**Hearing Is Believing**

(Acts 13:48—14:7)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

One day a Buddhist monk saw what *looked* like the face of Jesus in his tub of margarine. Seeing it, he said: “I can’t believe it’s not *Buddha.”*

Speaking of believing things, here in Acts 13, the Apostle Paul has just finished preaching the gospel to a bunch of Gentiles,

*“***And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).**

Now to begin with, doesn’t glorifying the word of the Lord sound like something we should be doing? With that in mind, what do you say we find out how they did it, so we can do it too? Paul told the Thessalonians,

**“…pray for us, *that the word of the Lord may*…*be glorified,* even as it is with you” (II Thessalonians 3:1).**

Now there, I think it is safe to say that Paul was asking them to pray that, as he was out preaching the Word, that it would be *believed* as it was with them. That means to glorify the Word of the Lord means to *believe* the Word of the Lord! And hey, if you’re saved, you already did that when you believed the gospel. And you *continue* to do it as you continue to believe the Word as you study it.

And do you know what we *do* when we glorify the Word of the Lord? We *praise* the Word of the Lord. My dictionary says that the word “glorify” *means* to praise. That’s how it’s used in the Bible as well. For instance, in Psalm 50:23 God says,

***“Whoso offereth praise* glorifieth Me…” (Psalm 50:23).**

That means if you go to a Bible-teaching church like ours, you now know what to say when someone asks you if you have “praise services” at your church. What *they* mean by praise services is a service where they praise the Lord by singing, with no message from the Word. My former assistant pastor Paul Balbach, along with his wife Mary, used to attend a church that was talking about having services like that once a month on Sunday morning. That’s why they decided to come here where they could *really* praise the Lord *by studying and believing the Word.*

And all of that *also* tells you what to say when you get asked, “Do you *worship* at your church?” What *they* mean by worshipping God is getting all emotional and passing out on the floor. But the word “glorify” *also* means *to worship,* as it does in Psalm 86:9-12, where the psalmist prayed,

**“All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and *worship* before Thee, O LORD; and shall *glorify* Thy name…I will *praise* Thee, O LORD…with all my heart: and I will *glorify* Thy name for evermore.”**

You see, all those words, worship, glorify, praise, are all *synonyms* that mean pretty much the same thing, with some nuances of difference. And the Lord said about *worship:*

**“…in vain they do *worship* Me, *teaching for doctrines the command-ments of men”* (Matthew 15:9).**

Now in light of what the Lord said there, let’s think this through. If teaching *bad* doctrine worships God *in vain,* then teaching *good* doctrine must worship Him *in truth,* right? So when we study the Word of God, we *worship* God, we *glorify* Him, we *praise* Him. So the next time you get asked if you worship at your church, as a lady once asked me years ago, ask the one who’s asking if they’d like to go with you to your church for some *real* worship, and praise, and glorifying of the Lord!

But when verse 48 says that “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed,” that makes it sound like God ordained only *some* people to eternal life, and people who *weren’t* ordained to eternal life *couldn’t* believe. That’s actually how many pastors and Bible teachers teach this verse.

But that would make God a *monster* who decides the eternal destiny of men.But *God* doesn’t decide who’ll be saved, *men* decide if they want to believe and be saved, and keep from spending eternity in hell.

But if that’s so, what does verse 48 mean?

Well, up until the Apostle Paul was saved, the only people ordained to eternal life were *Jews.* The Savior Himself said,

**“…salvation *is of the Jews”* (John 4:22).**

Now that didn’t mean that all Jews were saved. It meant that only Jews *could* be saved. If a Gentile wanted to be saved in those days, he had to be circumcised and become a Jew, because only Jews were ordained to eternal life.

But beginning with the ministry of the Apostle Paul, Gentiles were *also* ordained to eternal life. That doesn’t mean all Gentiles were saved. It means they don’t have to become Jews to be saved any more, because Gentiles are now ordained to eternal life too!

If you’re not sure what I mean, it may help to understand that one of the dictionary definitions of the word “ordain” is to *prepare.* That’s actually the first definition in my old dictionary. And that’s how the words is used in Psalm 7:13, where we read:

**“He hath also *prepared* for Him the instruments of death; He *ordaineth* His arrows against the persecutors.”**

We see the word “ordain” mean *prepare* again in Isaiah 30:33, where God says,

**“For Tophet is *ordained* of old; *yea,* for the king it is *prepared;* He hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; *the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.”***

That word “yea” there means, “I’m about to tell you the same thing using different words.” Tophet is ordained of old, and prepared for the king of old. And *Tophet* is one of the Bible names for *hell.*

And as it says there, hell was *prepared* for the king—the king *of this world.* At least that’s what it says when Matthew 25:41 talks about “everlasting fire,” and says that it was

**“…prepared *for the devil* *and his angels…”***

After Lucifer sinned, God ordained that *he* should suffer eternal punishment, and He prepared a place called *hell* and ordained that he suffer it there. God never meant for men to join him in hell, but men joined Satan in his sin and rebellion against God, and men have been going to hell ever since.

But if men in the Lord’s day *got saved,* they could go to *another* place that God prepared. In Matthew 25:34, the Lord talked to believers about

**“…*the kingdom* prepared *for* *you* from the foundation of the world”**

That’s talking about *the kingdom of heaven on earth.* But that kingdom was *for the Jews.* It’s the place God *prepared* for the Jews who He ordained to eternal life. God talked about that place back in I Chronicles 17:9, where we read:

**“…I will *ordain* a place *for My people Israel,* and will plant them, and they shall dwell in their place, *and shall be moved no more;* neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the beginning”**

That’s talking about the kingdom as well. The only place Jews will ever be where they will never be moved away from is *the kingdom.*

Now look back at Matthew 25:34, and tell me when God *began* to prepare the kingdom for Israel. It was *from the foundation of the world,* right? That’s *also* when God began to *tell* His people about the kingdom. In Acts 3:21, Peter called the kingdom

**“…*the times of restitution of all things,* which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets *since the world began.”***

So to sum it all up, God prepared and ordained the kingdom for Israel, and spoke about it to them through their prophets since the world began. Now compare that to what Paul tells us Gentiles in I Corinthians 2:7, where he says,

**“…we speak…the…*mystery,* even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained *before* the world unto *our* glory…”**

God began to prepare the kingdom of heaven on earth for Israel “since” or *after* the world began, but *before* the world began, He ordained and prepared a place for us Gentiles that was a “mystery.” That means it was a place the prophets *didn’t* talk about. Paul says of the mystery,

**“…the mystery…*was* *kept secret* since the world began…” (Romans 16:25).**

Now if you were able to follow all that, it will go a long way toward helping you understand the meaning of a much misunderstood passage of Scripture found in Romans 9:18-24:

***“Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy*…What if God…might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore *prepared* unto glory, *Even us,* whom He hath called, *not of the Jews only,* but also of the Gentiles?”**

God having mercy on whom He will have mercy isn’t about Him choosing to have mercy on one man and not on another. It’s about Him choosing to have it *on Gentiles* as well as Jews! He’s able to do that because He’s prepared a way for Gentiles to get saved as well as Jews. He’s ordained *Gentiles* to eternal life as well as Jews.

And once the Gentiles in Acts 13:48 heard Paul tell them about that, they believed and got saved—and then went out and told *other* Gentiles about it, as we see in Verse 49:

**“And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region” (Acts 13:49).**

Now when we think of *publishing* something, we think of *printing* something. But you don’t need a printing press to publish something. My dictionary says that the word “publish” means *to make something known that was unknown.* And that’s how it’s used when the prophet Amos declared,

**“…God…*revealeth His secret unto His servants…*God hath spoken… *Publish* in…the land of Egypt, *and say…”* (Amos 3:7-9).**

Amos was saying that God revealed a secret to His Jewish servants *about the kingdom,* and they *published* it. That is, they made known that secret that was previously *unknown.*

And when Paul revealed *the mystery* that was unknown, these Gentiles published it by making it known throughout the region. They went around saying, “Hey guys, God now has a message for us Gentiles! We’re not chopped liver in his sight any more!”

But the Jews who *didn’t* believe Paul’s gospel didn’t *like it* when the mystery was published, so it says in the next verse of our text:

**“But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts” (Acts 13:50).**

Now don’t be confused by that word “devout” there. It doesn’t mean *saved,* it just means *devoted.* Devout is the noun form of the adjective *devoted.* Those women in Antioch were devoted to *some* god or other, but not to the *true* God.

So what we are seeing here in our text is unsaved Jews stirring up unsaved Gentiles to do their dirty work—just like they stirred up the Romans to do their dirty work and crucify the Lord!

But Paul and Barnabas didn’t let that bother them, as we see in Acts 13:51:

**“But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.”**

If you know your New Testament, you know that shaking a city’s dust off your feet is what the Lord told His twelve apostles to do when Jews wouldn’t listen to them. He told them,

**“…whosoever shall not receive you, *nor hear your words,* when ye depart out of that house or city, *shake off the dust of your feet”* (Matthew 10:14).**

So when *Paul* did that *here* in Acts 13, it was his way of saying, as it were, “I’ve been thrown out of better regions than this! If you don’t want God, *God doesn’t want you.”* God never forces Himself on *anyone.*

Now back up in the first verse of our text in verse 48, we saw that these Gentiles were “glad” Paul preached to them. In the last verse of Acts 13, we see that those disciples weren’t just glad,

**“And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 13:52).**

Those disciples were *filled* with joy and gladness, as I’m sure you were when you believed and were saved from your sins.

By the way, I’ve heard some grace pastor teach that the word “disciples” only refers to Jewish kingdom saints. But it sure seems to me that here it refers to members of the Body of Christ whom Paul had just led to the Lord.

I know verse 52 *also* says they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and that means they spoke in tongues, like the *Jews* did at Pentecost (Acts 2:4). So you’d think these disciples were Jewish disciples as well.

But the thing to remember about that is that, during the transition from God’s program for Israel to His program for us, He gave members of the Body of Christ miraculous gifts like tongues. But it’s also important to remember that He *stopped* giving them to us *2,000 years ago.*

Of course, some men claim to have those gifts today. But I like to say that those gifts are “often imitated, never duplicated.” So you can either go to an imitation church where they imitate those gifts, or you can go to a grace church where they rightly divide the word of truth!

Now you’d think that Paul would quit preaching after those unsaved Jews started persecuting him, but some guys just can’t take a hint! So verse 51 says that after Paul and Barnabas shook off Antioch’s dust, they came to Iconium. And as we read on into the next chapter of the Book of Acts, Luke tells us what *happened* to them in Iconium:

**“And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1).**

Now here we see Paul must have been targeting really *big* synagogues, to have “a great multitude” of people respond to his message. But when verse 1 says they *“so spake”* that a great multitude of people believed, that makes it sound like Paul was such a *polished* speaker that literally *oodles* of men believed when he spoke. And *that* makes ordinary Joes and Janes like you and me think that if we were only *eloquent* like Paul, *we too* would see oodles of people believe when we speak.

But we know that Paul *wasn’t* a polished speaker, because he himself admitted,

**“…I be *rude* in speech…” (II Corinthians 11:6).**

These days that word “rude” means *impolite.* But years ago it just meant *unpolished.*

So it wasn’t Paul’s *eloquence* that made all those people believe. It was what Paul *said* that made them believe. He preached *grace* to those people! And Gentiles believed because salvation was now available to them. And *Jews* believed because Paul *didn’t* preach what Peter preached at Pentecost.

In Acts 2, Peter *blamed* the Jews for crucifying the Lord. He said, as it were, “You did it, and now you need to *repent* of it.” But that’s *not* God’s message for Jews *today.* Today, it’s *grace!* The Apostle *Paul* didn’t tell those Jews, “You did it, and now you need to repent of it.” He said, as it were, *“God* did it. He did it *for you.* And now you need to *believe in it* and get saved!”

And that’s a message that is so simple that *you can preach it too.* You don’t need to be a polished speaker to get people to believe. But you *do* have to open your mouth and “say a few syllables,” as Moe used to say to Curly on The 3 Stooges. Curly would get conked in the head and pass out, and Moe would shake him and say, “Speak to me, kid! Say a few syllables.” Well, it doesn’t take very many syllables to tell someone, “Christ died for our sins” (I Cor. 15:3).

After that multitude in Iconium believed in Acts 14:1, you’ll never guess what happened in Verse 2:

**“But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren” (Acts 14:2).**

The unsaved Jews in Iconium did the same thing the unsaved Jews in Antioch did. They got people all riled up against Paul. So you’d think that the apostle would leave and look for greener pastures in some *other* city. But he *still* hadn’t learned how to take a hint!

**“Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Acts 14:3).**

Now I have to tell you, *that* is a pretty impressive “therefore,” wouldn’t you agree. Luke is telling us that it was *because* those unsaved Jews got those unsaved Gentiles all riled up against them that they decided to stay there and *take the heat.*

I don’t know if you know this or not, but you can measure your commitment to serving the Lord by measuring what it takes to *stop you* from serving the Lord. Paul didn’t let *anything* stop him from preaching the word of God’s grace, and we shouldn’t either! And whatever part you have in the ministry of God’s grace, I hope you’ll never let *anything* stop you!

Of course, when verse 3 says the Lord testified to what Paul preached with miraculous signs and wonders, you might be wondering why God doesn’t do that for you? I mean, why doesn’t He give *us* the strength to work miracles to back up what *we* preach?

To be honest, I believe He actually *does* give us the strength to do miracles—just a different *kind* of miracles. Look what Paul told the Colossians in Colossians 1:9-11:

**“…we…do not cease to pray for you….that ye might walk…*strengthened* with all might, *according to His glorious power,* unto…”**

Unto *what?* Unto the working of miracles? That’s how God showed His “glorious power” in the Old Testament! Exodus 15:1,4 says,

**“…the LORD…hath triumphed *gloriously…*Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea”**

God showed His glorious power in time past by parting the Red Sea, and then using those parted waters to close up and drown the enemies of His people! So you’d think that Paul would pray that we’d be strengthened unto God’s glorious power to do stuff like that!

But that is *not* what he prayed! The remainder of Colossians 1:11 tells us that Paul prayed that they’d be strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power,

**“…unto all *patience* and *longsuffering* with joyfulness.”**

Today, in the dispensation of grace, God shows His glorious power when believers like you are *patient.* We need to be *powerfully* strengthened by God’s Word to be patient enough to put up with the wickedness of the world, with all its abortions and gay marriages, etc. We just have to *suffer long* with all that, and keep in mind that God is going to put an end to all that sin and degradation *in the kingdom.* At the Lord’s Second Coming, God plans to use His glorious power in a supernatural way to put an end to all that wickedness.

You say, “How come God doesn’t show His glorious supernatural power *now* and put an end to the world’s wickedness *now?”* Well, He could. But He shows *greater,* more *glorious* power by being patient and *not* ending it now.

How’s that work? Well, let me ask you: when does a boiler show more power, when it *explodes* and takes out half a building, or when it *contains* the tremendous pressures that build up within it? You know the answer to that.

Let me ask you a Bible question. When did David show more power, when he killed Goliath, or when he *refused* to kill Saul? If you know anything about the power of our fallen Adamic natures, you know the answer to that question as well.

I know it *looks* like God showed more power when He overcame the forces of nature at the Red Sea. But even mere mortal *men* can overcome the raw power of nature. Our United States Army Corp of Engineers did it when they reversed the flow of the Chicago River over a hundred years ago, and when they built the Hoover Dam, etc. Even *men* can overcome the power of nature. It takes *far* more power to overcome the force of *human* nature, by making a man *patient,* for men by nature are *impatient.*

So don’t be sighing for the Lord to back up *your* testimony to the world with miracles like parting the Red Sea. You can show *far* more power with your patience with the world—*and* with your patience with each other, when some knothead believer crosses you! Or does that never happen to you? Well, believers need to be shown God’s power too, and how it can work in *their* lives, if *they* can learn to be patient.

You say, “But Pastor, I back up my testimony by being *incredibly* patient, and people *still* don’t believe.” Well, you know what? Some people still didn’t believe when they saw Paul’s *supernatural* miracles. Verse 4 of our text reads:

**“But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles” (Acts 13:4).**

Now the first thing I want you to notice about this verse is that the whole city of Iconium *wasn’t* divided over *politics.* Do you know why? It’s because Paul didn’t *preach* politics, *he preached the word of God’s grace.* Just imagine what would happen if *all* preachers preached grace instead of politics. Just imagine what would happen if all *grace* preachers preached grace instead of politics! People would be divided over something eternally *important* for a change.

And hey, there’s nothing wrong with dividing people. It’s what the Lord did when He was here! The apostle John tells us,

**“…there was *a division* among the people because of Him…. there was *a division* among them….There was *a division* therefore again among the Jews for these sayings” (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19).**

Truth *always* divides people. It divides them into those who believe the truth, and those who don’t. As grace believers, we get accused of dividing churches because we preach the word of God’s grace like Paul did, and sometimes men believe it and leave their church. Well, *amen!* That’s how you know you’re doing it right! If you get the same results that Paul got when he preached, you must be teaching what he taught! I guarantee that if the man who was *God in the flesh* couldn’t figure out a way to preach the truth without dividing people, you probably won’t either!

“But Pastor, grace is dividing *my family.”* Well, I don’t mean to sound harsh, but *so what?* That’s the reason God sent His Son into the world, as the Lord explains in Luke 12:51-53:

**“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather *division:* For from henceforth there shall be five in one house *divided,* three against two, and two against three. *The father shall be divided against the son,* and the son against the father; *the mother against the daughter,* and the daughter against the mother; *the mother in law against her daughter in law,* and the daughter in law against her mother in law”**

So when you share grace with your family, and it divides them, just say, “Bless God! I’m accomplishing the purpose that God sent *His Son* to accomplish.”

Now it might *break your heart* if members of your family don’t believe the gospel. But I’m sure it broke the Lord’s heart when, as it says in John 7:5,

**“…neither did *His brethren* believe in Him.”**

But the Lord didn’t let it get Him down. You can tell by what happened in Matthew 12:47-50:

**“Then one said unto Him, Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee. But He answered and said unto him that told Him, *Who is My mother? and who are My brethren?* And He stretched forth His hand toward *His disciples,* and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! *For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven,* the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.”**

I bet I share that passage at least a half dozen times a year at *Berean Bible Society* when I hear from believers who are heartbroken because of family members who don’t believe. I remind them that they have a *church* family! That’s where the Lord took *His* comfort in that situation, and it is where we must take ours as well.

Finally, Paul says in the last three verses of our text:

**“And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,**

**“They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:**

**“And there they preached the gospel” (Acts 14:5-7).**

Now here we have to ask why it has to say that Paul became aware of an assault that was made on him. I mean, wouldn’t you know it if you were being assaulted?

Maybe not. You see, there’s a difference between *assault* and assault *and battery.* In law, an *assault* is when you raise your fist and swing it to deck some dude. It only becomes *battery* when your fist *lands,* and finds the dude’s nose.

So here, these men *assaulted* Paul by *planning* an attack on him. But he became aware of it, and later wrote of about this time in his life when he talked to Timothy about all of the

**“Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, *at Iconium,* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: *but out of them all the Lord delivered me”* (II Timothy 3:11).**

But verse 6 of our text doesn’t say *how* he became aware of it. It might have been by his power as a prophet. Prophets could miraculously know stuff like that, like when Peter knew what Ananias and Saphira were doing behind closed doors in Acts 5. Or Paul might have been aware of it by God using the Body of Christ as His informants. All I know for sure is: now that there are no more prophets, that’s the *only* way we can be made aware of plots against us, and other dangers that can beset us.

And that’s just another example of how God now uses *us* to do things that He *used* to do with supernaturally miraculous means. And knowing that will keep you from being disappointed when God doesn’t do miracles, and act like you *think* he should act.

And it will *also* get you to get off your duff and let God use *you* to serve Him. If you will, you’ll find that He’ll use you in ways more powerful than miracles ever could.