



Sunday, April 20, 2014

Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

# ROMANS Part 24

Chapter 3:21-23



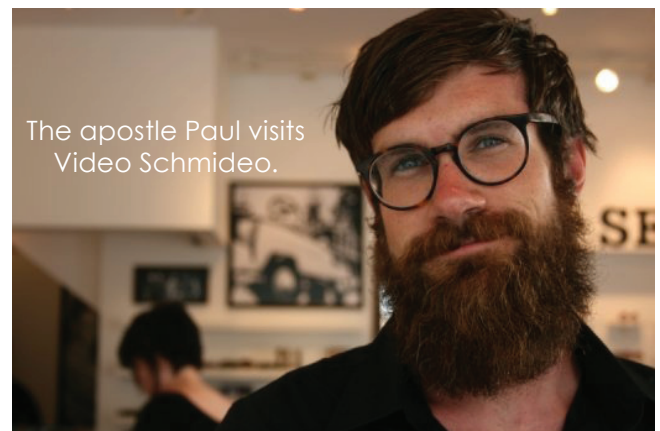
## Romans 3:21-23

**Yet now, apart from law, a righteousness of God is manifest (being attested by the law and the prophets), yet a righteousness of God through Jesus Christ's faith, for all, and on all who are believing, for there is no distinction, for all sinned and are wanting of the glory of God.**

I sat on a fold-out chair at the tiny Baldwin Chapel in Baldwin, Michigan. It was a sultry day in August, 1994. Sweat came, but did not evaporate. The little town of Baldwin languished in the afternoon sun. At that very moment, two or three people perused the dim aisles of the Tru Valu hardware store adjacent to the chapel, seeking nuts for their bolts. Not one of the twenty-five people in the chapel this day knew of these people, nor did they know of us. For who

could have known of us? Who besides us knew that for seventy-five years this tiny building served God—having been separated by Him—as a meeting place for His saints? In this ancient tabernacle (such a small step above the transient tents of Israel), the saints of the Most High gathered to discuss such sublime truth as the salvation of all, the conciliation of the world, the consummation of the eons, the administration of the grace of God, and the calling above in Christ Jesus—anything but hardware.

Had Paul been alive, he'd have been invited here. He would have arrived on Friday evening, perhaps on a bicycle from his rented home in nearby Ludington. Into the front door he would come, greeted warmly by holy kisses, hugs—and a small box of Sun-Maid raisins. The screen door would slap shut behind him, startling him as it startled everyone. Though visible as any man, none besides those gathered for the high purpose of God would note or care for the apostle's presence—never mind his celestial esteem—no, not the mayor, not the city council president, and not one of the 1,216 residents of a town boasting of an establishment on 5th Street known as, “Video Schmideo.” With everyone seated, Paul would amble to his place behind the homemade lectern, clear his throat and begin.





Dean Hough teaches  
at the Chicagoland  
Conference,  
September, 2009

It was here, on this ordinary day in August, that I heard Dean Hough of the Concordant Publishing Concern, editor of *Unsearchable Riches*—a modern-day Paul in his own right—say two words that changed my life,

“Yet now ...”

He paused, and said them again. He was teaching from Romans and had found his place in chapter three, settling on the twenty-first verse. Here he was—Dean Hough—at chapter three and verse 21 of the letter Paul wrote to straighten out everything in our troubled minds. Dean paused, and said it again,

“... yet now.”

Why did he say it again, I wondered. What of it? Then he said it again. At the third repetition, I felt it. Something had just changed, both in Romans and in my heart. Something was changing in my understanding. Something had changed in the voice of this latest Paul. The tenor of everything had just taken a turn. My future with God had veered off into a glorious avenue laden with stars. God’s opinion of me was about to be articulated from a man of no articulation. Something was coming that would alter the dual enemies of sin and death forever. Everything that had gone before in this important letter—“there is no one righteous, no not one”—now turned dramatically with two simple words, plainly uttered: “Yet now.”

Shocking was Dean’s utter monotone. Shocking was the way the words hit without finesse or fanfare. True to Paul, Dean simply said them. The words themselves held the power. The gospel is the power of God. The *saying* of the gospel is the power of the heart of Deity (it is *logos*; the *expression*). The words, alone, change everything.

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Dean knew this. Paul, before him, knew it well.

It took three repetitions, each as dull as the last, each as blaring. How had I missed this? How could I just now be hearing such truth? How could I have read Romans so many times and missed the import?

“Yet now ... apart from law ... *a righteousness of God is manifested.*”

Nothing going before in Romans had stitch or stammer to do with God’s righteousness. It was all about my failure to attain to it. The words before concerned the inability of human beings to attain to God’s divine standard. Everything heretofore contributed to humanity hanging high and dry without a single hope or expectation in this world. We speak incessantly of the nations having no expectation and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12), but Paul has just set the nations *and* Israel adrift in the same boat of doom: *there is no one righteous, no not one.*

“Yet now ...”

Forget how we never saw such a thing. The question now is: *How do we see it?* We simply turn our heads. We simply turn our heads away from our own failures and toward Christ. (What could be easier, yet what could be harder?) We turn our heads and eyes from our own darkened hearts toward the stake set so firmly into earth, and to the Man suffering and dying upon it. Thus engaged, we behold something so different, so strange to our sight, so foreign to anything we could imagine for ourselves. We

have looked within for the righteousness of God, each time coming away empty. The disappointment has vexed us, tortured us, and nearly killed us. Unaccountably, we have repeated and repeated the failure.

“Yet now ...”

Yet now, *a righteousness of God is manifested.*

Oh my God, then. Show me the righteousness of God! Who would not want to see this? What human being, hearing the very possibility announced, could refrain

from gazing upon something so marvelous as the righteousness of Him Who created us all? Could it resemble anything we have ever seen? How *do* we see it? Through what glasses do we behold it? In what light will it come to us? What, if anything, stands between us and it? Surely something vast and dark.

Who is so at home and comfortable with his or her own struggles that he or she would focus inwardly rather than outwardly at the promise of such a marvel? Who would refuse the announcement of something so new, so



startling, so ultra-human? Strangely, it greets us without fanfare or earthly flourish, but rather with two simple words. The two words, so easily overlooked by flesh, are latched upon by the spirit as though they are life itself—and they are.

“Yet now, *a righteousness of God is manifest.*”

Yes! I want this! Show me the righteous of God, if only I can see it! It must be something so different from my own righteousness. Please, God. If I cannot look of my own accord, then *You* turn my head and give me eyes fit to see the new spectacle. I am tired of myself, my failures, my efforts to please You long rusted shut. I am so frustrated that I will look at anything now. Ah. You have set me up so brilliantly for this. The years of futility have prepared me for Your next sentence, whatever strange thing it will be. You have situated me just so. Now, divert me. I badly want it.

It happens!

“Yet now, a righteousness of God is manifest ... *yet a righteousness of God through Jesus Christ’s faith.*”

I behold now a man on a stake, dying. Oh, my God! I see Jesus Christ, alone, nailed to a crude stake, struggling for breath. *Why is He doing this?* I start to cry. My first cry is, *Why must an innocent man suffer so much!* My first instinct is to avert my eye, to rebel against the new thing. It is so foreign to me. Yet for some reason unexplained, I cannot look away. Because

# “YET NOW ...”

now, from the stake of torture, the Man speaks. From the Roman tool of execution, the Sufferer forgives His murderers, “Father, forgive them.”

I haven’t time to recover from it when He begins talking to His God. *How can He utter any words at all?*

My eyes are opened, and now I see the invisible demons tormenting Him. From ground level, the priests mock Him. His mother is crying; He looks upon her with tenderness. Through strained breath (He is suffocating to death), He tells John to love her unto the end of her days.

*From the stake, He cares for others.*

Now, He requests drink. His words are barely discernible. He jerks His hands suddenly; the nail there vexes Him in a new way. He bites His lip at it, drawing new blood. He is crying now; His mother now must



turn away. Tears flow from His brown eyes with no one to catch them. I turn away, myself. When I turn back, the horror has morphed into calm. *What is it?*

He then says, “It is finished.”

*He is doing something. Something is happening—right now. Something that has never happened before.* Yet nothing in the world looks different. Roman soldiers still spit and mumble, kicking the dust. But I feel it. And now I see it—or my spirit feels it without me. It is something so large and yet so silent as to make anyone wonder whether anything at all has occurred. Not a soul present here—save Him and me—discern it. The spirit world surrounds Him, both good and evil. *They* know. Not even He can see it, and yet in this moment ... *it* is accomplished.

*What is accomplished?*

God Himself is smiting Him. His own Father is behind it. It is true. His Father is behind everything. Who is torturing Him on this stake? His Father is. His own Father is using the other people. The other people are all vessels of dishonor: Satan; Israel; the priests; the Romans with the sponge on the stick; Judas, now dead; Pontius Pilate; King Herod.

*How can He settle into this? How can He justify it in His mind?*



He knows something.

Now He cries out to His father, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?”

This starts *me* crying. Hard. He feels forsaken. I can no longer look. His mother has long since bowed her face to the ground, her grief coming in spasms wracking her shoulders in John’s grip. All His life He knew fellowship with His Father. Now this. Now even His Father has left Him alone, forsaken Him.

Or so it feels.

The sky turns black, but it is midday. People become afraid. A surge of wind strikes; it has portents in it. Even the Romans executing Him now become nervous. What have they done? They look at one another, but say nothing.

“It is finished.”

Then I see. Then the light comes to my spirit, even through the unnatural darkness driving Satan himself to a far corner of creation to hide from what he has done. *The Son is faithful to the will of His Father.* His Father sent Him here, not because of His hatred for the world, but because of His love for it. Can the world detect the love of One invisible? Yes, but only through a visible Man perfectly representing Him—a Man with nails driven through His wrists and feet; a Man Who loves those killing Him and Who is now reconciling even the malevolent perpetrator adrift now, hiding his face.

“Father, forgive them.”

“I thirst.”

“It is finished.”

It renders us fixed. This is far beyond anything familiar to us. Satan himself could not have imagined it. If he had known, he would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Or he would have.

What the world-at-large cannot now know is that this Man has, for six hours, been assuming and battling the sins of the world, and not those of the known world only, but the failings of an unseen realm high above Jerusalem. Not only the sins of humanity He fights, but those of invisible celestial beings who, themselves, must learn the love of His Father. Is such a thing now accomplished? Yes! But not by the might of sword or sweat, but rather through loving sacrifice. It is not by grandeur, but by grace.

### THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

He knows He is going to die. As I watch, He prepares Himself for His last breath. His Father has promised not to forsake Him in the unseen. He once doubted His Father—but not now. He is finally through the six hours. Like Jonah in the belly of the whale, this Man will be in the belly of the Earth for three days and three nights. This is the picture His father gave Him—the picture, the sign of Jonah.

When it first occurred to Him, He didn’t like it. He would think about Jonah, then drove it from His mind. Yet it always revisited. Again and again, the example of Jonah came to Him. He knew why He could not stop thinking about it: it was the answer. It was not only His fate, but His deliverance. God delivered Jonah from the belly of the darkness. It was not much to go

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on—but it was something. Thus, His father promised to deliver Him from three days of death. He, Himself, raised Lazarus. He knew the power of His God. The problem was that He, Himself, had never tasted it—death. It was one thing to raise other people, quite another to taste it yourself. All things human had become His experience—except this. It was the last thing, the hardest thing. Nothing was more bitter. Nothing frightened Him more.

He knew that, when He gave up His spirit and His head fell to His chest, He would cease to exist. Our Lord knew nothing of the Trinity. He knew what He was: the First-born of the creation of God (Revelation 3:14); God's Son. As God's Son, and as the ultimate sacrifice for the ultimate failure of everything, He must taste this hardest thing. He must not exist. He must taste death for all, then trust His Father to raise Him. It was all in the trust, the faith. All He had to go on was the few people He Himself had raised—and Jonah. The stupid saga of Jonah. When His Father raised Him (He tried hard to say the word “when”), He would have conquered death. He would have conquered death by dying. The concept was not strange to Him; it was the execution of it that tasted so bitter. *When* God raised Him (He repeated this phrase to Himself on the stake), He would have drunk the bitterest cup to a finality. Only then could He conquer the greatest of enemies.

He knew what it meant to say the words, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” It is why He drew such a large breath.

His last thoughts were of Jonah.

Then—it was over. He did what He wondered if He could ever do. He gave up His spirit to His Father. The decimation would be three days; or thirty days, or three-thousand years—there would *be* no experience for Him, no passage of time, nothing. “The dead do not know anything” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). If His father did not rouse Him, at least He would never know of the failure, of the breach of trust.

He would now enter oblivion—to destroy oblivion.

“... yet a righteousness of God, *through Jesus Christ's faith.*”

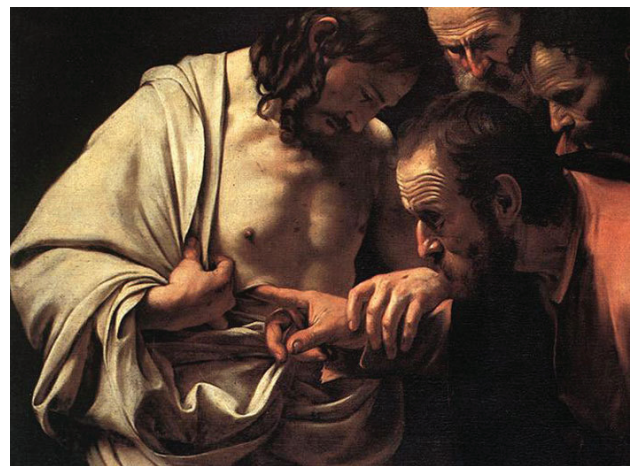
## POSTSCRIPT

It was Jesus Christ's faith in giving Himself up to The Plan of God, for us, that demonstrates to us the righteousness of God. The most righteous thing a human being, or any being, can do is to believe God. None of us believe God. We have all gone out of the way, we have all become useless. There is no one righteous, no not one. There is no one who believes God. But *He* believed God. *He* believed God in the worst extremity. God appointed Him to be the representative Man, that is, the answer to Adam (Romans 5:18-19; 1 Corinthians 15:22). *He believed God for all of us.* We could not do it.

Because of Him, all those in Adam will one day come from death—forever.

Since He is the answer to Adam, then His belief is our belief. God cannot express this faithfulness Himself. He is invisible. Jesus Christ is His visible image (2 Corinthians 4:4). Through Jesus Christ, God demonstrates His

own faithfulness. If God could demonstrate His faithfulness to us unto death, He would; but God cannot die. Therefore, He sends His Son to die, not only for us, but in the stead of God Himself. It is as though God, through Him, dies for us. It is as though God is saying, “I am doing this for you. I *would* do it for you—so literally—but I am not a man and therefore cannot be extinguished. Yet I send to you My most precious possession, My only Son. Through Him, you see My heart. Through His obedience in being extinguished, you see My faithfulness to you, to everything I've promised you. Through His belief in Me, and through His trust in Me,



you see My belief and My trust in My plans and in My love for you.”

All of this is demonstrated at the cross of Christ. We are saved, not by our faith, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.

Take your eyes from your own faith, for it will fail you at every turn. Take your eyes from the weakness of your own belief, which vacillates like the sea. Cast your weakness upon His faithfulness in dying for His Father and His Father's Plan. It is the last thing He wanted to do in the flesh—yet the most desirable thing of His inner heart. It was the hardest thing God ever asked of Him—yet the only thing He had to do. Through it, He proves every promise of God to be true. Even though His Father smote Him, yet He trusted in Him, and His Father raised Him from the dead. Extend this love heavenward into the bosom of the Father. Everything Christ did is a picture and testament to the faithfulness of God toward us.

“*Yet now ... a righteousness of God is manifest.*” Cast your eyes upon the cross. It is your answer. It is what God sees. It is the remedy to everything at which you have ever failed. —MZ