



Sunday, August 31, 2014

ZWTF

Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

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ROMANS Part 32

Chapter 4:1-3

Romans 4:1-3

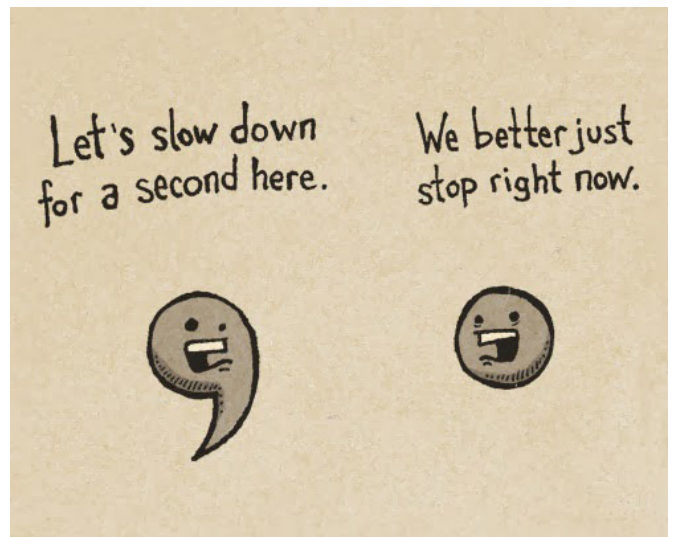
“What, then, shall we declare that Abraham, our forefather, according to flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by acts, he has something to boast in, but not toward God. For what is the Scripture saying? Now Abraham believes God, and it is reckoned to him for righteousness.”

Thank God I'm finally at chapter 4 of Romans, and can talk about Abraham. Abraham is a fairly simple piece of work. Anything is simple, in my mind, compared to some of the things we've been discussing in chapters 1-3 of this highly-technical book. Did I at any time ever call Romans an easy book? If I did, I'm sorry. I meant to say that the concepts are easy; it's the writing of Paul that makes everything feel like driving donkeys through a maze of wet clay. The passage above, consisting of short sentences, is welcome refreshment from Paul's usual fare; I'm sure it was an oversight. Ordinarily, Paul is the king of run-on sentences.

SENTENCE GOT LEGS

Allow me this indulgence and then we'll get down to business. I've got to get this off my chest. If one of Paul's typical sentences entered a marathon, it would not only complete the race without losing breath or composure, but would accidentally run ten miles further than the prescribed 26.2 mile distance. A wondrous piece of punctuation known as a period would run up to the sentence after 36 miles, tap it on the shoulder and say, “Um, excuse me, sir, but the race ended ten miles ago.” Paul's sentence

would then proceed to make an excuse for missing the finish line, but the excuse itself would go on for another twenty miles, at which point the period would collapse from exhaustion, but not before passing the baton to a semi-colon. The semi-colon, in far better shape than the period, would take over at the 56 mile mark of Paul's wondrous wordfest, pursuing it with much pleading, saying, “You rejected the period, for whatever reason. It is not my business. But my God, man. Have a heart. No one knows what you are talking about any more. Here I am, a semi-colon, to grant you and your readers relief. Please, sir, consider me. I am offering you a pause, for this is what I indicate: I



am typically a pause between two main clauses—enjoy my poetry, if you can—and I can do this tragic sentence of yours much good by at least allowing it to stop and tie its shoes. I am much more pronounced than the pause indicated by a comma, I hope you know, and it is my solemn prayer that you will now avail yourself of my services, if not for my sake, than for the sake of your poor readers who—if you have not noticed, friend—departed your company when the sun set and this unending diatribe refused to.”

Paul's sentence would reject even the semi-colon, naturally, so the baton would be passed to the comma, which would finally, 100 miles into the trauma, force Paul's construction to sit down for briefest pause before resuming its course into infinity.

THE HOLY TRINITY

The gospel of the kingdom, otherwise known as the gospel of the Uncircumcision, touts David as its poster boy. Why shouldn't it? God made an unconditional covenant with David, promising that his lineage would produce the Messiah. God would then establish this coming One's throne—that is, His kingdom—for the eon. ("For the eon" refers to the Millennium.) Whenever the kingdom of the heavens is mentioned, therefore (especially in the book of Matthew), King David will be strumming his harp somewhere in the vicinity.

The evangel of God, on the other hand, looks to Abraham. The "evangel of God" is the truth of "justification by faith," that is, being considered righteous by God simply for believing what God says about you. Your next

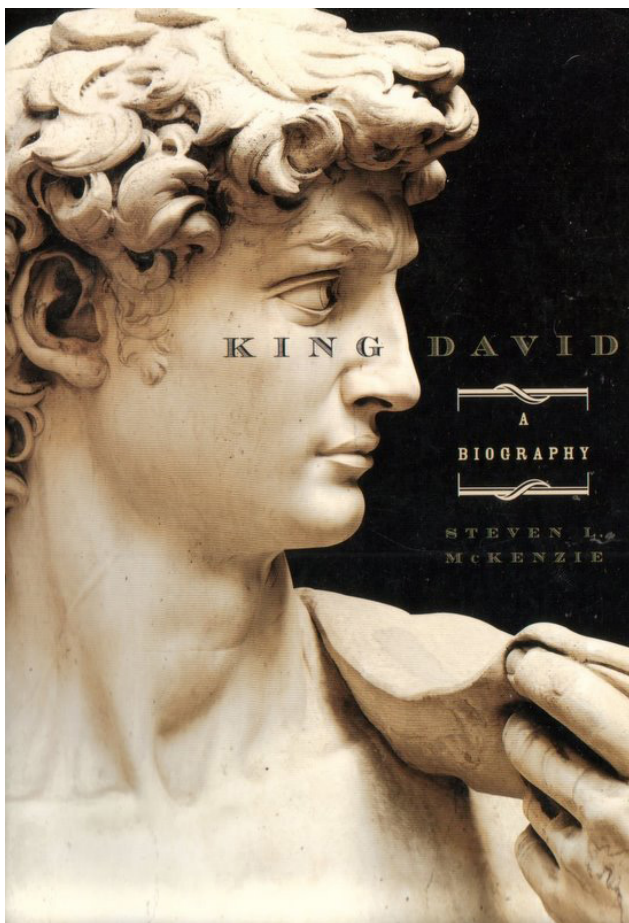
question would naturally be: *Then what is Adam known for? What does he represent?* I wish you hadn't asked this question; it sidetracks me and has nothing to do with what I'm talking about; but I will answer it anyway. Adam is the "go-to guy" for the truths of conciliation—that God is now at peace with the entire human race due to the crosswork of His Son Jesus Christ—and the salvation of all. Between David, Abraham and Adam, God has everything covered: 1) the Israelite kingdom, 2) unconditional righteousness, and 3) the salvation of all. Even though Adam and David were Men of the Year in their eras, let's forget about them for now and focus on Abraham, because from here until the end of chapter four of Romans, Paul can't stop talking about him.

ALLEGORY FATIGUE

Abraham was probably very tired at the end of every day, and never knew why. He thought it was the heat. He thought it was the incessant buzzing of desert flies. He thought maybe it was all the unleavened bread Sarah made him eat. Turns out, it was from serving as a dual allegory for what would eventually be known as the Gospel of the Circumcision and the Gospel of the Uncircumcision. Both of these evangels draw upon Abraham as an example, but at far different times in his life. Paul uses him as an example of faith, before Circumcision (Romans, chapter 4), and James uses him as an example of service, after his manhood has been unnaturally shortened (James 2:20-24).

“Abraham serves as a dual allegory for two evangels; no wonder the man was so tired.”

Abraham inspires Paul's pen in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, when Abraham's spiritual seed takes center stage beneath the stars of heaven, and when not a single rite has been performed. James jumps ahead to chapter 22 before finding anything useful in the patriarch's life, at which time (post-circumcision) God tries Abraham by requesting the life of the promised son, Isaac. Both of these are great events in the life of Abraham. In the former event, God makes an unconditional promise to the man, concerning which the man simply believes, seeing as how God had already declared it to be so. In the lat-



ter event, Abraham's faith is perfected and, as God would eventually demand of all Israelites, he proves his faith by works. Since works is a slap to the face of pure grace, Paul ignores the Isaac incident and focuses on the man when he's simply standing beneath the stars, dumbstruck, listening to what God had already decided to do for him.

IS ABRAHAM A MEMBER OF THE BODY OF CHRIST, OR PART OF THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM?

This is another question I wish you hadn't asked. Nevertheless, since I am Martin Zender, I will answer it. Abraham cannot be a member of the body of Christ. Why? There can be no members of this hallowed body until Paul announces the evangel concerning it, on the heels of God blasting *him* with it on the road to Damascus. A person cannot believe a thing of which he or she has no knowledge.

The claim could be forwarded that, since the gospel of the Circumcision is for Israel, then neither is Abraham a part of *this* blessed organization, seeing as how he was never an Israelite; Israel did not take the eonian stage until God re-named Abraham's grandson (Jacob), "Israel." Can a man come out of his own grandson? But wait. This man is known the *father* of Circumcision (Romans 4:12), and therefore of the evangel bearing his name. That's right. So there's the key. Because he's the father of the Circumcision, and because the promise of a great nation started with him, Abraham belongs in the millennial kingdom.

One sentence from the lips of Jesus seals Abraham's blessed fate: Matthew 8:11-12—

Now I am saying to you that many from the east and the west shall be arriving and reclining with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens, yet the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness. There shall be lamentation and gnashing of teeth.

So why does Paul call upon Abraham? Isn't it more confusing than constructive to use such a famous "kingdom guy" to forward a teaching that is in no way related to that kingdom? It would be, until you realize the disadvantage faced by Paul. The man was given truths by the resurrected Christ for which there was little or no Scripture. In His mercy, God granted Paul a precedent of justification by faith, drawn from the life of none other than he who posed for the most valuable trading card in Israel's

history: Abraham. When Paul says in verse one of this chapter: "What, then, shall we declare that Abraham, our forefather, according to flesh, has found?" any Jewish person hearing or reading of it would snap to immediate attention: *What? Did this man just reference Abraham? I thought this Paul was a radical overthrowing every trace of our heritage and decimating our best trading cards.* But no. There is a precedent for Paul's teaching, and it is none other than Abraham—before the rite of circumcision. (Paul puts Adam to similar use in chapter five when teaching on eventual race-wide justification; the *truth* of race-wide justification may never have been elucidated, but God planted the seed in concept by making one man a representative head of the race.) This is why I say Abraham was so tired. In one chapter of his life he represents faith, and in another chapter, works. The Muslims even find a way to claim this son of Tereh, calling upon him as prophet, apostle and patriarch. I'm telling you, the guy never needed a sleeping pill in his life.

"What, then, shall we declare that Abraham, our forefather, according to flesh, has found?"

—Romans 4:1

What has Abraham, according to flesh, found? Nothing! Why? Because "no flesh at all shall be boasting in God's sight" (1 Corinthians 1:29). When God promised Abraham to make a great nation and eventual world benefactor of his seed, Abraham simply stared at the stars and mumbled his acquiescence to a fact. Even when God passed between the divided animal sacrifices later in chapter 15 to seal the covenant, God put Abraham to sleep. If Adam is any example of this (God's greatest creation, Eve, emerges from him during a deep slumber), God does His best work with His servants are unconscious and drooling. This way, the servants can't blow it. It's only when the servants wake up and change out of their jammies that bad stuff begins happening.

"For if Abraham was justified by acts, he has something to boast in, but not toward God."

—Romans 4:2.

The Circumcision gospel, of which Abraham would later become the father, is a gospel of acts. Read James. James uses Abraham in James 2:20-22 to forward his famous "faith without works is dead" principle:

**C'MON, ZENDER!
I LIKE JAMES' ALLEGORY
BETTER!**



Now are you wanting to know, O empty human, that faith apart from works is dead? Abraham, our father, was he not justified by works when offering up his son Isaac on the altar? You are observing that faith worked together with his works, and by works was faith perfected.

Will Abraham be upset when he rises from the dead to discover that James has used him in this fashion? I don't think so. After all, he will be in the kingdom made famous by Jesus-inspired,

“My disclosure will disturb Abraham’s bright demeanor for only a moment, after which he will shrug.”

James-documented works. The big surprise for Abraham will be discovering that some guy named Paul used him as an example of how not to do anything. It will muddle him a little initially, but then someone (probably me, if I can get to him first) will remind him of the Hagar

incident, and of him sleeping through the big covenant, and of his penis being worthless, and then the old patriarch will smile and say, “Ha. No wonder I’m the king of justification by faith alone.”

If I’m the one who first informs him of this (I guarantee you I’ll push for the job), I will probably then ask Abraham if he’s mad at James for using him for opposite ends. James, of course, will be standing there next to us, and will cast me a dirty look. Since I will be a celestial being and James merely a resurrected kingdom saint, the former leader of the Jerusalem ecclesia will hold

his peace. “*This* guy,” I will say to Abraham, gesturing to James, “ignored all your glorious uselessness and found the once decent work you did your entire life and built the whole of Judaism around it.” My disclosure will disturb Abraham’s bright demeanor for only a moment, after which he will shrug and say, “Well, faith without works is dead!” James will smile, Abraham will happily run off to sacrifice a goat, and I will return to my celestial kingdom to regale the citizenry there of my earthly antics. They will be many laughs around the campfires of Alpha Centauri.

A gospel of acts is not a gospel of grace, for acts defy grace, just as grace defies acts. As we discussed earlier, acts cannot help but produce boasting; one person acted, while another failed to do so. Where is boasting in an evangel of pure grace? “It is debarred” (Romans 3:20). It is debarred, because no one acts. Rather, in such a gospel, faith is graciously granted by God (Philippians 1:29). How is boasting even possible in the face of such a gift? It isn’t. “Now what have you which you did not obtain? Now if you obtained it also, why are you boasting as though not obtaining?” (1 Corinthians 4:7).

“For what is the Scripture saying? Now Abraham believes God, and it is reckoned to him for righteousness.” —Romans 4:3

Here is the heart of the evangel of God: People are made righteous simply by believing what God says of them. Is belief then a work? It would be, were it not a gracious gift of God (Philippians 1:29; Ephesians 2:8-9). Since it is a gracious gift of God, it cannot be construed as a work. Paul never presents it as such. In fact, in Romans 11:6, he presents such grace as given Abraham in uncircumcision as the antithesis of work:

Now if it is in grace, it is no longer out of works, else the grace is coming to be no longer grace. Now, if it is out of works, it is no longer grace, else the work is no longer work.

Boy do I ever love it when Paul throws in a handful of commas and some well-placed periods and makes as much sense as this. —MZ

