

Acts 17:16-34

“Responding To The Word”

Once you find Acts 17 mark your place there and then find your way back to Mark’s gospel ch 4.

Perhaps you’ve discovered throughout the course of life in your Christian experience that different people respond to the word of God in different ways. Some people will resist it, or flat out reject it, others seem to warm up *to* it but then seemingly do a sudden “about face” and turn away *from* it. Some will mock or make fun of it, ridiculing God’s Word, but then others will *welcome* the word of God, *receive* the Word of God, are impacted and changed by the word of God. Don’t be discouraged when you see different people responding to God’s Word in different ways, it’s to be expected, Jesus taught His disciples to anticipate varied responses and told them why it would be that way. In Mark Ch 4 we find Jesus on the beach pushed out into the sea just a bit on a boat and teaching the multitudes in parables, and in vs 3 we read (Vs3-9).

Later on when His disciples were alone with Jesus they asked Him, “Hey, what was that all about anyway, what exactly were You talking about there? What does that parable mean?” In vs 14 Jesus begins to explain, and He said to them, (Vs14-20)

So illustratively speaking the human heart is like soil, and the word of God is like seed, and some hearts are like the wayside, they just don’t even have any area by which the word of God can begin to sink in, they’re really not *open* to God, have no desire to hear the *word* of God or anything else. These are those who reject the word, or ridicule the word, the seed is snatched from them just as soon as it hits, it’s like a rock skipping across the water, it never sinks in. Other hearts are like stony ground, there’s a bit of soil, but its thin, right beneath it is a hard layer, in other words these are the people that are open to talking about it with you, seem to be taking it in and even responding to it in a positive way, but then somewhere down the line things get a little tough and it’s like they do an “about face.” They just take off and you never see them again, some people seem to have it in them to go the distance, things are going well, they’re beginning to grow, things look good. But they begin to be distracted by the things of this world, always looking for the bigger better, they don’t have time for fellowship they’ve got to pull some overtime because they’re looking to buy this, or go there, and do that and eventually they fade away, they’ve been choked about by the cares of this world, and you look around and you one day say, “Where’s so and so, they haven’t made it out in months,” and they’re just gone. Their priorities went askew, they didn’t purpose in their hearts to seek 1st the kingdom of God so they were choked out by the things of this world. But then there are those like yourselves, your heart is eager for the word of God, you look forward to feeding on the word of God, it takes root downward in your life and you bear fruit upward to the glory of God, some 30 some 60, some 100 fold.

Well here in ch 17 of the book of Acts Paul has had and will have varied responses to the same message; the message is always the same, the gospel of Jesus Christ The Jews in Thessalonica resisted and rejected it, like a rock skipping across a pond. But the Jews in Berea received, soaked it up like a dry sponge in a bucket water, they loved it, looked forward to it, what was the difference? The approach to the message? No, the position of the human heart, one purposed to receive, the other poised to reject. But we want to look at these Bereans for just a minute before we move on because we just sort of brushed over them lightly last time for time's sake, but there's a couple of things we want to take note of with regards to *them* because their example is healthy for *us*. Vs 11 and 12 give us 2 practical things that the Bereans did and the subsequent result. Look at vs 11

What was the 1st thing they did with regards to the word of God? #1 They *received* the word with all readiness. They had purposed in their hearts that when it came to God's Word, they were open to it, welcoming of it, that word "received" speaks of "taking with the hand" or "receiving favorably" there's almost an intimacy about the word. It speaks of taking and making one's own, which means that when the word of God was being shared they were *eager* (that's what the word "readiness" speaks of) they were *eager* to "personalize" it, and "internalize" it. There was an embracing of the word of God, what an outstanding disposition to have. That you and I purpose in our hearts that when it comes to the pure milk, or the hearty meat of the word of God, we're going to receive it *eagerly*, not with reservation or a spirit of procrastination, but rather that we "embrace" it. Take it and make it our own, internalizing and personalizing it so that it begins to mold us and shape us more and more into the likeness of Christ.

But 2^{ndly} we need to note the fact that just because someone had a bible out and was standing behind the pulpit, that didn't cause them to hang their brain on the rack with their coat when they walked in the church. They received it with all readiness but #2 They searched the Scriptures daily, to find out whether these things were so. What things? The things that Paul was sharing with them regarding the Christ, and the heart of God, and the desire of God for their lives; they didn't just go, "Well, he's the preacher he must know what he's talking about." They searched the scriptures daily so as to make sure that what they were being told was the truth. and That word "searched" isn't a "sluggish" kind of a verb. It speaks of high levels of scrutiny, a sifting through; it literally speaks of researching in a forensic fashion. Think about that! You've heard of perhaps the "forensic" aspects of science whereby they'll utilize this incredibly meticulous highly detailed scientific approach to a certain situation to perhaps solve an otherwise unsolvable crime? That's the way these guys were going at the word of God, in a *forensic* fashion, meticulously, very scrupulously, painstakingly going over the details of everything Paul said and researching the context of scripture to see if he was accurate in his exposition of the Scripture. It says that they did this *daily*, in other words, they not only had their bibles out, double checking all his cross references, but then they went home and continued to thoroughly examine the scripture. They were what we might refer to as "critical thinkers" they had incredibly open hearts, but very clear heads.

I can't stress to you enough the vast importance of meticulously, forensically researching the scripture to make sure that the things that you're told (be it on TV, the Radio, or even from myself) are so. Don't take my word for it, search it out for yourself, think about it. If the apostle Paul was deserving of such close examination and inspection, how much more those of us today that take the pulpit. and I don't care how many Greek words someone rattles off or anything else, make sure that what's being put on your plate is worthy to swallow. These guys were hungry for the word, eager to take in the word, but they didn't turn a blind eye, or leave their reasoning at the door just because someone spoke with authority. They didn't leave and say, "My he sure was funny," or "I can't believe how articulate and eloquent that man was!" They went home and searched it all out; they were hungry, thirsty for the truth of the word of God. What was the result? Look at vs 12. (Read 1st ½)

What did Jesus say? "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.*" Matt 5:6 You can't search the scripture from an honest and open heart, and a desire to know the truth with out being drawn into a relationship with Jesus Christ You search the scripture with a heart for the truth and you'll come to a saving knowledge and a continued intimacy with Christ. Why, Because Jesus *is* the truth, the way, the (what?) truth and the life. So receive the word, but research it as well.

Well, shortly after that the Jews from Thessalonica came down and began to stir up the people there as well so Paul was sent away for his safety's sake to Athens. and When he got there he sent for Silas and Timothy to join him, now look at vs 16.

Vs16-17

Now this is sorta interesting because in reality Athens wasn't on Paul's missionary agenda, he probably thought he'd check out the city like any other tourist until Timothy and Silas got there and then they could keep moving. But as he observed this famous city, with all its culture his spirit began to stir with in him. It's as though it just made him angry that behind all the incredible sculptures was nothing more than gross idolatry. The phrase "given over to idols" speaks of inundated, or saturated; the city was drowning in idols. One historian remarked that it was easier in Athens, to find a god than a man. and It just ate a Paul, why? Because they were deceived, being blinded by the enemy, they were just lost, you remember when Jesus looked upon the multitudes as they gathered about Him the bible tells us that, "*He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*" Matt 9:36 Now That's not the exact emotion that the bible is speaking of here with Paul, but the idea is there with respect to the fact that he looked upon the circumstance and was stirred to action because the people were lost and deceived.

Question: Is there any emotion that's *stirred* up in you, or *provoked* with in you when you look upon people who are lost and deceived? When you're at the mall, or driving down Range Line, inside every vehicle, or every face in the food court and buzzing down the mall is in 1 of 2 positions. They either know Jesus personally, or they're lost and headed for hell specifically, that's the reality. Now that ought to stir something up in you, because God loves humanity, gave His only begotten Son so that people wouldn't have to spend an eternity separated from Him in torment where there'll be weeping and wailing, the gnawing of the tongue and gnashing of teeth. But we just go through life on cruise control because all is well with us, but there's an entire city out there (and beyond) that God has placed us in that will have a good chunk of it slip off the planet with out Jesus if we maintain such a self centered perspective. Paul was moved to action, so what did he do?

He went into the synagogues and reasoned with the Jews, he reasoned with the Gentile worshippers and he spoke to people there in the marketplace everyday with anyone who happened to be there who'd give him the time of day. In other words he shared Jesus with everyone and anyone who'd listen (isn't that convicting? God help us) but the idea there is that the gospel is for all men everywhere. It doesn't have a "target audience" if you're lost, it's for you, whether you're lining a pew or a church chair, are at the mall or Wal-mart, Jew, or Gentile, it doesn't matter. God so loved "the world" therefore the gospel is for the world, as many as have ears to hear. He just engaged in conversation and reasoned with anyone who'd give him the time of day.

Vs18-21

So here's Paul just sharing away in what had become one of the most, if not the most educated/intellectual city in the world, it'd be like sharing at Oxford, or Cambridge in England. and Here come these Philosophers that have caught wind of what he's been sharing, and we don't have time to get into the fullness of what these guys stood for. Suffice it to say the Epicurean philosophy said that pleasure was the chief aim, and again there were a couple of strains of thought with in the philosophy itself. But you can imagine that it ultimately developed into a perverse philosophical position, it was an "eat, drink, and be marry," type mindset, virtually atheistic and just going for the gusto, taking life easy. The Stoics were just the opposite, if the Epicureans were couch potatoes, the Stoics were the aerobics instructors, very disciplined. Thought that the body should be bridled, and the best way to do that was to remove yourself from any emotional attachment whatsoever.

So they were very somber individuals, they placed high emphasis on moral sincerity and a high sense of duty, and as far as spiritual convictions go they were pantheists. Thought the God was in everything, they believed that God was the world's soul. and So you have 2 extremes here, one that said you need to *enjoy* life, the other that said you need to *endure* life.

They thought the Paul was preaching more than one God in that he spoke to them of both Jesus *and* the resurrection. The word “resurrection” in the Greek is “Anastasin” which was also a feminine name in the Greek. So when he’s speaking of “Ieesoun and the anastasin” they’re registering 2 different names there. They think Paul is in reference to 2 different people and aren’t registering yet that he’s speaking to them of the fact that Jesus *is* the resurrection, that Jesus is the *One* who resurrected. So they’re all, “What’s this babblers trying to say.” They didn’t get it, interesting that the intellectual capital of the word, didn’t understand; professing to become wise they became fools, the natural man unable to discern spiritual matters. But because their interest was spurred they drug him to this place of debate, the Areopagus. Why, because we read here that what he was saying (up to this point was tickling their ears), they lived to waste time and find out new things.

You know time is very precious, and we only have so much of it, yet we’re all the time wasting it, and it’s not wrong to relax now and then, “stop to smell the roses” so to speak. But the reality is that we’re not to be wasting the time but rather *redeeming* the time. Paul told the Ephesians, “*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*” Eph 5:15-16 Walk wisely, making the most of the time you have. Moses said, “*So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.*” Ps 90:12 Help us to see our lives in the radically limited span that they are that we might walk in wisdom, rather than foolishly wasting the time we’ve been allotted. These Athenians weren’t necessarily interested in truth, just entertainment; they wanted to be in on the cutting edge of the latest greatest information. A lot like our culture today, don’t confuse me with the facts preacher, just tell me a cute story, keep me on the edge of my seat, I want to leave here with warm fuzzies. Paul told Timothy, “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*” 2 Tim 4:3-4 and Of course you can turn on your television and get plenty of that, not that its limited to TV, but you get the idea, such are the days in which we live. But that’s sorta the idea here, “What is this *new* doctrine that you teach, sounds interesting, mind if we listen in?” and Paul was never one to miss an opportunity so.

Vs22-23

Now you’ve got to love this, Paul was a sharp individual and he made this segue right from the day and age, the mindset and culture that they were in straight into the gospel with out missing a beat. They’re all, “What is it you want to say to us?” Paul says, “Well, as I look around I was noticing how religious of a community you are.” (There were various temples everywhere, idols all over the place,) and he says, “As I was just passing through here I was observing your manner of worship (people bowing to these statues and all) and I even saw an altar with the inscription ‘TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.’”

They had deified and made a god of every emotion and everything you could think of, god of love, of anger, of wisdom, of war, of the sun, the moon, the sea, of nature, of fire, everything. and Just incase they missed one, they had an altar to “The unknown God” the legend has it that 600 yrs prior to this time and horrible plague swept through there. and Unable to do anything about it, one guy had the idea that they’d release a flock of sheep in the town, and wherever they laid down, they’d be sacrificed to the god of the nearest temple, but if they didn’t lay near any temple, they’d be sacrificed to the “unknown” god.

Well, Paul says, “It’s this God whom your worship with out knowing that I want to talk to you about.” and From *that* point he’s going to start at the beginning with creation, and take them to the culmination of all things-judgment. But how important it is to *know* God, God isn’t unknowable, that’s his point. You’re worshipping a God you don’t know, but we don’t have an impersonal disinterested God. We’ve been created by God, that we might come to know God in a personal and intimate way. and There’s such an incredible emphasis placed upon knowing Him in the scripture because apart from knowing Him, we can’t be saved. Remember what Jesus said regarding those people who come to Him apart from a relationship with Him on that day even though they did all kinds of neat things even tagging His name to them? He said, “*And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me,*” Matt 7:23 Where’s the emphasis? On *knowing* Him, when He spoke of the parable of 10 virgins, 5 were ready, 5 caught sleeping, the 5 who were ready went with the bridegroom, but the one’s who weren’t were left behind. The tried later to gain acceptance on their own, but you recall what was said, we read that, “*Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'*” Matt 25:11-12 You see, *knowing* Jesus Christ is the key to eternal life, not knowing *about* Him, knowing Him. John 17:3-Jesus is there praying, “*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*”

Vs24-31

Like we couldn’t spend all day here...Paul starts at the beginning, “God created all things, and He is Lord of all things. Therefore you need to realize that He doesn’t dwell in some temple made with hands.” He’s not localized, He’s in all places at all times (Ps 139) when Solomon built the temple what did he say? “*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!*” 1 Kings 8:27 So the 1st thing Paul focuses on is the *greatness* of God, He can’t be contained in a mere temple, He’s created the heavens the earth and all that’s contained there in. Then he shifts to the *goodness* of God, “It’s not about what He needs from us, it’s about what we need from Him. He doesn’t need what we bring to Him, we need what He has brought to us, He gives us life, breath, and all things.” So much of the time the focus is placed upon what we need to be doing for God, but in reality our focus would be better placed upon what God has done for us, we’re not the givers, He’s the giver, we’re the receivers, what do you have but that you haven’t received. and So Paul places the emphasis on God’s goodness, that He’s given to us life, our next breath, and everything we have. From there he moves on to the *governing* aspects

of God, that we're all created of one blood, namely Adam, and notice vs 26, "He has determined their *preappointed* times and the boundaries of their dwellings."

God has purposed the era in which you'd live, the country in which you'd live, the city and state you'd live, the whole thing. You ever wonder why you were born when you were vs any other time in history? This is it, because God purposed it this way, why would He do that? (Vs27) Because He loves you so much that He placed you in the "environment" if you will that would be most advantageous for you to seek Him out. There's a homing device in the heart of everyman, a void, and it's "God shaped" people are searching, unfortunately often times their looking in the wrong place, thinking the answer is at the bottom of the next bottle, or in the bed of that other person, or the corporate raise, but it's not. The answer lies in Jesus Christ and until you've found Him, you'll keep searching, but He's not far away, as a matter of fact He's nearer than you might imagine. Because it's in Him that we live and move and have our being. His presence is everywhere, there's nowhere that you can go to escape the presence of God. Paul told the Colossians regarding Christ, "*And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*" Col 1:17 and He says that since we're *of* Him, have been created *by* Him (vs29 read last ½).

In other words, "God is infinitely greater than *man*, therefore to seek to identify God with something fashioned *by* man is the apex of ignorance." (and Paul is in the intellectual capital of the world.) In Rom ch 1 Paul speaks of those professing to be wise have become fools changing the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like corruptible man, or birds, animals etc. But we serve a *gracious* God. Paul is progressing here, from God's greatness, to His goodness, to His government, to now His grace.

Vs30-31

So he says, "Just because God has been patient throughout the past, don't mistranslate that for God's approval." So often if God doesn't immediately deal with us we think, "He must be ok with it." Paul is saying here, sins of ignorance in the past though mitigated through ignorance were in no way, eliminated nor would they be completely dismissed. It's the "To whom much is given much is required" principle. But if much hasn't been given, than much isn't required. Paul says, before God didn't require much, because the revelation of Himself was limited, but now that the full revelation has been given in Christ. Ignorance is no excuse, God commands all men everywhere to repent. That is, "Get a new mindset about life, and follow after Christ." Why? Because judgment is coming, we all have an appointment with judgment. The believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and your works will be judged (that's not for salvation but for rewards). The non-believer will stand before the white throne judgment whereby the books will be opened, and another book, the book of life. and Anyone whose name isn't found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire, that's what the bible teaches. Jesus confronts us with accountability, and God has assured us that He'll judge the world in righteousness by the person of Jesus Christ by raising Him from the dead.

Vs32-34

So you see, different responses to the Word, and the message of the gospel, some resisting, rejecting. Some ridiculing (the bible says the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing), we see indecision and apathy, excuses, “Not ready yet, come again later” Paul didn’t waste his time with that. He wasn’t going to play their games, he shared the gospel, now his hands were clean and they had a decision to make. Some received it, came to know Christ by it. The question is which category do you fit in this morning. Rejecting, ridiculing, or receiving, I pray it’s the latter, that you receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. Be a Berean, receive it, research it, allow God to mold your life by it.

Maybe you’ve never made that conscious decision to receive the word of God into your heart thereby taking the Son of God into your life. You’ve never asked Jesus to make Himself real to you, that you might *know* Him, and that He might know you. There’s no reason to pay homage to this God that you don’t know any longer, give your heart to Christ, repent of your sin and receive His righteous covering for your life. Let Him wash you white like snow, and forgive you of your sin and you can have new life in Christ today.

Prayer points: God help us to be those with open hearts with regard to Your Word, that we’d receive it eagerly, internalizing it, personalizing it, that we’d make application of it practically. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness, searching meticulously, forensically, Your Word. That we might know You, be known by You, we don’t want to search the scriptures thinking that knowledge in itself is where it’s at, we realize that the scriptures is that which testify of You, we want to be drawn to You. Help us to redeem the time, and to be stirred to action over the desperate position of those lost and deceived. Use us in a great way to increase your Kingdom. We pray for this city, that many might come to know You from the work You’re doing in our lives and in this place.