Series: Unstoppable (Part 26)
Speaker: Charles Lim

INTRODUCTION

We return to join Paul on his second missionary journey, focusing on his time in Macedonia. Traveling through different lands and cultures, we draw lessons from how Paul approached different communities, and their reactions to the gospel.

In particular, we look at how the Berean Jews in Macedonia responded to the gospel preached by Paul. They were:

- Open-minded enough to listen to and consider the message of the gospel[1], but not blindly believing what the apostles said.

- Objective about evaluating the truth of the gospel against the Jewish Scriptures. "They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." (Acts 17:11)

For these virtues, the Berean Jews were described as being of "noble character". High praise indeed.

[1] In contrast with some of the Thessalonian Jews who formed a mob and tried to attack the missionaries (Acts 17:5)

Yet, the Berean Jews needed the work of the Spirit as well, to have believed. If their own knowledge was sufficient, it would not explain why other Jews had reacted differently. Or indeed, why Gentile men and women were convinced by the gospel without any prior knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."*[2] No Spirit, no gospel.

DISCUSSION

1. As a thought experiment, select a person from your group.
    a. What do you know about this person?
    b. How do you know these things, e.g. by observation; by hearsay; by experience?
    c. Compare this process to how we might know God. What might be similar or different?

2. Read Acts 17:1-15.
    a. How did Paul bring the gospel to the Thessalonians and Bereans? What was the place of the Word and the Spirit in His ministry?
    b. How might Paul's example shape how we share the gospel to others?
    c. How might the example of the Thessalonians and Bereans shed light on how we ourselves are to receive church teaching?

3. Read 1 Peter 3:15-16.
    a. Are we able and ready to reason our faith with others? Why or why not?
    b. How clear and convinced are we of some of the doctrinal statements we may proclaim e.g. God's love? Shall we pray for the Spirit's help for understanding and belief?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Let us adopt a curious mind towards the teachings of the church - and the teachings of the world. Examining our beliefs with one another is all part of the process of sharpening our minds and strengthening our faith (see Proverbs 27:17).

[2] 1 Corinthians 2:14

Note too that there are certain mysteries in the Bible that God has chosen not to reveal definitively to mankind. There are also certain promises that we cannot test for ourselves in our lifetime. Yet there is still value in examining why these are so, as wisdom lies in the search.

Still, at the same time, let us ask the Holy Spirit for discernment to recognise His will in all things. It is not through our effort alone that we might find God, but rather through His willingness to be found that we might even begin to seek Him.

MEMORY VERSE

“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 (NIV)