

Belief That Transcends Reasoning
Luke 23:44-49

Over the many generations of the history of mankind, there have been many, many arguments put forth about the existence of God, many of them arguing for His existence, but others against.

As Christians, our first argument for God's existence is that of "faith", simple "faith". That while yes, the reasoning and the arguments put forth by the unbelievers of our world might seem plausible to them, for those of us who choose to believe that God exists and is real, something else takes place within us, something completely different and completely unexplainable. The "reasoning", the "intellectual" exercises of our minds change, and our "reasoning" becomes "belief", simple belief".

There's a Hebrew word given in Genesis chapter 15 verse 6 that helps me with my understanding of what took place when my own struggle with "reasoning" changed. It is the Hebrew word "Emunah".

In those words we read that "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness." And that word "believed" is the Hebrew word "Emunah" and it means "believe", "faith", and it's best definition is simply that of being "an innate conviction that transcends reason."

Listen again carefully to that definition . . . the Hebrew word Emunah means "believe", "faith" and is best defined simply as "an innate conviction that transcends reason." "An innate conviction that transcends reason."

And yes, our natural mind does so want to always "reason out" every matter that we encounter. But simply put, there are some things that go beyond "reasoning out", that "transcend reasoning".

And yes, we have the scriptures within our bibles that declare to us that God really does exist. And yes, we have the proofs revealed to us in the natural world. As Psalm 19 so well describes, the heavens do declare the glory and the presence of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. And day to day they pour forth speech, and night to night reveal knowledge. And there really is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Because their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Those are our “proofs”, if we need “proof”. But may I say that for me, and I believe for everyone who gives their hearts to the Lord Jesus in salvation, this understanding that is spoken about here must be the pathway to the eternal relationship that our Lord wants to have with us, His children. It is by “Emunah”, by “Belief”, by “Faith”.

And while that kind and manner of “belief” can come into our souls only by the working of God’s Holy Spirit, His manner and way of captivating our heart and our soul often takes place in different ways and under different circumstances.

Here, for these men in our scripture passage, the Centurian, and perhaps some of the others, who were standing around the cross of the Lord Jesus while He was being crucified, we see that that “Emunah”, “belief” took place within their hearts in a very dramatic fashion.

Here, as Jesus breathed His last and gave up His Spirit to God the Father, this centurion, most likely the commander of the cadre of soldiers charged with carrying out the crucifixion, stood looking on as he probably did on so many other days as he carried out his crucifixion orders from Pontius Pilate.

But then, suddenly, everything changed. The sky went dark! Listen to these words given to us here in Luke chapter 23, verse 44,

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” ⁴⁸ And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things. (Luke 23:44-49)

Here stood a man who was under authority, a man most likely often compelled to do things that he did not want to do, things that he did not understand and agree with, duties that cut across the lines of moral conscience. But regardless of his personal feelings, he was duty-bound to carry out his responsibilities,

because that is what a good soldier does. And that was what he was doing on this day.

But how different was this occasion from all those other occasions when he carried out orders that he disagreed with? From his response, it is clear that this occasion struck all the way to the depths of his heart and soul!

We are able to gain further insight into this man's soul when we read about this same account as it is given in the Book of Matthew. There we read,

⁵⁴ So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54)

May I take a moment and remind us again that the scriptural teachings are clear about such matters as these. Spiritual insights, such as were running through this man's mind and were being voiced here, are not given to a person's natural mind! These are "Spiritual truths"! And "Spiritual truths" are given only through the Spirit of God.

Jesus confirmed that truth on another occasion when after the Apostle Peter had declared Him to be the "Christ, the Son of the Living God", Jesus said to Peter in Matthew chapter 16,

¹⁷ . . . "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 16:17)

And so it was also with this centurion and those with him as they stood in awe before the cross of the Lord Jesus. God's Spirit revealed to them that "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Were these men able to fully comprehend what they were thinking and saying? Probably not, especially at that moment, but surely they would know much more later on as events would begin to unfold, because that is how God's Holy Spirit works within the hearts of men. He reveals Jesus to us one step, one incident, one proof at a time.

May I also go back and again give another thought and concept that I have given to you in the past regarding what I believe took place with this centurion and at least some of these soldiers?

In an earlier study, I shared some thoughts with you about what I believe took place in those moments when the soldiers were beating the Lord Jesus with those awful whips, and when they fashioned that mocking crown out of thorns and forced it down roughly upon His head, and then later when they held Him down and drove those nails into His hands and his feet.

It is said that His blood flowed freely from all those wounds. And as probably took place in most all such occasions as this, His blood spilled forth onto the soldiers as they went about their cruel duties.

No doubt, over time, the soldiers had become so accustomed to getting the blood of men on their hands that they probably gave it little more than a passing thought. Blood was simply a messy part of their duties.

But it was never that way with God. From the very beginning, the blood of all creatures, especially of men, held a very special importance to Him.

From His first moments of establishing His providential plan for the souls of man, God had put within the “shedding of blood” both a natural and a supernatural meaning and value.

As we are told in these scriptures, “life” itself is within the blood. Those words from Leviticus 17:11,

¹¹ For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life. (Leviticus 17:11)

Our science has confirmed some of this truth to us, at least in its natural sense. But unfortunately for science, it cannot begin to understand or explain the last part of this verse . . . that special mystical value and importance that God places upon it. Those words again . . . “and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”

Science cannot comprehend such mystical truths as these. And may I say, how sad I feel for them! They willfully restrict further understanding and knowledge by insisting only in the “natural” and ignoring the wonders of the “supernatural”.

I do wish that these men and women would use their studies as they should, to reveal the majesty and the perfection of God's creation rather than to seemingly always try to use their science to deny Him.

And unfortunately, we also know that the scientific community is not just a group of unbelieving atheists. There are many among them who occupy pews within our churches every Sunday, dear souls who with one part of their being do earnestly desire to worship God, but with another part of their being willfully choose to remain blinded to truths such as these.

In their labs and in their instructions to others, they can examine the molecules of the blood of men and see only what is natural, disregarding that there is also a very special supernatural essence that also resides within that blood, and especially within the blood of the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus.

But here again, "Spiritual truths" come only from the Spirit of God, and to comprehend them we must have "eyes to see and ears to hear"!

And for those of us who do, immediately we begin to see in these scriptures those wonderful truths beginning to unfold.

Here in some of the first words found in these scriptures, we see in the Garden of Eden where God shed the blood of an animal to provide the first covering for sin represented by the clothing he provided to hide the nakedness of Adam and Eve.

And then, following on down through time with all the many sacrifices made in the tabernacle and in the temple, until here as the Lord Jesus shed His blood for the sins of the world, the shedding of blood has always been necessary for the supernatural "wiping away", the "cleansing", the "remission" of the sins of men. We are told in Hebrews 9:22 that,

²² . . . without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.
(Hebrews 9:22)

And yes, while these words do remain strange and mystical even for those of us who have known and believed in the Lord Jesus for most of our lives, by faith we can rest in the knowledge that it is all true and that it is by His blood that our own souls are cleansed from our sins.

So, what then might have taken place within the souls of those soldiers and that centurion that day as the blood of the Lord Jesus spilled out upon them?

I would contend that it is exactly as we have been saying here today, and also in the words we sing so often in our hymns, that "There really is Power in the Blood", and that we truly do need to be "Washed in the Blood of the Lamb", because "Nothing But the Blood of Jesus" can cleanse us from our sins.

Folks, I believe the words of those songs are real and they are true. There really is a special power, far beyond the natural, a supernatural power that resides within the blood of Jesus. It can wash away sins and change a person's soul in only a moment.

And as that centurion and those other soldiers touched the blood of the Lord Jesus, I believe with all my heart that they were immediately cleansed and changed, saved for all eternity!

Do these scriptures say those exact words? No, they do not. But by faith I do believe that that is the exact reason why these men declared, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

And also . . . I want us to also take note that these men were Gentiles, as was Pilate. And each of them made the same declaration that, "Certainly this man was innocent".

Why is that important to take note of? It is because, even then, God was beginning to spread His ministry beyond the borders of the Hebrew people, on out to the Gentiles.

Jesus had been sent to His own, but His own received Him not. And here, God clearly and openly demonstrated that He would graciously reveal Himself to all who would receive Him.

I would not want to carry these scriptures further than they intend, but I do believe and hope that these men might have become future ministers in the furtherance of the gospel of Christ.

Certainly they were “stirred” within their spirit beyond anything they had known before. And we know that it was a “Spirit-filled” stirring because it is said here of the centurion that He immediately gave “praise to God”. Listen! Verse 47,

⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” (Luke 23:47)

He “praised God”!

May we also take note of one other, seemingly natural event that also took place in those same moments, a natural event that evidenced God’s “supernatural” involvement! It is said here in Matthew 27:54,

⁵⁴ So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54)

To add to all the other things that had taken place that day, the blood of the Lord Jesus having its special effect on these men, and them witnessing His response to His suffering, here the earth also suddenly began to shake violently. That is when “fear” began to creep into the hearts of those otherwise very brave soldiers.

“Fear” in the hands of God is a very effective tool to draw men’s souls to Him. Yes, “fear” is also a weapon of satan, a weapon that he can use to melt the hearts of men and to turn them into helpless pawns of misery.

But Godly “fear” is very different. When used rightly, “fear” can be an excellent means of bringing righteous understanding into the hearts of men.

We’re told in Proverbs 9:10 that, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

And in Psalm 111:10, we’re told that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and all those who practice it have a good understanding.”

And in Proverbs 1:7 we’re told that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

And yes, both kinds of men mentioned in this last verse were present there that day, the scribes and the Pharisees who thought themselves to be wise, but were

fools. And then also, there were these more simple, even childlike-minded soldiers.

And thanks be to God for the witness of those men, because it is within minds like those who would be like children, that God is able to do His saving work.

Jesus said in another place in these gospels, "unless you humble yourself and become as a child, you will never enter the kingdom of God".

So then, yes, God may have also used some measure of "fear" to gain the attention of the centurion and his men that day. But I am sure that it was the unction of the Holy Spirit that did the rest and brought them to the conclusion that, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

May we conclude for today by returning our thoughts to the one most important thing that took place on this very special day in the history of men! The Lord Jesus shed His precious blood for the sins of men, for you and for me!

Neither the Scribes, nor the Pharisees, nor the soldiers took His blood from Him. He shed His own blood of His own free will so that you and I might have life.

And we, like that centurion and those other soldiers must allow His precious blood to "spill" upon us, because it is through His shed blood and his shed blood alone that we are cleansed from our sins and are given the precious gift of eternal life.

And so, may we, along with this centurion and his fellow soldiers, give praise to God and proclaim fervently of the Lord Jesus that, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Pray with me!