

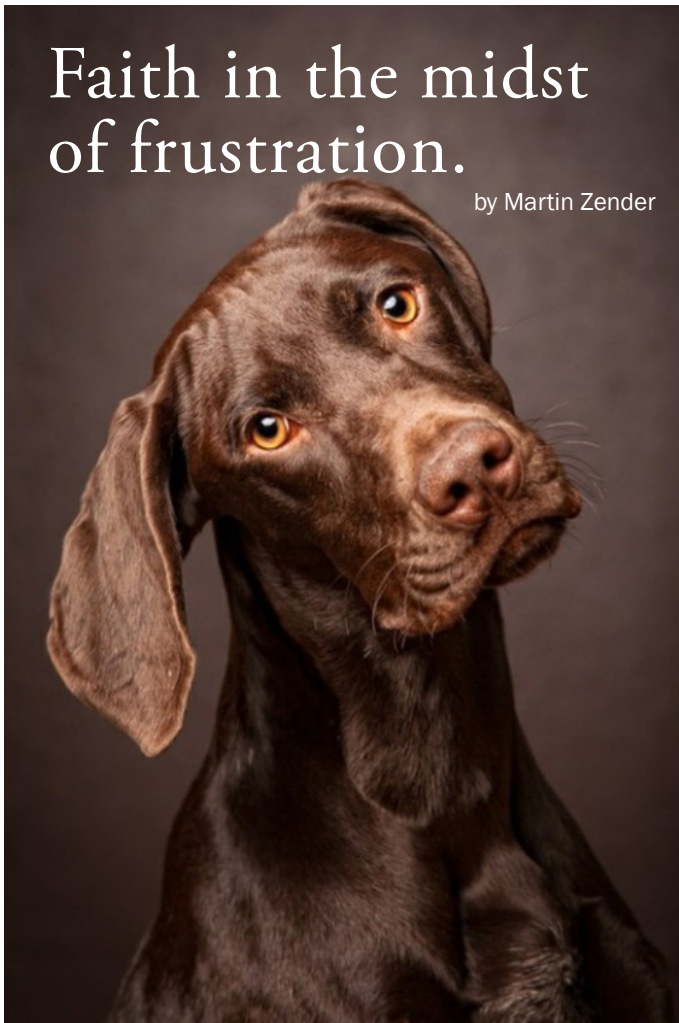


ROMANS Part 95

Chapter 10:16-18

Faith in the midst of frustration.

by Martin Zender



But not all obey the evangel, for Isaiah is saying, “Lord, who believes our tidings?” 17 Consequently, faith is out of tidings, yet the tidings through a declaration of Christ. 18 But, I am saying, Do they not hear

at all? To be sure! “Into the entire earth came out their utterance, And into the ends of the inhabited earth their declarations.”

God’s system of disseminating truth is nifty. The Word is heralded by human mouths commissioned by God and then heard by human ears. The mouths and the ears all work fine. The ears have all the requisite parts for discerning sound: cochlea, semicircular canals, auditory nerves, and the one-and-only eustachian tube. There’s only one problem, of course: *nobody believes the message*. The ears hear but the mind does not grasp. Your dog really does hear you reading Shakespeare (he’s got a cochlea just as you do) and he cocks his head at all the right inflections, but try giving him a pop quiz afterwards. “Who was the ghost in Hamlet?” “Woof?” “No, idiot! Claudius!” It may be a bit of an exaggeration to say that nobody believes the message of the truth of God, but not by much.

Relative to the number of people on the planet (currently 7.4 billion), few people “obey” the evangel—any evangel. The word “obey” here doesn’t mean following rules by rote, but simply hearing and heeding. The Greek word translated “obey” is *hupakouo*, and its English elements are UNDER-HEAR. The thought is to hear and to understand. This is what your dog *doesn’t* do with Shakespeare, and it’s what your religious neighbor *can’t* do with the grace of God apart from divine enlightenment. The God Who has locked up all together in stubbornness (Romans 11:32a) will eventually have mercy upon the same all (Romans 11:32b), but it doesn’t look like that’s going to happen before, say, Christmas. I’m not putting any money on New Year’s, either.

POOR ISAIAH

Isaiah was a frustrated guy. Anyone sent by God to proclaim truth in a world hell-bent on tradition will



Isaiah was fairly frustrated.

throw fits similar to that of the son of Amoz. “Lord, who believes our tidings?” said Isaiah. Isaiah’s lament centered around the fact that Israel lusted after everything that appealed to the flesh. If it wasn’t mainstream (or cool), then Israel wouldn’t have it. Here’s the context of Isaiah’s complaint—

Who believes our report? And the arm of Yahweh, onto whom is it revealed? He is growing up like a young shoot before Him, and like a root sprout out from arid earth; He has not shapeliness nor honor that we should observe Him, and not such appearance that we should covet Him. He is despised and shunned of men, a Man of pains and knowing illness, and, as a concealing of faces from Him, He is despised, and we judge Him of no account. Surely He Himself bears our illnesses, and our pains, He is burdened with them; As for us, we account Him assaulted, smitten of Elohim and humbled. Yet He is wounded because of our transgressions, And crushed because of our depravities. The discipline of our well-being is on Him, and with His welts comes healing for us.

Isaiah prophesied concerning Christ here, but inspiring this was some immediate rebelliousness that Isaiah knew would carry forward through the centuries and

doom this people to rejecting their own Messiah. Not only did Isaiah suffer contemporary Israelite stubbornness, but he extrapolated it (not without whiskey, I hope) and saw this same rebelliousness yielding an even more disastrous result in the future.

PAUL STAYS TRUE

“Consequently,” Paul says, “faith is out of tidings, yet the tidings through a declaration of Christ.” I admit to not grasping Paul’s use of “consequently” here at first. The word “consequently” ties the preceding statement to that which follows it. The preceding statement is, “Nobody believes what we’re telling them!” This is followed by Paul’s statement, “Consequently, faith is out of tidings.” I didn’t see the connection. Then I realized that it’s a deliberate disconnect. Even in the face of a failure of faith, Paul remains immovable on the principles of what counts for faith.

The apostle has just emphasized earlier that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by a declaration of Christ. Heralds declare Christ (they do their jobs), but no one is understanding. In other words, the heralds are doing *their* jobs, but the recipients of the message are not doing *theirs*. Those failing in the listening and heeding department (“obeying the evangel”) consequently have no faith and thus no eonian life. This is what Paul seamlessly accepts here. The fact that no one gets the message cannot and will not change the fact that faith is out of tidings, and tidings out of a declaration of Christ. It does not change the fact that those with ears must not only hear, but hear and heed. They must believe. But they don’t.

“No one hears and heeds,” says Isaiah. “Consequently,” Paul might have said, “we’re changing the plan; we’re changing the rules. We will no longer require tidings and understanding for faith. Obviously, the current method is not working.” But no. Paul says, “Consequently, faith is out of tidings.” It’s classic Pauline stubbornness on display—

PAUL: Faith is out of tidings.

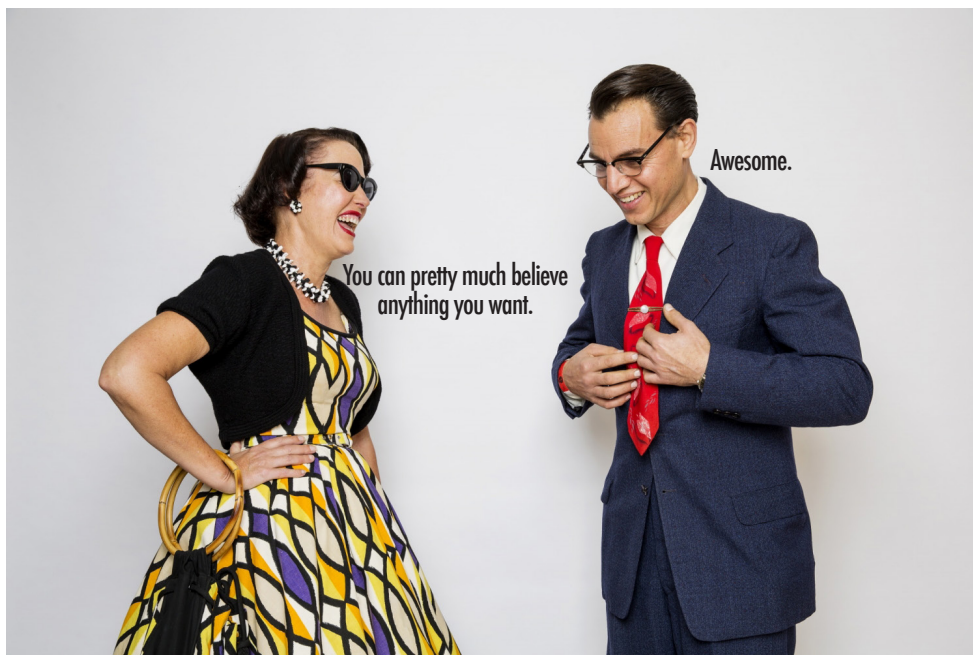
ISAIAH: But no one believes our tidings.

PAUL: Consequently, faith is out of tidings.

What a hard-nosed son of a gun. To Paul, nothing has changed. He’s not backing down from what constitutes saving faith, no, not even in the face of mass failure. Talk about flying by one’s instruments and ignoring the ground. Our instrument is the Word of God; the ground is the massive wall of unbelief facing us every day. Truth is truth, however. Results are not to be taken into consideration.

No matter if not a single person believes the tidings, we're not changing our minds that faith is out of tidings yet the tidings through a declaration of Christ. Faith is out of tidings, hearing, and heeding. One must admire Paul's consistency here, a consistency that is lacking in today's announcement of the evangel.

Some contemporary evangelists—even true evangelists—become so frustrated by the lack of result that they take to lowering the standards of the message. They say



things like, “You don’t really have to believe any evangel precisely as it’s presented.” Their motto is, “Anything to get people in the door.” So they fudge the evangel. They water it down. The necessity of a faithful herald become less and less important as the gospel becomes more gray and indistinct. This is the point where these men can no longer be called true evangelists. That point arrives when the message is so watered down that it loses its distinctions. Paul would never do this. God has His way of doing things, and His way of doing things is: Herald, hearing, believing. Our faith says that God will one day be successful. Practical experience says that this is not that day. Spiritual maturity maintains one’s integrity in the face of obvious “failure.” God measures faithful service not by any ensuing success, but by the quality of the service.

There is no better example of faithful service and acceptance of “failure” than Jesus Christ’s words in Matthew 11:25-26—

At that season, answering, Jesus said, “I am acclaiming Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for Thou hidest

these things from the wise and intelligent and Thou dost reveal them to minors. Yea, Father, seeing that thus it became a delight in front of Thee.

A.E. Knoch’s commentary here is priceless—

Though His ministry seems to be a failure, the Lord recognizes the fact that this is in accord with God’s unrevealed purpose. He acquiesces in God’s evident delight in hiding the truth from those who were wise and intelligent in the things of this life. He does not fret because He cannot reach them, because God’s work is apparently without the anticipated results, for He has the consciousness that, in the final analysis, it is God Himself Who is operating all for His own purpose and glory. It is not that those who rejected Him were blinded by some act of their own for which God disclaims responsibility. They do not see because God positively hides it from them.

MUTE UTTERANCE

But, I am saying, Do they not hear at all? To be sure! “Into the entire earth came out their utterance, And into the ends of the inhabited earth their declarations” (Romans 10:18).

I would like to see the “at all” of the above verse italicized, like this: “Do they not hear *at all*?” That’s the idea of it. It’s like a plea from Paul: “Come on. There’s got to be *some* sort of belief going on with people. Human beings can’t be *that* dumb. Are people *completely* not hearing? Someone rescue me from despair.” This is Paul rescuing himself from despair. I do believe that the thought of “hearing and heeding” is meant here, and not just the receipt of sound waves by the ears. Lots of people heard the gospel message but did not believe it, and this was the lament of both Isaiah and Paul in their respective gospels. Paul comforts himself by entertaining a broader testimony of God’s wisdom and power other than the specific evangels of the Circumcision and Uncircumcision—a testimony that is more readily grasped and heeded, though the heeding be tacit and not necessar-

ily voiced. This broader testimony is the testimony of creation. Paul references Psalm 19:1-6—

The heavens are recounting the glory of El, And the atmosphere is telling the work of His hands. Day after day is uttering a saying, And night after night is disclosing knowledge. There is no audible saying, and there are no words; Their voice is unheard. Yet into the entire earth their voice goes forth, and into the ends of the habitance their declarations. For the sun, He has placed a tent in them, So it is like a bridegroom going forth from his canopy; it is elated like a master, to run its path. From the end of the heavens is its going forth, And its circling around goes on to their ends, *so that there is nothing being concealed from its sunshine.*

Keep in mind that chapters nine, ten and eleven of Romans are chiefly about Israel. Paul is about to turn his attention full-bore upon that people, not only in the last three verses of this chapter, but for the entirety of chapter 11. In the meantime, he comforts himself with the testimony of nature—the wonder of the stars, and

“Paul comforts himself that not even those who disbelieve heralds can deny the universal beneficence of the sun.”

especially the sun. He comforts himself that not even those who disbelieve human heralds of detailed truth can practically deny the universal beneficence of the sun. Little does the disbelieving world realize that the sun is a type of Christ. It is a type of life. The sun goes away each day, but then returns, proclaiming every twenty-four hours that good conquers evil. It circles, always coming back. What is concealed from the sunshine? Baring clouds, nothing. The sun shines on everything. This is the testimony and the truth subconsciously accepted by the most stubborn hearts and spirits.

TESTIMONY OF THE SUN

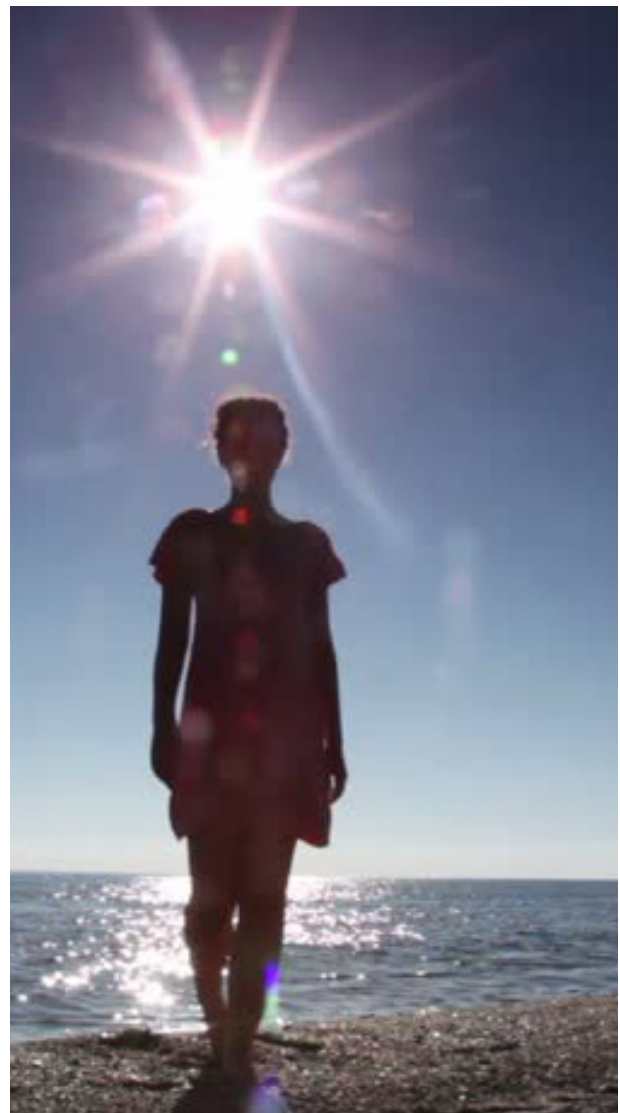
Like the rain that falls on the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:25), the sun shines on good and evil

people irrespective of their deeds. Nothing is so universal. The sun occupies the same category as air. Every human bathes in it and lives because of it. Even at the Earth's



poles, the sun shines. In Africa, in Asia, in the East and in the West, nothing escapes the source of all life.

Before there was a written testimony, the sun spoke silently of the lavish love of God. It continues today,



even after the completion of God's Word. This ought to tell humanity something larger, and it does. "Do they not hear at all?" Paul says. "To be sure!" Every citizen of Earth deep down knows. The gift of light and life is so appreciated that many cultures worship the sun. These cultures flirt so near the truth. Paul does not exactly congratulate people for worshiping the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25), but such earnest worshipers are one revelation removed from the truth; one step away from salvation. Thus, the sun portrays for Earth-dwellers the invisible love of God. Besides Christ, the sun is His outshining. God is light (1 John 1:5), and so the sun easily pictures Him. God is the source of all life. Apart from Him, all dies.

Israel surely ought to grasp this. Paul is convinced that she does. Like the sun, God's bounty cannot and will not remain contained within their nation only—within Israel. He purposely limited Himself to that nation for years, but the sun predates Israel. As Paul says concerning faith versus law in Galatians 3:15-18—

A human covenant likewise having been ratified, no one is repudiating or modifying it. Now to Abraham the promises were declared, and to his Seed. He is not saying "And to seeds," as of many, but as of One: And to "your Seed," which is Christ. *Now this am I saying: a covenant, having been ratified before by God, the law, having come four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not invalidate, so as to nullify the promise.* For if the enjoyment of the allotment is of law, it is no longer of promise. Yet God has graciously granted it to Abraham through the promise.

Before a man named Moses ever climbed Mt. Sinai, God cleverly promised Abraham something by faith. This was so that, years after the establishment of law, a man named Paul could counter the "law-is-everything" people with the fact that faith actually pre-dated the coming of the precept. Everyone had forgotten it. Law was so in-your-face-insistent that few took the leisure to recall days without it. Only a spiritual genius like Paul (aided by leisure in the Arabian desert) appreciated God's purpose in antedating law with a show of grace via faith to Abraham. Now Paul could point to a time in Israel's past and say, "I'm not so crazy after all. Maybe grace via faith is God's default setting."

Exactly right, Paul. Grace via faith *is* God's preferred method of dealing with humanity. God added law to demonstrate humanity's inability to please Him—a necessary lesson. With the lesson learned, God reverts to the faith default, only with an added twist. Failure in the face of cold commands adds



“Israel ought to have gazed up at the great light and wondered at the graciousness of God.”

luster to a calling completely devoid of imperatives. God's loving attitude toward humanity shines front and center.

WARM PROVISION

It's the same with the sun. Long before He called out Abraham, God made the sun to bless all of humanity. Israel ought to have gazed up at the great light and wondered at the graciousness of God. Israel ought to have wondered at the contradiction between the universally benevolent sun and their own narrow shade of favor. It ought to have informed them that their temporary advantages were just that: temporary. The truth of God's care and concern for all of humanity predates not only them, but Adam.

In the meantime, this revelation is ours. We are tuned into the Creator of the sun, and into the Mind that antedated all human dealings with a stupendous display of universal light. In a way, we *also* predate Adam, being chosen in Christ before the disruption of the world (Ephesians 1:4). We shall also be in Christ long after God has extinguished the natural source of Earth's light.

And people wonder why I never use sunblock. —MZ