person from God is not any particular moral failure but rather the refusal to believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior. God's promise throughout Scripture is consistent and unchanging -- when you seek Him, He will be found by you. That promise is as true today as it was when it was first spoken.

**Personal Reflection:** Is there an area of unbelief in your life that you have not yet surrendered to God? What is one thing you know to be true from Scripture that you have not yet fully trusted?

**Practical Application:** Write down one area of your life where you have been operating in unbelief. Confess it to God today, and ask Him to replace that unbelief with a faith rooted in His Word and His character.

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## **Day 5: The Resurrection Changes Everything**

**Reading:** Acts 17:31-34; 1 Corinthians 15:17-22

**Devotional:** When Paul mentioned the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the crowd was divided. Some mocked. Others were curious. A few believed. The resurrection is the hinge point of all of history and the foundation of every claim the Christian faith makes. Paul declared in his letter to the Corinthians that if Christ has not been raised, faith is futile and believers are still in their sins. But Christ has been raised. That fact changes everything -- it means sin is defeated, death is not final, and every person who places their trust in Jesus Christ has the guarantee of eternal life. The proof of God's plan is an empty tomb.

**Personal Reflection:** How does the resurrection of Jesus Christ personally affect the way you face difficulty, loss, or the fear of death? Does your daily life reflect a belief in the resurrection?

**Practical Application:** Share the truth of the resurrection with one person this week -- not as a theological argument but as a personal testimony of how the risen Christ has changed your life. Let the Holy Spirit complete what you begin.

