**The Chattering of the Scattering**

(Acts 11:19-23)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

Three Southerners were vacationing in a third world country, and got drunk one Saturday night. They tore up the town *so badly* they were sentenced to die by firing squad. But when they stood Billy Bob against the wall and asked if he had any last words, he thought for a moment and yelled out: *“Tornado!”* and the men in the firing squad all *scattered.* Seeing what he did, when they stood Cletus against the wall, he yelled out: *“Flood!”* and the firing squad scattered again. But that third Southerner wasn’t too bright, so when it was Bubba’s turn to be lined up against the wall, he yelled out: *“Fire!”*

Speaking of being *scattered,* as we return to our study of Acts 11, we’re reminded that the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ did some scattering of their own. And when they did, they did some *chattering* as well, as we see in the opening verse of our text in Acts 11:19-23.

**“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only” (Acts 11:19).**

Now as I’m sure you remember, after the unsaved Jews in Jerusalem stoned Stephen, the Lord’s disciples showed the good sense that God gave them and *hit the bricks,* and were “scattered abroad.”

And when it says they preached the Word “to none but unto the Jews only,” that shows that they knew what you as a grace believer know, but what most pastors and teachers don’t. And that is that when the Lord told His apostles,

**“Go ye therefore, and teach *all nations…”* (Matthew 28:19).**

And then *added,*

**“…all nations*,* *beginning* *at Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:47),**

He meant they couldn’t go to *all* nations until *the nation of Israel* got saved, so God could *use* that nation to reach all the others. That’s why here in our text these Jewish preachers *ignored* the Gentiles and preached to “none but the Jews.”

And when they got persecuted, they didn’t let a little opposition affect their faithfulness in serving the Lord, they *kept* preaching the Word. That’s something that we ourselves should keep in mind—especially when you consider what little opposition we usually have to deal with in our lives.

But if you’re familiar with the Book of Acts, you may be thinking, “Wait a minute! Didn’t God just get done teaching Peter that Gentiles were no longer unclean, in order to use him to introduce Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles.” Well yeah, He did! But that didn’t change *their* ministry to the Jews! God might have been starting a new program, but that didn’t mean His old kingdom program had come to an end. *Both* programs continued throughout the Book of Acts.

And if you don’t understand that, you’ll never understand Acts. And if you don’t understand this transitional book, you’re never going to understand what God is doing *today,* in the dispensation of grace, or what He wants *you* to do, or what message He wants you to share with people. This is important stuff!

And as we read on, we see something else that it is important to understand. Speaking of those scattered believers, our text goes on to say:

**“And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20).**

Now “Grecians” were Jews who spoke Greek, instead of Hebrew as the Jews in Jerusalem. But most new Bible translations change the word “Grecians” to *Greeks—*the Bible word for *Gentiles.* But we know this is incorrect, and that Grecians were actually Jews, for a couple of different reasons.

First, we just finished reading in the previous verse that these scattered believers “only” preached the Word to Jews, and verse 20 begins with an “and,” not a “but.” That is, Luke is not drawing a contrast here, he’s merely clarifying where some of these “Jews only” preachers were from.

Second, look what it says about Saul of Tarsus right after he got saved:

**“…Saul…preached Christ…that he is the Son of God…and dis-puted against the Grecians: *but they went about to slay him”* (Acts 9:19,29).**

Now let me ask you: who was always trying to kill Paul, Jews or Gentiles? Jews! They’re the ones who didn’t like to hear that Jesus Christ was the Son of God! They didn’t want to hear that their messiah was some poor carpenter from Nazareth who wasn’t able to save them from Roman bondage, which is what they expected their Messiah to do. But *Gentiles* didn’t care that Jesus was the Son of God, so we know that the “Grecians” who tried to kill Paul had to have been *Jews.*

Plus, later on the church that was getting started here in Antioch sent Paul out to preach to the Gentiles, and look what happened when he and Barnabas went *back* there:

**“…they…sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, *and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles”* (Acts 14:25-27).**

Now did you follow all that? The Antioch church sent Paul and Barnabas out to preach to the Gentiles and they “fulfilled” that work. Then when they went back to the church in Antioch, they said, “You know, while we were out, God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” But it wouldn’t make any sense to say that if the believers in Antioch were Gentiles! If *they* were Gentiles, that would mean that the door of faith to the Gentiles was opened *by these scattered Jews here in Acts 11.* No! It was opened by *Paul,* not by those Jewish kingdom saints.

Now perhaps you are wondering why you should care about any of this. But you probably wondered the same thing about most of the stuff you learned in school! I know I did! But what you learned in school was what your teachers used to mold you into the person you are today. And everything you learn *in the Bible* is what *God* uses to mold you into the *spiritual* person that He wants you to be!

So you can either let your eyes glaze over and doze off when you study material such as this, like you did in school, or you can pay attention like the nerds did in school. You know. The nerds who now make *way* more money than you! Don’t envy the good life they enjoy just because you snoozed in school. And don’t envy the good *spiritual* life some Christians have if you snooze while studying God’s Word.

There’s no quick fix when it comes to fixing your problems in life. If there were, I’d sell it and get rich instead of teach the Bible. It takes *work* to learn God’s will for your life, so justr buckle down and make the decisions to *do it.* You don’t want to get to the end of your life and have to wonder why you made such a *mess* of your life when you could have had the *triumphant* life God wants you to have!

Now if God didn’t *approve* of preaching the Word to none but the Jews only, He would have been against these preachers, right? But that’s not what we read as we continue in our text, where it says of them,

**“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).**

As you can see, the Lord was *with* those “Jews only” preachers, not against them!

But here we have to ask how they *knew* that the hand of the Lord was with them. Just because a great number of people believed doesn’t mean that the preachers are in the will of God. The power of God’s Word is such that sinners can be saved when it is preached despite their failings.

No, in the Bible, “the hand of the Lord” was associated with God’s Holy Spirit. Do you remember what the Lord said in Luke 11:20?

**“…I with *the finger of God* cast out devils…”**

But Matthew heard Him say,

**“…I cast out devils *by the Spirit of God*…” (Matthew 12:28).**

Now that’s not a discrepancy in your Bible. That’s God’s way of teaching you that the fingers of His hand were associated with His Spirit.

So when our text says that the hand of the Lord was with those kingdom saints, it means that those scattered Jews were doing things like casting out devils, healing the sick, and all the other miraculous things the filling of the Spirit empowered them to do at Pentecost. Apparently they were still evidencing those supernatural gifts. We’ll see more evidence of that in a moment.

But first, I should point out that the tremendous response these preachers received is one of many Bible proofs that God does some of His best work when His people are being persecuted like these Jews were. So when you hear about Christians being beheaded overseas, or persecuted in other ways, don’t let yourself be discouraged about it. God is probably working more *there* than He is *here* where things are more calm and peaceful. And if persecution ever comes here, don’t let that get you down either. And don’t let keep you from being as faithful as these Jews were.

*And,* when you’re having a rough time in your personal life, don’t let *that* get you down either, for that’s when God can do some of His best work *in you.* As your apostle Paul put it,

**“I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in neces-sities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: *for when I am weak, then am I strong”* (II Corinthians 12:10).**

If you want to know why God allows you to have “infirmities,” or lets you be so poor as to have to go without the “necessities” of life, or to be “distressed” in any other way, it’s because He wants you *spiritually* strong, and that happens best when you’re *physically* weak. And when you find yourself oppressed in these ways, and you can do what Paul did and learn to “take *pleasure*”in your adversities, that demonstrates the power of God *way* more than healing the sick or casting out devils.

So don’t be moaning and lamenting that you can’t show the power of God like these scattered Jews could when God has given you a way to show it that is *far* more powerful. To patiently *endure* things like that is admirable. To actually take *pleasure* in them is divine. So if you want to show the world what a powerful God you have, it won’t be easy, but you can learn to do it if you just decide to be Pauline in your conduct as well as your doctrine.

Well, when news of these many Grecians getting saved got back to the headquarters of the Jewish kingdom church in Jerusalem, they decided to learn more about it:

**“Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch” (Acts 11:22).**

Now Barnabas was a member of the Jewish kingdom church. Do you remember what his name meant? Acts 4:36 says that “Barnabas…being interpreted” is “The son of consolation.” That means he had a *consoling* type of personality.

Now the word “console” has two parts. The word “sole” means *single,* as when you hear that someone was the sole survivor of a disaster, the lone survivor of a catastrophe. And “con” means *against,* as when you’re trying to decide something and you make a list of the pros and cons. So when you con-sole someone, it means you’re *against* them being *alone—*especially when that someone is in distress and *needs* consoling.

And Barnabas’ consoling personality was something that God was able to use mightily after Saul of Tarsus got saved and tried to meet up with the other apostles, as we see in Acts 9:36, where we read:

**“…when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: *but they were all afraid of him,* and believed not that he was a disciple. *But Barnabas took him,* and brought him to the apostles…” (Acts 9:36).**

For awhile there it looked like Saul would have to remain alone, but the son of consolation consoled him.

Now all this explains why the headquarters of the Jewish kingdom church sent *Barnabas* to these new Grecian believers. You see, the Grecians and the Jews didn’t always get alone, as we see evidenced when “…there arose a murmuring of the *Grecians* against the *Hebrews*…” (Acts 6:1). And the apostles and other Jewish leaders didn’t want those Grecians to feel alone and unaccepted by their Jewish brethren, so they chose Barnabas to represent them based on the nature of his personality.

Now maybe you don’t have a consoling personality. But no matter what kind you have, God can use it if you make yourself available to Him. I once knew a grace pastor who had the very *opposite* of a consoling personality, but he was faithful, and because of that God was able to use him. And over the years I learned to thank God for him, as I do to this day.  
 By the way, my psychiatrist told me that I have a *split* personality. And he charged me $100 to render this assessment. I responded by paying him $50 and telling him to collect the balance from the other guy! (Just kidding!)

Okay, let’s find out what Barnabas did when he arrived in Antioch by continuing on in our text:

**“Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23).**

Now to do something “with purpose of heart” means to do it with *determination,* as we see when the king of Babylon tried to get Daniel to eat things that the law of Moses said he couldn’t, and

**“Daniel *purposed in his heart* that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat…” (Daniel 1:8).**

When Daniel’s Bible said he couldn’t eat that meat, he was *determined* that he *wouldn’t!*

Now what’s that tell you about what Paul says in II Corinthians 9:7:

**“Every man *according as he purposeth in his heart*, so let him *give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”**

When Paul uses that same phrase “purpose of heart” to talk about our *giving,* that shows we should be just as determined to give as Daniel was not to eat the king’s meat! I know that many of the saints in the church I pastor feel that way, for I saw evidence of it during the Covid-19 lockdown of 2020. When our church was closed for weeks and our people couldn’t get to our offering box, *Faith Bible Church* treasurer Ed Ostrowski told me that they began *mailing* their offerings to us rather than fall behind in their giving.

How’s that square with what legalists say when you hear them opine, “You can’t tell people they don’t have to tithe! If you do, they won’t give anything at all!” The example I just cited is just one of countless ones that could be entered into evidence to prove that grace believers can be just as determined to give because they are thankful for all God has given us as legalists are who tithe because they’re afraid of what God will do to them if they don’t.

One of the ways you can *have* the triumphant life that God wants you to have is to learn to give of yourself to Him in *every* area of your life. And if you’ve tried every other way to have that kind of life and come up short, why not try giving financially to support the Lord’s work. If you will, I think you’ll find that the Lord was right when He observed that where your treasure is, that’s where your heart will be as well.

But the thing that Barnabas told those new Grecian believers to do with purpose of heart was to “cleave” to the Lord (v.23). Now if you want to talk about a word that can have more than one meaning, as we often do, there’s a word that can have completely *opposite* meanings. It can mean to *stick* with someone, as when Adam said,

**“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, *and shall cleave unto his wife:* and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).**

But is that what that word means in this description of the Lord’s coming seven years after the Rapture to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth?

**“…His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olivesshall *cleave* in the midst thereof *toward the east and toward the west…”* (Zechariah 14:4).**

There the word “cleave” means *to divide!*

I can remember one of my teaches in high school asking the class for a definition of *cleave,* and I said that it meant to stick to someone or something. She replied, “No, it means to *divide* something,” and used the example of a meat “cleaver” and how it divides meat. I responded by opening the Bible that I always carried to class to Genesis 2:24 and reading her what Adam said about a man cleaving to his wife. She said—and I quote—“Huh!”

There’s even a name for words with opposite meanings. You’ve heard of synonyms? Well, such words as these are called *contronyms.* You can “dust” your furniture to *remove* dust, or you can “dust” your strawberries with powdered sugar to *apply* it. The word is spelled exactly the same either way. Do you see why we pay such close attention to words when we study the words found in *God’s* Book?

Well, when Barnabas exhorted the Grecians to cleave to the Lord, he wasn’t telling them to dust Him off. He was telling them to stick to Him like glue!

And I know how hard that can be in the face of all the disappointments that can fill our lives with despair. But listen, Barnabas knew a thing or two about being disappointed. After Judas betrayed the Lord and the other eleven apostles got together to pick his replacement, they narrowed it down to two candidates:

**“…they appointed two, *Joseph called Barsabbas…*and Matthias*…* and the lot fell upon *Matthias;* and *he* was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:23).**

Now doesn’t “Joseph called Barsabbas” sound a lot like a man whom Luke mentions later in Acts?

**“…*Joses,* who by the apostles was surnamed *Barnabas*, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,)…having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet” (Acts 4:36,37).**

It seems likely that these are one and the same man. If so, do you think maybe he was a little *disappointed* when God didn’t pick him to replace Judas? If you’ll read the context of Acts 1, you’ll find that Barnabas had followed the Lord *for three years,* right from the very beginning of His ministry. He left everything to follow the Lord, just as Peter left his nets and boats and his fishing business to follow Him. If anyone ever had a reason to *not* cleave to the Lord, *it was Barnabas!*

But when the Lord said he *also* had to sell all of his investment properties, *he did that too!* And here in our text he’s *still* serving the Lord as the emissary of the Jewish church to Antioch. Do you know what you call that? You call it *cleaving to the Lord,* despite any and all of life’s disappointments.

And as we peek ahead at the text for our next lesson, we see Barnabas described in an additional favorable light:

**“For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord” (Acts 11:24).**

Now maybe you’re thinking, “If I cleave unto the Lord, *what’s in it for me?”* If so, look what Moses promised the Jews under the law in Deuteronomy 11:22,23:

**“…*if* ye shall…love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to *cleave* unto Him; *Then* will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves” (Deuteronomy 11:22,23).**

God told the Jews under the law that if they cleaved unto Him, He would not only drive the Canaanites out of the Promised Land, so they wouldn’t have to deal with them any more, He’d also make the Canaanites their *possessions—*their *slaves!* Well, I have to admit, I kind of like the sound of that. It would be nice if God would get rid of all the people who annoy me by making them wait on my hand and foot! That’s one of the verses that makes it tempting to wish that our apostle Paul *hadn’t* declared,

**“…we are not under the law, but under grace…” (Romans 6:15).**

We usually think of this verse as a positive because we use it to comfort ourselves that we cannot reap the curses with which God threatened the Jews under the law if they misbehaved. But it works both ways! The truth of Romans 6:15 means we can’t expect the kind of blessing that God promised Jews under the law for good behavior either.

But do you see those words “if” and “then” in Deuteronomy 11? That’s what you call a promise of *conditional blessing,* and it has nothing to do with grace! Grace is a guarantee of *unconditional* blessing. Our apostle Paul says to us,

**“…God…*hath* blessed us *with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”* (Ephesians 1:3).**

Under grace, Paul explains how God gives us all of our spiritual blessings *up front,* the moment He saves us. But along with such unconditional assurance, he prayed,

**“That ye might walk *worthy of the Lord* unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Colossians 1:10).**

Paul reasoned that if we have all those blessings in the Lord that we should *walk worthy* of the Lord. And he’s right! Obedience and faithfulness are the only proper responses to the infinite grace of God.

Of course, God knows that what He’s asking you to do is a whole lot harder than what He asked the Jews to do under the law. Every father knows it.

When my kids were toddlers and my wife and I were trying to teach them to say “please” and “thank you,” one of those was a whole lot easier to get them to say than the other. Can you guess which one? “Please!” And you can probably figure out why, even if you’re not a parent. It’s easy to get a child to say please *because you still have what he wants.* Once you give a kid what he wants and try to get him to say “thank you,” he often says “Nuts to you,” and goes off to enjoy whatever it is you gave him.

But that’s because he’s a child. And you can treat God like a child if you want to, and just go off and enjoy all the things He’s given you. You can do what a lot of grace believers do and just sit around and study the Bible and *revel* in the splendor and the glory of your spiritual blessings. But what you ought to do instead is thank God for them by walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.

But if you’re not saved, you need to know that you don’t have to purpose *anything* in your heart to be saved from your sins. You just have to believe that that’s what *Christ* did when He decided to go to the cross and die for your sins. *Nothing* deterred Him from doing that, not even when the going got tough. Look how Isaiah described His determination in Isaiah 50:6,7, where he quoted the Lord prophetically as saying,

**“I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help Me; therefore shall I not be confounded: *therefore have I set My face like a flint…”***

That means the Lord was *determined* to go to the cross to die for your sins.

And the *reason* He was so determined to pay for your sins is that He knew that no matter how determined you are to pay for them by being good, you could never measure up to the perfect standard that God’s holiness required. Your best bet is to just do what Paul told a lost sinner to do and

**“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, *and thou shalt be saved”* (Acts 16:31).**