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#60 Should my girlfriend get baptised? What will we remember in heaven?

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Will we keep our memories in heaven? How does the Isaiah 65 prophecy of a new world fit in with Tom's eschatology? My girlfriend is a Christian but says she doesn't want to get baptised – what should I do? Plus Tom gets interrupted by a young visitor!

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Transcript

The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast Hello great to have you back with me for today's edition of the show I'm Justin Briley and I get to sit down with Tom Wright on a regular basis to ask him your questions about all sorts of topics and today we're going to be looking at your questions around heaven and baptism but I'm really excited to say not long to go now till Tom joins us for unbelievable the conference 2021 including that special live edition of the Ask NT Wright Anything show book your place make sure you don't miss out by going to unbelievable dot live we've got ticket options there and yeah it'll be wonderful to gather people from all over the world for what will be a great day with many other speakers too helping to engage our faith understand it and tell it again to a new generation as we learn to tell the greatest story ever told unbelievable dot live to book your place there are also links from the show page at ask NT Wright dot com shout out to Rikaki Steve who is a missionary in the Marshall Islands and left us a review of the podcast saying I'm a missionary in one of the most remote places in the world and

the podcast is a blessing to hear everyone is a fortunate one it's awesome to hear NT Wright and Justin interact and answer questions from around the world definitely a five star plus podcast don't miss it unless the internet is out but I always catch up with the archives blessings to you both and thank you from us here in the middle of the Pacific exciting so exciting to know where the show is reaching thank you very much if you want to leave us a review then feel free to do that and I look through them every so often and like to share them here at the beginning of the show each week you can find out more of course again at our website ask NT Wright dot com where you can support the show too and receive our show ebook if you listen from the states don't forget you can do that from premiere insight dot org and click on ask NT Wright anything but whether it's that or the conference or anything else all of the links are available for today's show on podcast for now let's get to your questions. Well today on the show we're just putting a variety of different things to Tom no particular theme to these questions that coming in from Ryan and Caleb and Talitha today but we'll just see where we go they're broadly if you like theological questions as all the questions are in one form or other but let's see what you have to say to Talitha in Strasbourg in France great to know we've got a listeners in France and says will we keep our memories in heaven will we remain who we are and remember our friends are lives from before the New Testament witness seems ambiguous about this doesn't it so what do you say to this one? Thanks very much to Leitha it's a great question the first thing to do with it is gently to adjust the in heaven bit because of course the New Testament teaches that the ultimate future is the new heavens and the new earth and so the idea of going to heaven whatever heaven is is a strictly temporary thing as a friend of mine said heaven is important but it's not the end of the world in other words when we die we go says Paul in Philippians two we sorry Philippians one we go to be with Jesus with the Messiah Paul says which is far better so I take it that he envisages life immediately after death as a conscious being with Jesus he doesn't say and the New Testament doesn't say anything about being with other people there and doesn't say what that will be like but insofar as it is a reality to which Paul and the others look forward immediately after death as a time which is far better I assume that we are being invited to trust God that whatever it will be like it will be continuous with our present life but presumably significantly different in some ways then there is the question in the new heavens and the new earth when we are raised from the dead and given resurrection bodies to be part of God's project in the new heavens and new earth which is not just hanging around gazing at God all day as some theologians seem to think but actually we are going to be the royal priesthood we are the ones who will be helping to run God's new creation whatever that will mean but that in that process I assume that there will again be rich continuity with what with who we are and what we are in the present Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that get on with your work in the present because it is not in vain it is not wasted the things you do at the moment whether it's helping with a soup kitchen for homeless people or whether it's painting a wonderful painting or studying and reading a book or bringing up a family these creative things which are bringing God's joyful wise creation to birth in new ways these are things which

will last into the new creation and so from that point of view I want to say that our memories as well are part of that our memories are part of who we really are and that we've got the lovely the lovely instance of you being interrupted by a grandchild here I think top which is absolutely fine by a grandchild and I think the cards that you're looking for are on the shelves in the dining room just on the right hand side as you go in there we are this is a little bit of real family life intervention fine I love it I love it we're going to keep this in the podcast because it's all part of the fun that was that was Leo my four year old grandchild who wants to play a game of cards with his nana but doesn't know where the cards are I hope I've just told him it's just as possible I could have been interrupted by any of my children who are currently home schooling Tom so so it's absolutely fine I hope he finds the cards but there's a funny thing about memory um as we all know when we get older we can remember some things particularly some things from when we were children very vividly children's memories are very vivid and they stay with you I find it difficult to remember things that happened last year of the year before and to sort out which year it was when such and such occurred or whatever and I suspect and St Augustine in his confessions writes very interestingly about this that our memories are more fluid and flexible than we imagine and it may well be when God remakes us finally fully to reflect his image that there will be some things which we remember gloriously and other things which God will very happily have wiped away because just as God says I will remember their sins no more so maybe we will remember our sins no more so there may be all kinds of gaps in the memory and by the way you can hear the clock striking because you know left the door open so that's telling us what the time is so real family life going on here absolutely well I love it I love it there's absolutely nothing wrong with that um let's turn to Ryan in Oklahoma and his question is this could you help me understand Isaiah 65 verse 20 within the framework of your eschatology Tom I'd especially appreciate a contrast of your interpretation of this passage with dispensationalism now let me read out at least in my NRSV edition of the Bible here what Isaiah 65 20 says it says no more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days or an old person who does not live out a lifetime for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered a cursed and I could go on into they shall build houses and inhabit them plant bin yards and eat their fruit they shall not build in another inhabit they shall not plant in another eat and so on so this this is um you know it's sort of a passage in Isaiah that seems to speak of a glorious new creation and and the prosperity and health and the good living that will be associated with that um so where do you put these these sorts of parts of Isaiah within your view of a new heaven and new earth Tom how does it fit in I I as I 65 and 66 does actually emphasize as you say the physicality of the new creation and the I that stuff about planting bin yards and and drinking the fruit and building houses and living in them is a way of saying to Deuteronomy that we will be or you will be the true covenant people as always promised because that's the echo of Deuteronomy that part of the curse in Deuteronomy which comes on the people when they're going to be wicked is that they will build houses and someone else will live in

them that they will plant vineyards and somebody else will drink the wine etc etc so it's a way of saying God will put it all right at the end now the New Testament picks up those themes and translates them into an even bigger cosmic extraordinary event as in Romans 8 or 1st Corinthians 15 or Revelation 21 and 22 so that the idea that you might now in the new creation live for 100 years and a bit more perhaps and then die no actually in the new creation there will be no more death itself Isaiah is setting up a signpost to point to that but the way that Isaiah can envisage it is still within a world where there would be death and it seems to me the New Testament takes the energy of that and goes to where those signposts are pointing not to deny them but to say but actually the fulfillment is even more remarkable that there will be a whole new creation which will be a time of rich fruitfulness and blessing and that will be just the most amazing thing now I take it that the point about dispensationalism would be that the dispensationalists and I'm not an expert on that would want to say ah that's a specific promise about something that's going to happen in Jerusalem and it hasn't happened yet so we're still looking for perhaps in the present state of Israel the present state of Israel to become that sort of a place and insofar as some dispensationalists might say that I would say that's a wooden literal misreading of Isaiah and we ought to interpret Isaiah like we interpret the whole scriptures in the light of what Paul says in Second Corinthians all the promises of God find their yes in Christ and in Christ we see the fulfillment of all these things and supremely with his death and resurrection through which the new world is generated in which there will be no more death and in which there will be a rich new creation for all to share Well final question for today's podcast Tom and I did say it's a bit of a hodgepodge of subject so we did at least have something a little bit thematic there new creation and so on with those first two questions this one though from Caleb in Alberta says thanks for all your great work on the podcast it's really helped me to rediscover the beauty of theology and also has given me a lot to think on and my question is about the importance of baptism my girlfriend is not baptized but she is a Christian I've been trying to encourage her to get baptized and I don't want to say it's mandatory but it seems like scripture would say it's mandatory I don't want to think that I don't think she's a Christian but I don't know how to encourage her on the seriousness of baptism could you shed some light on this a bonus would be if you could say how this might affect the way we preach the gospel as well well well obviously we don't know a great deal about this situation only what Caleb has told us here or indeed his girlfriend but yeah what is it how important is it for someone to be baptized if they are a Christian Tom? The whole New Testament assumes that Christians will be baptized now of course there are exceptions when Jesus turns to the brigand who is dying beside him on the cross and says today you will be with me in paradise I mean some of the some of the early church theologians wrestled with that one because this guy hadn't been baptized and so they said well he was baptized in his own blood and I think one of the reformers I remember reading went along with that but the implication was some sort of baptism is necessary but that's kind of extrapolation out from the general New Testament teaching believing in baptized being being baptized you see it in Acts 8 when Philip goes and joins

the Ethiopian eunuch and his chariot and they're reading the prophet Isaiah and Philip explains about Jesus and the eunuch says I believe it and by the way here's some water right by the road can I be baptized and Philip says yeah sure they baptize him then then and there that is strange to us because the Ethiopian is going back to a community that has no church in it so is he joining the church well we hope you've gone tell other people about Jesus but baptism it's a mystery to us in the modern world because we have so much made Christianity about my personal faith my sense of the presence of God that why do I need this rather odd outward thing and the answer is because God believes in odd outward things he's the God of creation and creation in the New Testament comes rushing to its climax in the death and the resurrection of Jesus that really is for the Christians the fulcrum on which everything in creation turns and baptism in Romans 6 is about dying with Christ and being raised with Christ it means being part of the new creation leaving behind the world of the old and it resonates out into the communities why I always used to say baptism is not something we do to this one candidate it's something that the whole church does again and again and again and when new candidates come they are enfolded into this practice it's a way of saying we are the people who are defined by the death and resurrection of Jesus and that's not something just that we think about it's who we are physically as we await the resurrection of the body so I want to say this is enormously important in ways that our culture has found it very difficult often to appreciate and sometimes in reaction other people have talked about baptism as though it's a kind of magic I'm going to splash water on this child and that means that he or she is automatically a Christian or saved or whatever then others have reacted against that and said oh you don't need to be baptized you just need to believe and then whatever and I want to say please can we move to maturity away from these interreactions and I think then it will be a matter of Caleb saying to his pastor you know we're having this interesting conversation this lady and I and I wonder if we could come and have a chat with you about it and I don't know what church he goes to but presumably that's something that will be possible and ideally it will be a way of saying this family is publicly visibly demonstrably marked by the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah and we'd love you to be part of that family and that's really what it's all about yes it sort of links into me in the same way that people sometimes say well I don't need to go to church to be a Christian and there's a sense in which you could say well I don't need to be baptized to be a Christian but it's about how we're supposed to live and act in the world the way that God wants us to to be a Christian it's like supposing a teenage child says I don't want to eat at the same table as you lot I'm just going to grab a sandwich and eat it up in my room well okay you are still part of the family but actually one of the things that most families do is to eat together and the decline of that is actually a very sociologically and personally damaging thing so one could say to the child okay you know fine that's all right we miss you and we would hope that sooner or later you might miss being around the table with us and and there are other things that families do instinctively as it were together which if you suddenly broke that then something amiss even if we couldn't quite articulate it and I think church life is a bit like

that too. Well all the best is you have that conversation together Caleb and thanks for the other questions that have come in as I say a bit of a hodgepodge of theological issues today but it's been good to go over them and have some welcome interruptions as well from the younger members of the family as well in the podcast today so Tom thank you very much for your time and we'll see you again next time.

[Music] So good to have had you with us for today's edition of the show and next time looking at questions on whether Jesus could have been female it's an interesting one isn't it and marriage too we'll be having some of your questions on that just a reminder that today's show was brought to in partnership with Premier, NtRight Online and SBCK and SBCK Tom's UK publisher do you have some great deals on Tom's book for pop podcast listeners so links are in the show notes more about the show as ever from askntright.com where you can find links to our unbelievable conference on Saturday the 15th of May where Tom is a keynote speaker that's all from me for now see you next time.