

## “When Truth Abandons Logic”

*Zephaniah 3:14-20; John 3:16-17*

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I’ve always been a bit of a problem solver. That is to say I take enjoyment in using logic and rationality to figure things out and proceed in a better fashion. And, most of the time, it works. Problems are solved, solutions offered. *Fait accomplis*.

EXCEPT in certain fields. Now look, coming into the pastorate, I just had no idea just how much medical stuff I’d be exposed to in the course of ministry. From being with congregants in hospital rooms with doctors who’re talking to them, to talking with congregants about what their doctors have told them, I’ve had quite the medical education.

But there is one inviolate and immutable rule when it comes to medicine (at least in my humble opinion) is that very little of it makes sense. Not according to the standard rules of logic it doesn’t. You see, the human body just doesn’t adhere to our logic as much as we’d like. Take for example cardioversion. This is a procedure in which a heart beating abnormally is given a shock of electric current with the intent of making it go back into a sinus rhythm. So, I’ve learned, don’t speculate when it comes to medical matters. Logic is wonderful stuff but it just doesn’t necessarily apply in the field of medicine.

Logic, when you think about it, is merely a system of rules that helps us assess the truthfulness of propositions. But it isn’t “law.” Not really. It bends, it has to. Otherwise, it breaks. Take for example the sentence, “This sentence is untruthful.” Now apply our logical laws to that and you’ll see that logic, well, it has limits. You see, if the sentence is true, then what it is stating might not be trusted. Or it might. It depends on how you come at the problem. Regardless, it is important for us to realize that, as much as we want them to be immutable, logic isn’t.

Another place we clearly perceive the failure of logic is in the heart, mind and actions of our God. If we’re honest, God doesn’t always make sense, at least, not to our limited minds. We strain sometimes to grasp the God given to us in the Scriptures. Let’s face it, when we read of some of the things that God did, we’re bound to be shocked, mortified perhaps. We might think, darn it God, that just isn’t reasonable (Which is just another way of stating that it isn’t logical).

But the scripture here is pretty clear. If it ever comes to a battle between Jesus and logic, the smart money is on the lamb, not the logic.

Here I read for us **John 3:16-17** – *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

It doesn’t make sense. It isn’t logical, at least not by human standards it isn’t. Sons (and daughters) for that matter are precious. Irreplaceable. The idea of giving your son up to save someone else just doesn’t make sense. It becomes even less so when you figure the broader story it fits into. In that story, you and I, well, we’re broken. Sin has crept up into this world and into us in such a fashion that we can’t hardly realize all of sin’s deleterious effects. What John 3:16-17 tells us is that God sent His Son in order to save sinners. That, in a way, God gave up His only begotten Son, in order to spare a set of ungrateful louts, such as myself.

On paper, that doesn’t make much sense. Trading the good for the bad, right? That isn’t what we’re supposed to do. And yet that’s exactly what Jesus does. John 3:16-17 gives it to us as a proposition. In the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus puts this same idea forward in another fashion. Telling us a brief parable, Jesus shares with us that, *“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So, it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”*

From a logical perspective, this makes absolutely NO sense. If one sheep takes off and you’ve got 100, you need to stay and protect the 99. That’s where your money is. That’s where your safety net is. The 99 should be kept safe and protected by the shepherd at all times. After all, if that one sheep has shown nothing else, it is that escape is possible. So, if you’re smart, if you’re logical, stay with the 99. But Jesus doesn’t do that, does he? Of course, He doesn’t. No, instead He leaves the flock in order to go and find that one that left

the rest. Is it kind? It is loving? Yes, absolutely. Is it logical? NOPE.

Later in the Gospel of Matthew, we're told a different parable. This one is about a boss man. You see, he's got a field that needs to be worked on in order to work in his vineyard. So, early in the morning, when the dew is still on the leaves, he heads out to find workers. He finds some. They agree to work in his vineyard for the entire day for one denarius.

Come lunchtime, that vineyard still needs tending so the boss man, he goes out again. He finds some more workers and sends them out into the field, promising a good wage. Finally, again, as the day draws to a close, he goes out again, hiring workers and sending them to work in his vineyard. Well, the quitting bell chimes and all the workers line up to get paid. Seeing the folks who were last in the field get a full denarius would've led me to believe I would get paid more. After all, one might thing, I did four times the hours of work. I should get paid more.

But, alas, no. No soup for you. It doesn't make sense.

Or how about this. A man plants some good seeds. He's looking forward to a harvest. Oh, but an enemy of his comes by. That evil guy plants a bunch of weeds right there alongside the man's wheat. Well, what are you going to do? You've got to weed it, right? You've got to get down on your hands and knees and you've got to do the work. Gotta pull up all those weeds. Get rid of all those bad seeds, otherwise the wheat will perish. That makes sense. That's logical.

Nope. Not so much, at least, not to God. For His Word teaches us that we've got to let those weeds grow up there right beside the wheat. We can't just get rid of the people who aren't good or are troubled. Nope, we've got to keep them around, no matter how annoying or how costly or how time-consuming they are. We've got to keep them around. Weeds. It doesn't make sense. I'm telling you, it just doesn't. It isn't logical.

Or how about this. A man, well, he's living a pretty dastardly life. In fact, his crimes are so egregious that he's condemned to death along with some other criminals. And he's not just going to suffer just any old death. No, he's going to be crucified. And he is. But as the bad man stands there, he sees something. A savior. He calls out, *"One of the other criminals who were hanged railed at Jesus saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

So, let me get this straight, Jesus. A person can go out and live a terribly reprobate life, hardly doing anything for his fellow man, and then, right as he's dying, see the light and turn it all around. It doesn't seem fair. I mean this violates many of the core presuppositions we take for granted. One of these presuppositions is that "If you do the crime, do the time." But Jesus says, NAH, that isn't my bag. Forgiveness is. It isn't logical. But it is, as we see, totally Jesus.

Or how about those beatitudes. You know, the ones right there at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Listen to them and see if they make sense to our vaunted human logic and reason.

**Matthew 5:3-11** – *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad..."*

What?

To begin with, that sounds at times like a laundry list of ways NOT to enjoy this life. Mourning, persecution, hunger, meekness for goodness sakes. And yet Jesus tells us that when we encounter these things, we all typically try to avoid, we are BLESSED of all things. Well, I don't know about you. But it's almost like the definition of blessed changed. But it didn't. Still stays the same. So, all of the states and traits that we actively try to avoid shouldn't be at all for they are, blessed.

It doesn't make sense, I tell you. Doesn't add up.

But perhaps of all the things Scriptures teaches us, perhaps the most troubling, the most upsetting, the most difficult thing to reconcile in our brains is this – that we’re not to be trusted. What the Bible teaches us is that you and I are broken by sin. Paul talks about the illogicality of sin.

**Romans 7:15-23** – *“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”*

What Paul teaches us here is, perhaps, the most difficult thing of all to grasp. It certainly is as it upends our reliance on ourselves. You and I are very much like that sentence I mentioned early on. You know the one, “that this sentence isn’t true.” WE don’t make sense. WE OURSELVES aren’t entirely logical and rational. After all, we know what’s right and then turn around and do the absolute opposite.

So maybe it’s time to stop trusting logic. To stop trusting ourselves and our laws and our rules and instead to seek to find the truth in God’s Word.

Because what Jesus teaches us in John 3 is so vital, so fundamental for our lives here before the Kingdom. God isn’t shackled to our notions of reason and logic. That God, being infinitely and eternally free, is free from the burdens and limitations we would set upon Him. And our God instructs us on this notion in both Old Testament and New.

**Proverbs 3:5-6** – *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”*

**Psalms 146:3-4** – *“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.”*

Did you hear that?

Don’t trust princes. Don’t trust yourself. Trust God. Let His logic become your logic, His love, your love. Then the question becomes, how does God act throughout history?

Well, let’s look. Things get off to kinda a bumpy start. God’s most ambitious creation takes a turn for the worse. No sooner than God leaves Adam and Eve alone in the Garden of Eden, the serpent comes. That old snake convinces them that, in order to be like God, they simply MUST do the one thing that God told them explicitly NOT to do and they turn around and do it. Eating of the fruit of the one tree from which they were told NOT to consume.

Look, I know this reference isn’t exactly applicable anymore, but does anyone remember typewriters? Well, I do. The very first term paper I ever did, I had to type out on a typewriter. And man, I remember that night. In typical Jason fashion, I left much of that paper for the last minute. As the hours dwindled down to the paper’s due date, I began furiously typing out words.

Now look, back then, you couldn’t just hit backspace and change things like you can with a word processor. To make corrections was a time-consuming ordeal which involved painting white liquid paper onto the error, waiting for it to dry and then typing over it.

Which was perfectly fine to do if you were near the end or middle of a page you’d been typing on. Ah, but what happened if you made a mistake in, let’s say, the very first sentence. Would you take the time to correct it? Not if you had an abundance of paper, you wouldn’t. You’d just pull the sheet from the typewriter, crumble it up and throw it away. Many pages of that term paper were begun, messed up, and then quickly filled a trash can nearby my desk.

So, thank goodness for **Isaiah 55:8-9** which reads, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

John 3:16-17 teaches us so wonderfully, so directly of this profound Biblical truth. That while logic is wonderful stuff, helpful to us on a great many occasions, logic is not the means by which we ultimately understand life. In truth, we ultimately understand life, and logic for that matter, when we see where logic fails.

Henry Watson Fowler, author of “Modern English Usage” notes that the phrase, “the exception proves the rule”, ought better to be understood as saying this – “is that the presence of an exception applying to a *specific* case establishes that a *general* rule exists. A more explicit phrasing might be “the exception that proves *the existence of the rule*”.

And when it comes to our vaunted human logic. One specific case necessitated an exception, at least according to the ways of our Lord. You see, there was a problem. Mistakes were made. Sin entered the world and, with it, enslavement. Men and women were hooked on darkness, so to speak. Now, if you’re God, what are you going to do?

Are you going to take that mostly blank sheet of paper, crumble it all up and toss it in the rubbish bin? While that may be a good general rule, when it comes to your beloved creation, it just isn’t sufficient.

So, what do you do? The very thing you love is destroying itself. There is one thing that you love more. Your Son. And, well, this isn’t just ANY Son. No, this is the ONLY-BEGOTTEN Son of the Father. Irreplaceable, unduplicatable. But there you are, you love your Son and you love your Creation. What are you going to do?

Well, let me tell you, it isn’t going to be logical, at least not by human standards. Not at all. Because love, well, it isn’t logical. The heart wants what the heart wants after all. In order to make a way for us, Jesus is made incarnate. God takes on human flesh. And He doesn’t just take it on like you and I might put on a Halloween costume. No, Jesus puts it on indelibly. As in, no going back. Human forever.

But that incarnation isn’t enough to do the trick, to save us. No, a debt is owed. A HUGE ONE. Every single sin from every single human being needs payment, punishment. God, we often forget, is a Holy God, incapable of being in the presence of darkness. Ah, but Jesus, because he takes on human flesh, He can. Jesus comes to earth on a mission.

Atonement.

The Holy God desires His creation returned to Holiness so that they can enjoy Him forever. But, in order to get there, restitution must be paid. Jesus agrees to the exchanged. **I Timothy 2:5-6** – “*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*”

John 3:16-17 sure isn’t logical. But I want you to know something. Something way deeper than I could ever conceive. One day, while enjoying some ice cream, I took it upon myself to explain how it gets made to my children. I talked about ice crystals and custards and how it all comes together to make this sweet, frozen treat. At the end of my rather lengthy and overly technical oration, one of my kids just said to me, “Dad, I don’t need to understand it to enjoy it.”

So, when it comes to grace, God, John 3:16-17 and everything know this – they will not yield their mysteries to the false god of human logic. But don’t let their irrationality prevent you from doing the very thing God wants you to do – enjoy the salvation He alone makes possible. For Truth does abandon logic. And where it does so eternally, is at the Cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.