

PAUL TO THE ROMANS

A Martin Zender paraphrase

PART V



Tryphena, at the Coliseum.

My dear Romans: At least part of the evangel I bring to you was promised before God's prophets in the Holy Scriptures. It was known from long ago that God would bless the nations through Israel. (The new twist today, of course, is that it is apart from Israel.) When God told my forefather, Abraham, that he would be the father of many nations, Abraham believed Him, and God reckoned this faith as righteousness.

Abraham believed God. This sounds simple, and it is. Yet it is the very simplicity of it that causes much of humankind to be unable to do it. *Surely, such an elaborate God requires elaborate faith,* they think. How untrue that is. And, so they stumble.

God takes such pleasure in being believed. O, beloved—you have no idea! But I shall give you an idea.

The childlike faith of Abraham

Many years ago, a man was outdoors, looking up at the stars. God then appeared—in the form of a human—to tell this man that his descendents would be as numerous as those stars, and that through his seed, all the inhabitants of the earth would be blessed. An astonishing thing happened then that Abraham's descendents still talk about these many hundreds of years later. Abraham said: "All right, then."

I would like to believe that that is what Abraham said. Of course, I do not know for sure; this is my own fantasy. It is a

Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

"If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong" --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

little dream in my head that Abraham simply acquiesced to God's ability with little more than an affirmative noise from his throat.

The most precious faith, beloved, bubbles forth like water from a spring, apart from any elaborate daring-do whatsoever from the cesspool of human reasoning. Do not be shocked at what I say. Human reasoning is cesspool, when the stench rises that says, "How can God do this?"

God "calls forth" love and grace

It pleases God when His people say, "Yes, of course we believe You. You are God. Why should we doubt that You do what You say? You called upon the sun to appear—and it did. You called each of the stars by name, bidding them come forth—and they came forth. Now You say that You have declared me righteous, and that You love me in spite of my flaws. In other words, God, You *call forth righteousness* for me—and it comes! You *call forth Your love for me*—and it comes forth!"



Abraham kisses Isaac.

Listen to this, you Romans: It is He Who said, "Let there be light," and it became light. This same One said, "Let there be love and grace for Saul of Tarsus!" And behold!—there came to be love and grace for Saul of Tarsus. "Let there be a throne of favor at My right hand for Saul of Tar-



sus"—He said, and there *is* a throne of favor at His right hand for me. *For me!*

For the same God Who says, "Out of darkness light shall be shining," is He Who shines *in our hearts*, with a view to the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.¹

"Shall not our hearts, also then, yield to His declaration?"

In other words, beloved, our hearts are as dark as that primordial emptiness from which He called forth light. How can we then doubt that He can call forth light to dispel our dark hearts? He has already done it with a far harder thing, namely, the expanse of the universe. But He speaks, and the universe yields. Shall not our hearts, also then, yield to His declaration? It is not that *we* are yielding, but that the light responds to His Word. He speaks, and it comes to pass. He has called forth light and righteousness for *you*. And peace. And pleasure in Him. Shall it not come to be? Is your heart more stubborn than the darkness that permeated the void before creation?

God loves the seemingly impossible

As for *what* God speaks into being, it satisfies Him even more when His promises appear to every human eye to be impossible. I assure you that they are far from impossible. It is only that He

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:6

makes them look that way. He makes them look impossible, so that, when you say, “All right, then” to the seemingly impossible thing, God is ultra-pleased. It is this kind of faith, radiating upward to Him from us lowly creatures, that stuns the celestial world itself to silence.

The most amazing miracle

Peter told me of the time that the Lord called him out to walk on the Sea of Galilee. I have witnessed, and even been the channel of, remarkable miracles, including the resurrection of the dead. Having said this, I still consider what happened to my friend Peter to be the most astounding thing I ever heard of, nearly commensurate—in my mind—with calling forth light from darkness. Perhaps it is just me. I share this with you—as Peter related it to me—to give you an example of the kind of faith that so pleases God. Such faith as this is a cornerstone of my evangel.

From fear to faith

The disciples had been fishing all night when there came a storm upon the Sea of Galilee. The Lord knew the trouble they were in, and so He walked out to them—walking on the sea—in the darkness before dawn. They heard a strange sound like, “a snapping of the water and a snapping of garments,” is how Andrew described it, and then they looked toward the sound—and there He was! But they did not know it was Him.

When they saw the figure on the water, they were greatly alarmed, thinking it was a phantom. In fact, Peter told me that he peed himself so hard that he could not stop it; he said that the entire contents of his bladder came forth, apart from any volition on his part, and then—being Peter—he went into further detail, telling me that no degree of willpower could stop it, and that the last time he had beheld any such phenomenon, there had

been a donkey involved.

To spare the disciples from further bodily embarrassments, the Lord called to them above the roar of the wind and said that it was He. Everyone instantly believed it—except Peter. If you knew Peter as I know Peter, this would not surprise you. God had determined before the eons that, of all the disciples on the boat that night, it would be Peter who would step out in faith.

Andrew describes Peter

Andrew has written a book about his blood brother and co-worker in the gospel of the Circumcision. I share this some-

Peter was the only one crazy enough to step out of the boat that night. Peter is not “all there,” and if you continue reading, you will see evidence enough of it. He is not a good fisherman. Everyone knows this but him. He is much too noisy, and scares the fish. Whenever we go out, we try to do so without Peter. We catch much more fish whenever he is not on the boat. In fact, many times when he is on the boat, we do not catch anything at all—not one fish. He talks incessantly, and so loudly. On the water, he is clumsy and without tact.

As a fisherman myself, I will tell you that one must *cajole* the fish out of the water; it is a form of art. Every single nuance of this, however, escapes my brother. As an example, Peter regularly yells at the fish. One time, he said, “Fishies! I will count to seventeen, and then you will come out!” And then, of course, he *threw* the net out instead of *placing* it, as any normal person would do. Anything we might have caught hightailed it to another crew on another boat, who made a fortune in the markets the next day, giving Peter the opportunity to curse them.

And yet the man thinks he is God’s gift to the fishing industry. He boasts all the time that he is, “A Fisher of Fishers,” and that fishermen and “people in general” will remember his name for the eons wherever fish are gutted, sold, or eaten. It was Peter who thought up the now-popular saying: *Behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law*. He dreamed that one up because

“And yet the man thinks he is God’s gift to the fishing industry.”

not only does he think that he is a successful fisherman—I cannot begin to explain to you how wrong he is—but the man actually believes that his mother-in-law respects him, when in fact she does not even like him.

And so, it was *this* man who did not even believe it was the Lord walking on the water that night,



what lengthy passage from, *Living With the Rock: My Days With Cephas*, to show you from which kinds of people, generally-speaking, come forth the faith most precious to God:

when Who else *but* the Lord could be doing that—and Who else, by the way, would know our names? Instead, Peter said:

“If it is You, Lord, order me to come out to You on the water!”

“I would like to report that Peter was drunk when he said that—but no. Sadly, he was sober. This is what I have been trying to tell you. Peter acts first, then thinks. And sometimes he never even gets to the thinking part. Anyone who does this today—acting without thinking, that is—owes a royalty to Peter, because Peter is the father of it, just as Abraham is the father of us all.²

Peter tells Paul of his “water walk”

Peter said to me,

“I *did* believe it was Him. Who else could it have been? Andrew will tell you ‘no, Peter did not actually know,’ but you can’t believe everything in that book of his; I will tell you that. I did believe it—all along. It was the Holy Spirit who made me say, ‘Order me to come out to You on the water!’ I don’t think that even *I* am crazy enough to say such a thing. But now here is the thing that will shock you, Paul: It was a bluff. I was bluffing Him! I did not think that He would say what he said. You know well what He said. He said one word, didn’t He? Yes, He said, ‘Come!’

“Imagine that! I had heard him say a lot of what I would call crazy things, but this was the craziest ever. He was calling my bluff, wasn’t He? I looked at Thomas and Andrew, and they looked at me like, ‘You’re not actually going to *do* this?’ I think it was Andrew’s unbelieving look that made me say, ‘Hell, yes!’—I screamed it, more like it—and I stepped out of the boat like I was stepping off a donkey on a desert road. I was just calling His bluff—you know? I felt crazy; mad; reckless; it was a head-rush of faith; I did



not give a damn for the consequences.”

I asked him, for my curiosity’s sake, what it felt like.

“It was like walking on a boardwalk that was just a finger’s-depth beneath the waves. What I remember most is not what my feet felt like, but the feeling in my head. My mind was so light. It was like my head was hollow and the wind was blowing through it. All the while, though, there was this little voice deep inside, saying that what I was doing was impossible. But the thrill of what was happening drowned out the voice. All I wanted was to get to the Lord. Everyone knows what happened next. There was a crack of lightning, and suddenly that little voice got louder than the thunder—and that was the end of it.”

This kind of faith

What a wonderful picture of the faith of Abraham, and the faith of all who believe, in this era, in the grace of God.

Let this kind of faith be in you, beloved!

When Peter saw the Lord only, he walked the miracle of faith. When he observed the lightning, his human reasoning overtook him, reminding him of this eon’s terrors. These terrors, apart from faith, will incessantly vex us, competing against the declarations of God. Let faith dispel doubt!

The lesson, beloved, is to *not* pay attention to what can be seen, but to pay attention to what cannot be seen. For what is being observed (the world and its terrors) is temporary, but what is not being observed (the steadfast love and security of God, in Christ Jesus) is eonian.³

It should be so easy to believe God

Nothing is too hard for God. When He says that you are now righteous and blameless

in His sight—believe Him! Do not look at yourself. Do not look *to* yourself. Do not pause to think. Do not pause to consider your flesh. Thus engaged, you will sink, as Peter did. Instead, believe God, in spite of everything.

God loves faith

Why does God employ faith as the channel into His heart? Ah! It is because the first sin in the garden was disbelief. God told the first couple: “Eat of the fruit of the tree of life, and to die you shall be dying.” Yet Satan said, “You shall not surely die.” Our forefather, Adam, believed the lie of the serpent. What better thing now to restore the primordial fellowship, than belief?

My definition of faith

Faith is faith, and if I had to define it, I would say that it is a child-like belief in what God says and does, though it be invisible. It is an assurance concerning things that are not being observed, I might say.

You may say that Peter believed an outrageous and impossible thing, and that Abraham believed an outrageous and impossible thing, but I will tell you this—that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, believed the most outrageous thing of all: Namely, that a death of such humiliating and degrading proportions could become the greatest boon ever to the human race, as well as to the citizenry of celestial realms. *Not one person on the earth believed this was possible*, no, not even His own disciples. Only *He* believed it, and it is that belief—*His* belief—that procures our salvation hour-by-hour, and for the eons.

Apart from law, a righteousness of God is manifest, yet a righteousness of God through Jesus Christ’s faith, for all, and on all who are believing.

Grace to you, friends. I shall speak with you again.



² Excerpted with permission from, *Living With the Rock: My Days With Cephas*, by Andrew bar Jonas, published by Nazareth Press, © 65, pgs. 101-103

³ 2 Corinthians 4:18