

# OpenTheo

## #34 An Evening With NT Wright live in London

April 1, 2020



### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

In a bonus podcast special we bring you 'An Evening with NT Wright', hosted by SPCK and recorded live at Westminster Chapel London with an audience Q&A.

Tom speaks on 'Jesus, Paul & the question of God' before engaging in an audience Q&A moderated by Justin on questions around Coronavirus, female ministry, Paul's relationship to Jesus and much more.

- We are sorry to announce that Unbelievable? the Conference 2020 has been postponed. For more details: [www.unbelievable.live](http://www.unbelievable.live)
- Support the show and receive NT Wright's brand new E-book '12 Answers to questions about the Bible, Life and Faith' <https://resources.premier.org.uk/supportntwright/>
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## Transcript

[Music] Well hello and welcome to another edition of the show that brings you the thought and theology of Tom Wright. It's a partnership between Premier SBCK Publishing and NT Wright online and coming to you at present from lockdown of course. I'm Justin Briley, theology and apologetics editor for Premier.

Live from my home in Surrey and I hope you caught up with last week's edition recorded with Tom from his home in Oxford when he was responding to my questions to him on coronavirus. So much great feedback and appreciation for that show including the YouTube video we released of it as well which is up over at the ask NT Wright dot com

website if you want to watch last week's show. Glad to say actually that we recently surpassed one million total downloads of the show as a podcast that since we launched so thank you so much for listening and asking your questions and being involved with the show.

The other good news is we've a number of editions of the show in the can and ready to be released despite lockdown so you will continue to get your fortnightly dose of the ask NT Wright anything podcast. In fact bringing you a few extras actually over the next couple of weeks and today's show is the evening with NT Wright that I hosted in London a few weeks ago before the travel and gathering restrictions were imposed in London but Tom does share some thoughts there on the coronavirus as the situation stood then. So I hope you enjoy this week's episode.

Great time as well of course to register at the website and get access to asking your own question on a future show the bonus content and the current competition we're running to win one of three signed copies of Paul a biography. Go and do that at ask NT Wright dot com and if you're able to support the show financially you'll get our exclusive ebook 12 questions and answers on life and faith from Tom Wright that's exclusive to the ask NT Wright anything show. For now thanks for listening and we cross to Westminster Chapel London for an evening with NT Wright organised by SBCK and which I had the privilege of hosting and leading the Q&A for.

Happy listening. Good evening thank you very much Alexandra it's a real pleasure to be here and I would just echo Alexandra's comments thank you so much for coming out tonight in uncertain times but yes that old British motto keep calm and carry on applies I think tonight. It's great to be with you as Alexandra said I'm privileged to spend a bit of time with Tom every so often because we sit down to record a podcast together called the ask NT Wright anything podcast.

Tom is a highly sought after speaker he has held many academic posts over the years he of course is former Bishop of Durham among many other things most recently he moved to Oxford with his wife Maggie for a well for who knows how long but the what his current title is I think is research professor research fellow sorry at Wickliffe Hall and that means that he gets to interact with students but also gets time to do some research as well along the way. Tom has written many many books far too many for me to mention here but tonight especially he'll be focusing on some of what he's been working on most recently with his major titles Paul, a biography history and eschatology and the New Testament in its world and I believe copies of all of them are available tonight. Before I invite Tom up to give his talk shall we just have a quick moment of prayer as we give tonight to God.

We thank you Lord Jesus that we can meet here tonight but we do know that it is under unusual circumstances in this nation and around the world and so we simply ask for your

spirit of peace and your presence to be with us as we meet. Thank you that you are the Prince of Peace and even in a time of fear and apprehension your spirit is with us. I pray that tonight whatever is spoken the questions that shared the thoughts that come to our minds may enable us to be lights in this world.

We pray in your name. Tom do you come up and do give a round of applause. Good evening.

Thank you very much Justin. Thank you very much Alexander. Thank you all for coming here.

I'll be the third person to say these are unusual times and well done for braving it and coming out and so on and I've had messages from friends this morning saying what you doing going to London it's too crowded there you should stay safely in Oxford etc. Let me tell you Oxford is pretty crowded right now as well so but I'm delighted to be with you and to be in Westminster Chapel. I think I've spoken in Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral and Westminster Central Hall so this makes it makes a four or four I guess completing a sort of circle and this was a famous place certainly many years ago when I was a student and Martin Lloyd Jones is preaching here my goodness this was this was a pilgrim place from for people from all over the world anyway I've been asked this evening to talk about this very nice little title Jesus Paul and the people of God and it's a kind of a how long have we got moment but that is obviously what I've been writing about for the last 50 years and particularly the three books that have been mentioned the biography of Paul this big fat one called the New Testament in its world which Mike Bird and I put together really as a book to give to somebody who says do you know I've been reading the Bible for a while and I'm getting a certain amount out of it but I have a feeling if I knew a bit more about the background and context etc it might make more sense and we want to say absolutely it will and here's the book to help you so that's the plug for that one the book called history and eschatology is very different and it's the one that's got the the picture which tonight's logo is taken from on it and that's perhaps a more searching book about where we are in contemporary culture and where the people of God particularly in the Western world has been where the Christian church has been over the last 200 years and why we've wrestled with the questions that we have wrestled with and that's been something I've been fascinated by but I want to plunge back with all of this in mind because the challenge of our times it seems to me is to put back together again what should never really have been separated so often when Christians talk about big issues of their faith or big issues of contemporary life or personal life they very carefully separate what we have come to call the supernatural from the natural and we think of natural in terms of secularism in terms of this worldliness and supernatural in terms of God and heaven and Jesus and so on and there's a great gulf between them and one of the things I have most should most securely learned over the years that I've been working on Jesus Paul and the people of God particularly the first century context is that that split has philosophical roots which

have nothing to do with the Jewish and Christian worlds but rather go back to the ancient philosophy of Epicureanism which enjoyed a massive revival in the 18th and 19th centuries and which is so much part of the air that we breathe that we don't even realize it's there but it's popped up now and again more explicitly with people who say you know Jesus can't have been both divine and human he must have been one or the other and people regularly get stuck in what are basically 18th century debates of that sort and we some of the questions later on will perhaps deal with that and sometimes this gets muddled up with political issues not so much in Britain because we tend not to do that but in America and I go to America a certain amount and I expect there's quite a few Americans here tonight very often the people who want to emphasize the supernatural tend to be on the political right and the people who want to emphasize the natural tend to be on the political left and so those Christian questions or would-be Christian questions have got muddled up with culture wars and all sorts of stuff so that it just becomes very very confusing and in the middle of all of that what I have really learned and want to share with you is that actually history can come to our rescue and there are many Christians who are frightened of history because they've been told about some scholars in this century or the previous one who've said oh we the historians will show you that Jesus was just a good Jewish boy who would have been horrified to have a church founded in his name or we the historians will show you that Paul was just a muddled Jew who got it all wrong etc etc and I want to say actually history as it as it properly should be and I've written about that in various places how we do history history is about learning to think into the minds of people who think differently to ourselves famous quotation from a century or more ago the past is a foreign country they do things differently there but let me tell you the past particularly the past of the first century is where a young Jewish prophet called Jesus from Nazareth came into Galilee saying it's time for God to become king and within 30 or 40 years some of his followers were saying things like he is the image of the invisible God in other words we we can't see God when we look at Jesus then we're discovering who God really is or John says in magnificently at the end of his prologue in his gospel he says no one has ever seen God the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father there's a textual variant there but we'll put that to one side for the moment the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father he has made him known in other words we're taking this extraordinary daring risky step of saying you can't start with God you know so many people today try to start with God we'll prove that there is a God we'll prove that there is a supernatural we'll prove that miracles happen or something and then we'll fit Jesus into that my friends you can't do that no one has ever seen God Jesus has revealed how do we know who Jesus is well we have these gospels and we have these gospels within first century history they mean what they mean within that world and if we want to know who God is we have to know who Jesus is and if we want to know who Jesus is we have to make the pilgrimage back to the first century at this point somebody is bound to be thinking are you saying that in order to be a Christian you have to be able to read Tacitus and Suetonius or Plato and Aristotle or whatever and the answer is no that might

help or it might not actually but you have to be prepared to do the work of thinking into what the New Testament meant in its context only so will you understand the basic things like what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God is at hand and what Paul meant in his extraordinary teaching about Jesus about God about the world about salvation etc these were explicitly first century things this is why older generations of clergy always had a copy of the Jewish historian Josephus on their shelves because you needed to read Josephus available in Penguin Classic translations today and I recommend him seriously seriously read it like a novel because Josephus is a funny old guy he's a younger contemporary of Paul he's got all sorts of odd agendas he's very clever and he was there he was around in Jerusalem through the 40s and 50s he was there first as a participant and then a spectator in the disastrous Roman Jewish war of 66 to 70 and then he went off to Rome on an imperial pension and wrote up the story in retrospect and even though he gets some things muddled there's so much that he tells you about what it was like being a Jew in the first century and even though he's not he's not the Bible he's not canonical as it were you can learn an enormous amount from going back through him or the Dead Sea Scrolls or many of the other documents that we've now got quite readily accessible and discovering the history in the middle of which we find Jesus and Paul and that trembling almost unbelievable phenomenon which we call the early church people going out into the unknown here is a whole new world opening before them nobody has been this way before what's it gonna look like what are we doing here anyway and the answer is no God is commissioning you by his spirit to be the witnesses to Jesus in this world so let me just say a few things about the Jewish world into which Jesus of Nazareth came and where his message about God's kingdom makes the sense it was supposed to mean and then I'll segue into into a bit of Paul and his world and then we'll try and tie it together in terms of what this tells us about God and God's people anyway so covering a lot of things quite broadly hopefully stimulatingly and then we'll get to some questions which you've sent in and which Justin has because the two things that have struck me particularly over the last 15 or more years about the Jewish world are things that we simply don't understand ourselves in the modern world but once you grasp them it makes so much sense and the first is about heaven and earth the Bible is all about heaven in the beginning God made heaven and earth heaven and earth were designed to work together it wasn't that earth was a training ground for people who might make it to heaven it's that God made a combined world of two different sorts of what we can loosely call place or space God space and our space and they were designed to be together to work together and the reason for that was that God the Creator wanted to come and live with his people in this combined heaven and earth space what is a combined heaven and earth space in the ancient world if you said that to somebody in many different cultures certainly in Judaism they would think well you're talking about a temple a temple is in the ancient world a place where heaven and earth come together so that when you go to the temple in Jerusalem in the first century when Jesus went up to the temple when Josephus writes about the temple the temple is not just as if you were in heaven but that is the place where heaven and earth come together most

modern Western Christians I've discovered just have never learned to think like this and we think of heaven as a long way away and perhaps we have a soul that will get to heaven one day that's Plato by the way it's not early Christianity and because early Christianity like the Jewish world wants the life of heaven to come to earth which is of course what the last book in the Bible says is going to happen at the end the new Jerusalem comes to earth so that the dwelling of God is with humans so that the temple is a sort of small working model of creation only because creation has gone horribly wrong the temple is a sign and the tabernacle in the wilderness was a sign that God is going to put the creation back together again in other words the temple was a small working model of new creation a sign that just as God came and filled the tabernacle in the wilderness think of Exodus 40 or God came and filled Solomon's temple first Kings 8 with his own divine glorious presence so that the priests couldn't even stand in front of it so one day the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord like that this is a sign of what God wants to do for the whole creation I love that strand of biblical thought you see it in Psalm 72 which is the royal agenda this is what the king is supposed to do the king does justice for the poor and needy and vulnerable so that God's glory may dwell in the whole whole earth and the king likewise seconds annual seven the king is going to build the temple so that God's glory can come and live there the two somehow go together this royal vocation now when you come to the first century and say what were people expecting when they were expecting a Messiah not everyone was expecting a Messiah some just thought that was an old myth or metaphor and just meant that things might get better one day but a lot of people were expecting a Messiah and there were several different expectations and Jesus of Nazareth rides the crest of those waves but insists on steering the direction of travel very very differently but at its heart it is something about the royal vocation to put heaven and earth back together to do and be for Israel and the world what the temple was symbolizing to be the meeting place of heaven and earth when you think of Jesus as fully divine and fully human don't think in terms of fifth century or 18th century categories of divinity and humanity they're not interested in it is they're interested in reality which is the reality of heaven and earth coming together and when you have a temple in the pagan world what is the last thing that you put into that temple the answer is an image so that the God may make his or her or its influence known in the world and so that the world can worship the God when God makes his temple his heaven and earth creation he puts an image into the middle of it you and me human beings made in God that's what Genesis is all about this is why Paul says of Jesus he is the image of the invisible God he is the genuine God modeling human being through whom the world can see who God is and through whom the power and love of God can flow out into the world so the whole idea of space we just get it wrong we think it's earth down here in heaven up there or out there or somewhere no they're designed to work together to overlap and interlock even in the present against the day when they will do that completely forever and when we tell the story of Jesus we find him doing and being temple-ish things forgiving sins out on the street come to me all who are laboring and heavy laden I will give you rest rest now there's a thought what

is rest rest is Shabbat Shabbat is the Sabbath and in Jewish traditions going back to Jesus day and probably at least a generational to earlier quite possibly way back behind that though it's not so clear the Sabbath is not simply a set of Jewish rules about how you must stop work for a day and sit there feeling bored etc the Sabbath is the moment when God's eventual future arrives fleetingly and mysteriously in the present so that when you're living Shabbat you are living the kingdom of God the new age it took so that one of the teachers a bit older than Jesus time says that on Sabbath you mustn't even kill a fly or a gnat because according to Isaiah 11 in the new age all creatures will live together in peace peace and harmony so when Jesus does things on Sabbath which they didn't expect that goes with what he said when he said the time is fulfilled because Sabbath means the fleeting moment when God's future comes into the present and Jesus is in person God's future arriving in the present can we get our heads around that and if the future has arrived in the present if this somehow is the arrival of the kingdom of God then you don't need to put up these weekly signposts saying one day we'll get there because it's come to you instead like you don't put up a signpost saying this way to London in the middle of Westminster Square because you're already there so Jesus embodies those two great Jewish symbols which are eschatological symbols that is there pointing forward to God's promised future and Paul picks up exactly that with his repeated but now but now it was like that but now God has done this but now Jesus has come but now the Son of God has loved me and given himself for me and so on so Jesus announcement of the kingdom is not as so many Christians have imagined a message that there is a life after death and I'll show you the way to get there and make sure it's a happy one.

There's nothing to do with that. Of course God will look after his people after death. Of course when God makes his ultimate new creation he will raise his people from the dead that comes with the territory of first century Judaism and Jesus and Paul gladly affirm that and Jesus of course in his own resurrection was again the foretaste the beginning as Paul says again in Colossians he is the beginning the first born from the dead or in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says Jesus rises as the first fruits and then at his coming those who belong to him and so we find temple and Sabbath the temple is to space what the Sabbath is to time these are places where God's world and our world God's time and our time come together strangely or mysteriously and that is where we find Jesus and I suggest you at the end of tonight you might scurry off home and read quickly through one or two gospels and think what that might mean in some key passages because it'll play out in all sorts of ways so the kingdom of God is neither going to heaven when you die nor a mere political rearrangement of the furniture in the present time it's about God becoming king on earth as in heaven but doing it according to Jesus agenda and I was reading the book the other day from a theologian from a generational so-go who said after all Jesus just picked up the Jewish expectations of his time and didn't really alter them and he was saying that when Jesus said the kingdom is at hand he meant that the world was going to come to an end that is a modern myth you may have heard it you

may have heard scholars and others saying oh they all thought the world is going to end that's simply a misunderstanding of the Jewish normal metaphorical language for God doing at last the great thing that he'd always promised there's all sorts of reasons for that which I've explored why the misunderstanding occurred which I've explored in my book history and eschatology especially the second chapter but no they believed that it was time for the Creator God to do that great act of redeeming creation which he'd always promised and you don't redeem creation by abolishing it rather you redeem creation through as Jesus saw this very strange narrative which ends up with God incarnate the servant of the Lord suffering dying and then being raised it's all there actually in Isaiah once you see with hindsight how Isaiah actually works the new creation of Isaiah 55 is entirely dependent on the new covenant of Isaiah 54 which is entirely dependent on the work of the servant in Isaiah 53 which fulfills the promise of Isaiah 52 reading backwards you see which is that God will come back and will be king because here's the other thing which Jesus Paul were totally familiar with and which with which we are totally unfamiliar and that is the Jewish expectation of the return of Yahweh Israel's God to Zion this is the funny thing about the Old Testament God and the New Testament God that he does stuff he's alive he's active and he comes and he makes his presence known and felt in one place and not somewhere else and today's philosophers say that's very undemocratic surely if there's a God he ought to be you know equally accessible etc equally visible well in a sense yes and in a sense no he's alive he does stuff and one of the things that he did 500 or so years before was that he was so totally fed up it's there in the book of Ezekiel with what was going on in the temple at the time that he abandoned the temple the divine glory left the temple the whirling wheels of the throne chariot Ezekiel says at the end of the book chapter 43 that there will be a new temple and the teal come back but though people came back to Jerusalem some did from Babylon and they rebuilt the city and they restarted the sacrifices and they rebuilt the temple at no point did they actually say that Israel's God had come back and those are the great promises think of Isaiah 40 as some of you probably in the next few weeks will be singing Handel's Messiah and because it's that time of year people do that and I've done it many times myself yeah I had sung that opening chorus literally dozens of times and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together before I stopped to ask what it was about Isaiah 40 verse 5 it's about God coming back in glory and everybody is seeing it and that promises then picked up in Isaiah 52 when the watchmen lift up their voices and shout for joy because in plain sight they see Yahweh returning to Zion wow and then the question is what will that look like and Isaiah says let me tell you instead a poem about the servant draw your own conclusions and Jesus drew exactly that conclusion but you see the promise remains because in Malachi chapter 3 written after the so-called return from exile Malachi 3 says the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple but at no point do they say that he's come back Jesus of Nazareth seemed to have quite literally staked his life on the belief that in his public career and in his final visit to Jerusalem and in what he was going to do and suffer in Jerusalem this would be what it would look like when Israel's God came back at last and



guess what that is exactly what John says the word became flesh and tabernacle in our midst the Greek is a skeinosen which is from the Greek for tent he pitched his tent in our midst John 1 is a new Genesis in the beginning was the word it's also a new Exodus here is the tabernacle the wilderness tabernacle and it turns out to be Jesus and says John we gazed at his glory yes the glory has of God's only son full of grace and truth the glory which God promised would come back what will it look like John says read on and by the end of his book we see Jesus crucified revealing the glory of God's self-giving love that's how it works and that's where Paul picks up so out of all that Jewish culture see so much of the Jewish culture of the time was phrased in terms of God has called Israel to be the light of the world to be the people who would be the city on the hill whatever and out there there are those wicked pagans and particularly the Romans the Romans had taken over the Middle East in the middle of the first century BC when Pompey marched into Jerusalem discovered that they didn't have an image in the temple and so concluded that they were atheists I mean you know yeah you can see where he was coming from but it was kind of odd but Rome had become more and more powerful and power in the ancient world included what we call religious power it's a dodgy word religion and religious but let's live with it for the moment and the Caesar cults there were several different Caesar cults were the fastest growing religion in Paul's world and Paul went round bits and pieces of the Mediterranean world planting flags saying Jesus is Lord in territory which had been taught that Caesar was Lord and if you thought the kingdom of God was apolitical well sorry but it's differently political it's not simply one more political party among others it's a way of saying as Jesus himself says in Mark 10 the rulers of this age lorded over their subjects and their great ones bully them and exercise authority over them we're not gonna do it like that the one who wants to be great among you must be your servant the one who wants to be first must be a slave of all because the son of man didn't come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many see what happens you get the atonement theology the meaning of the cross inside the redefinition of political power or if you like to do it the other way only when you look at the cross do you discover what real power is all about I've spent this term in Oxford lecturing my way through second Corinthians which is all about this when I am weak then I am strong that shaped Paul's life ministry work etc because Paul had drunk in that whole Jewish tradition rethought around Jesus himself so that he could write that stunning poem in Philippians 2 that though Jesus was in the form of God he did not count equality with God something to exploit but instead emptied himself took upon himself the form of a servant being born in human likeness and submitting to death even the death of the cross therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every name that is a deeply Jewish piece of theology and it is right in your face to Caesar and John does exactly the same thing because the climax of John's gospel is where Jesus and before the crucifixion scene itself is where Jesus and Pontius Pilate face one another the kingdom of God facing the kingdom of Caesar and what do they argue about kingdom and truth and power those three themes are every bit as relevant in the year 2020 as they were in 30 AD and we need to go back and figure out what's going on

in Jesus conversation with Pilate and what the play out of that all is if we're to understand what our responsibility might be in the contemporary world many thoughts we could play out from there I have a little book called God in public in which I've tried to explore some of them so for Paul living in his world meant being a Jew but living in the Roman world and also living in the Greek world and this is something which I love to explore with Paul because he grew up in Tarsus and you know what Tarsus was it was this city in what we would call southeastern Turkey where after the Romans had smashed up Athens a century before the philosophers in Athens wondered where to go some of them went to Rome and quite a lot of them went to Tarsus saw of Tarsus grew up in a city of philosophers so he learned about the Stoics who think that the world and God are all basically the same thing he learned about and knew the Epicureans who thought that God and the world were totally different and that there was no commerce between them and that when you die you die so there's nothing to be afraid of in inverted commas and he knew about the Platonists and he knew about the Aristotelians he knew about the ideas of a soul leaving the body and going somewhere else and Paul already is a young Jew so all of Tarsus hammered out his Jewish beliefs in relation to them and then when he discovered that the Messiah of Israel embodies the wisdom of God then he re-thinks the whole thing so that as he says in 2 Corinthians 10 he takes every thought captive to obey the Messiah.

Friends that's a challenge for us as we look out in the world as we read the newspaper as we figure out what earth's going on not only with medical things but with geopolitics and and global warming and so on how do we take every thought captive to obey the Messiah rather than just being swept along on a tide of different issues and hoping that we can do a bit of Christianity on the side we've got to think holistically as Jesus himself taught us to and as Paul urged his his followers to his readers to in Romans 12 he says don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind you need the renewed mind not so that you can inhabit a different space to which the concerns of earth are irrelevant that's that old split again but in order to understand God's real world within God's larger real world and to see that it all does make sense because in Jesus God has launched his new creation and he's invited us not just to be beneficiaries through receiving his salvation but to be agents it is as though when you become a Christian God is saying welcome to the family now we in this family are image bearers and this is what we have to do we have to reflect the love and grace and mercy of God into the world and we have to reflect the worship of the creation back to God and so out of all this there is this amazing picture of God which is growing up I just finished as I say lecturing on second Corinthians and at the end of that letter Paul says one of those one liners which we all probably know so well that we forget where it comes from rather like people who go to a performance of Hamlet and then come out complaining it was full of quotations because there's so many famous one liners in it but at the end of second Corinthians Paul says the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all and you all know that as well as I do

because that sums up what that letter and what all of Paul's theology is about and people say were they Trinitarians well they didn't use the language that was used four centuries later about substances and natures and so on but they were Jews who believed in the one God but who had discovered that the one God is not a numerical isolated separated monotheism in that sense but a differentiated monotheism so that Jesus calls God Abba Father and Jesus pours out his own spirit upon his followers so that as Paul says in Galatians chapter 4 when we were slaves God sent his son to redeem us and then God sent his spirit to dwell in our hearts and then he says chapter 4 verse 8 now that you have come to know God or rather be known by God how can you turn back to what is the equivalent of paganism again already in Galatians which I think is the first book of the New Testament to be written you either have an incipient doctrine of the Trinity or you have some form of paganism that's the challenge and that's the excitement of theology it's not just about learning funny old phrases that people used but we really don't quite understand them these days it's about exploring or rather allowing the gospel and the spirit to explore in you who this God really is and he's a God who is on the move he is active he hasn't forgotten us he knows all about the coronavirus he knows all about global warming he knows all about the new creation which has been launched in Jesus and by his spirit is at work in and through us so that like Jesus we too are called to be small working models of new creation against the day when God will do what only God will do we have to build signs of the kingdom in the present so that when God builds God's kingdom those signs will turn out in retrospect to have been true signs I've spoken for long enough we've got time now for Justin to come and talk to me thank you for your patience and attention obviously much more I could have talked about but hope you've enjoyed that and that you'll enjoy the questions to follow thank you very much thank you thank you Tom that was really great thanks so we're just gonna take a few minutes now to put the chairs on and just get things set up and for some of you who are here at the beginning we were playing some videos to tell you a bit more about SPCA because we're not just about publishing books but SPCA does lots of other things as well so we're just gonna tell you about some of SPCA's programs so if you can play the videos we'll set the chairs up and then the chats will come up and we'll carry on talking thank you if you run a home group we have a website launching soon that is going to change your life but you want to home groups are life-giving and life affirming I think home groups are really great because I've made a lot of friends they're good fun they're really good fun you get to share and get to know each other the opportunity to share a spiritual journey with people from different perspectives and different ages but they can also be time-consuming tracking down the right content or stressful make a decision on what discussion topics to introduce having the time to find the resources online is just really stressful trying to get it all planned up and ready ready to go on the evening you don't want the organizing and the practicalities and the logistics of it to squeeze out what it's really about and that's where home groups comes in it's a website designed to help you it's easy and has everything you could ever need to run a fulfilling home group topical blogs courses crafted for different interests and

dynamics further reading recommendations and detailed studies reviews and even recipes and it'll only take minutes instead of hours to source your content leaving you free to spend time with your kids or go on that job planning my home group using the home groups website is just going to be a complete lifesaver you just know that that resource hub is there and you can go to it quickly get what you need and then the rest of your time can be spent doing the discipleship building the relationships doing what it's really all about I really like the idea of having a home groups website it's saved me so much time if you like the sound of home groups to order UK go on our website and sign up now you have the time to give us some feedback on the site and be one of the first people to use it when it goes live why not share it with your friends and get them involved in its development to we want to make sure that it works for you we'll be launching the website very soon and we're looking forward to supporting you in your journey to forge true connections deeper knowledge in an ever-growing church community good well we're going to take our chairs now and we've got a number of questions that have come in but you were just saying Tom just as the videos were on just just how much things have changed in your time and this was the resources available at people's fingertips these days yeah I mean when I was first ordained and one of the things young clergy would be told to do would be go and take an assembly in the primary school next door and you shiver nervously what on earth am I going to do and there might be some resources in a local bookshop or something but nothing remotely like this is quite extraordinary we are blessed in so many ways but before we launch into some of these quite deep theological questions and thank you for the brilliant questions that have been submitted tonight I just wanted to go to a more practical issue which is obviously been referenced a few times already but we are living in uncertain times this coronavirus everyone's not quite sure where it's going to go what's going to happen I think I sense a lot of fear and anxiety actually among people and I just wondered from your perspective pastorally how as Christians should we be responding to this and maybe what are some of the lessons from the past that you would say we should be looking to when it comes to the way we live our lives in the midst of this it's a good question because I have tended until literally the last couple of days to take the line that you said before you know where British keep calm and carry on as though you know yeah there's people making a fuss out there and actually I know it's very serious I have a friend whose pastor of a church in Tehran in Iran just down the road from where the main hospital is where people are dying and I'm getting emails from him on a daily basis so I'm very much aware there's a very serious issue but we in Britain tend to feel insulated isolated from that sort of thing yeah it's happening a long way away foreign countries about whom we know little to coin who was that Chamberlain said that somebody under and actually normal Christian life over the last 2000 years has regularly involved facing earthquakes wars rumors of wars famines floods and yes major epidemics plagues one of the features that you see in the second and third and fourth centuries is and people commented on this as they would that when a plague would strike a city and people would be very sick and a lot of people would be dying all those

who could afford to who are rich enough to including the doctors would get out and flee to the hills and leave the swamp infested town to do its own thing the Christians would stay and nurse people and sometimes the Christians would catch the plague and die as well but sometimes actually they would nurse people back to health and when the human cry died down people say what was that about why did you do that and they would say well we follow this man called Jesus and we just think this is what we're here for and that that was one among many things which made people realize oh my goodness this is a different way to live now because we haven't had to face this kind of thing we haven't faced those sorts of challenges and I'm not a doctor it's easy for me to say this I'm not writing an agenda for myself at the moment I think as well though that Jesus in Mark 13 and so on says there'll be wars and rumors of wars and all sorts of famines and goodness knows what and the early church just lived with that we in the modern west have had the sort of assumption that it's a post-enlightenment assumption that we've got modern technology and modern medicine so basically everything ought to be all right there should be nothing out there which we can't in principle fix and now suddenly it'll take a year or more to develop a vaccine well g thanks and now what we're going to do and I think psychology people are not prepared for that but what I'm saying is actually this puts us on the map of normality into which the Lord's prayer suddenly becomes relevant you know thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven and as much as obviously we want to take this very seriously it may also be an opportunity for the church to be a light in well yes I mean I think I think to show an appropriate way of approaching the very real fear of death etc and because we haven't had a war on our own territory in my lifetime you know we haven't been used to thinking that in the way that that quite as pressing a crisis as perhaps this exactly but I mean I was reading a piece in the paper some you probably saw it I think it was yesterday about the so-called Spanish flu in 1917-1918 when one of my great uncles died of spanish say so-called Spanish flu because that was an accident of calling it Spanish it wasn't actually Spanish it was all over the place but that was massive that was just extraordinary and many people who'd managed to stagger their way through the war without getting shot to pieces then died of this you just think oh what's that about and when you're faced with tragedies like that then I think the thing that it calls fourth which we've not been terribly good at doing is lament and the biblical tradition of lament which is there all over the place in the Psalms obviously but in many of the prophets and then in a passage like Romans 8 is precisely there so that when we do not know how to pray as we ought because it's so dire then we invoke the Holy Spirit to enable us to lament knowing that actually this is God's lament as well and it's I was reading a book just the other day which was expounding Jesus tears at the tomb of Lazarus even though Jesus knew he was going to raise Lazarus it's still appropriate to weep and I think we can live into stories like that and just hold on to it without seeking a resolution just stay there and lament and weep if you need to that will be the first thing brilliant thank you so much let's go to some of the questions because rather than us spending too much time with with my questions about this I thought we might as well dive into as many of these as we

can and lots of them are very relevant to what you presented just a moment ago one of the most common questions that actually come in comes in for you Tom especially on the podcast we do together is around your view of heaven salvation and justification as well they're all sort of mixed in together very often and I'm just going to give you a couple here that are sort of linked in that way firstly Aiden asks I read history in eschatology and was persuaded by the argument that going to heaven is not a useful concept and that we should think of the Kingdom of God coming to a new creation in this context what does the word justification mean for example Romans chapter 3 is someone justified by faith a citizen of the new kingdom or is justification more like a document supporting an application for citizenship and a similar sort of question from Keith in God will mean sorry says how and when are we justified does your work imply two stages now and in the future so yeah I mean the short answer to that last one is that Paul himself talks about future justification and present justification and future justification is that when God finally does what we still wait and hope and pray for God to do which is to complete the work of that was begun and launched in Jesus so you get a scenario like first Corinthians 15 which climaxes with God being all in all which clearly isn't yet the case when God does that and raises his people from the dead that will be the public visible manifestation that these people really are in the right there his people they have forgiven etc etc they're part of his covenant family but that verdict of the last day is anticipated in the present when as a result of the gospel somebody believes in Jesus as Lord and believes in their heart that God raised him from the dead so that's the present justification and Paul is quite clear this isn't just about a heavenly law court a kind of abstract disembodied forensic setting it's about how you know who the people of God are and that's hugely important in the early church because Paul is going out and telling people of all sorts of every race and kindred and tribe and tongue you can get his hands on about Jesus and naturally they want to say especially the early Jewish believers who are very nervous about this but but hang on are you saying their children of Abraham Paul says yes you bet their children of Abraham over there haven't been circumcised that doesn't matter the Messiah's died and been raised we have a new sort of family but it is the family God promised to Abraham and as soon as you believe you're part of it and it is the forgiven family whose sins have been dealt with on the cross etc so it's not just about me having this thing called righteousness which means that God now likes me he might not have done before that would be a very curious way of putting it but some people do put it like that it's about God's declaration that everybody Jew and Greeks, slave and free male and female who believes the gospel is equally part of this single family that's the ecumenical doctrine that's the bizarre thing justification by faith isn't just something we ought to be able to agree about across denominational barriers it is the doctrine that says that everyone who believes in Jesus belongs at the same table no matter what their background is so that present justification defines the church as well as assuring of final justification which is then cognate with salvation does that make sense yeah what one other thing I've often put it like this God has promised throughout Scripture to put the world right the idea of putting right is the same linguistically as

justification it just is a different route in English linguistically in Greek it's the same God has promised to put the whole world right in the present time he puts people right by the gospel in the spirit so that they can then be part of his putting right purpose for the world both as models this is what it's going to be like and as agents you've got a job to do so justification and justice belong very closely together without losing anything I think of the traditional reform doctrine but putting it in its biblical context so the next obvious question that a lot of people have is then what part does the cross and the atonement play in that process and there's a question here from Nathan who comes from Cornwall and says surely the affirmation of Christus Victor as central to the atonement doesn't mean that penal substitution isn't key do you deny that God has wrath against him when that's so clear throughout Scripture and adds please don't dodge the question of Roth okay I don't believe in dodging questions especially about Roth I mean I'm with those theologians who say unless God hates child abuse genocide etc God is not a good God you know God must be angry at the many many wicked things which people do many wicked things which I do many things you all do if God doesn't hate those God is not a good God God is not just a benevolent old grandfather speaking is now a benevolent old grandfather myself I know what that's like and God is not like that God actually sees what's happening and hate is one word for it grief will be another and I think the grief of God you know when God sees the wickedness of the world in the days of Noah it grieves him to his heart and that grief of God continues and I think if we're going to talk about Roth we need to talk about grief as well so the question I'm not sure if you all understood that but the idea of Christus Victor is central to the New Testament that is to say it's a Latin tag which means that Jesus the Messiah has won the victory it's what a Messiah is supposed to do all the way back to King David remember before he even became publicly King what did you do he goes and kills Goliath that's a symbol of what then the King is expected to do defeat the enemy that is oppressing or enslaving the people of God okay how does Jesus do that because the New Testament is quite clear that he does do it Paul says on the cross he disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example you know there are dark forces out there we don't have good language for the powers of darkness they didn't have good language for them in the first century because actually the powers of darkness are a kind of a category mistake they weren't part of God's good creation they are what happens when powers within the God given world are worshipped by humans who then give them puff them up into being dominant powers over us but then they then rule over us and you can give them fancy names like Mammon and Mars and Aphrodite you know money war and sex whatever they dominate people by making them worship them because they think this is the way to gain power or fun or prestige or whatever and then the sin which results from that is the lock which the powers have on us and on the world when Jesus dies in the place of sinners some version of penal substitutions Romans 8 3 is I think the clearest passage then that breaks the hold which the powers have on the world so that it isn't as many have imagined either Christus Victor or some form of substitution many there are many kinds of penal substitution some are clearly not biblical you know God so hated the world that

he killed Jesus that isn't biblical but many people that's what they've heard often in Sunday school too bad but there is a form of penal substitution and Christus Victor operates through appropriate biblical substitution the way the gospels do that is very interesting they don't do it by theory they do it by narrative that Jesus takes the place of Barabbas Jesus and the dialogue with the bringer and on the cross next to Jesus and so on and so on so so we need both and it's in that both that then there's a song which has that line the wrath of God is satisfied that's an attempt to deal with a bit of Isaiah 53 but it's actually decontextualized and it can easily sound as though this is just a malevolent angry God I used to tell people you want to sing that okay every other time you sing it please sing the love of God was satisfied because that is equally true and actually more so copyright allowing but yes I understand that the sentiment entirely these are huge questions these are very much thumbnail sketches of responses to all of these but why don't we move on to Jesus and Paul because a few questions have come in as to how we put what Paul represented and what Jesus and Torton did together firstly just some sort of kind of informational questions really there's one here from Catherine in Surrey who asks how did Paul get his information about Jesus's teaching and another one Keith asks why does Paul say so little about the life of Jesus I thought those were sort of related questions yeah how much did Paul know about Jesus and his teachings and and his life yeah we don't we don't know that much about how Paul got his information we do think many of us think that Luke was a companion of Paul on some of his journeys at least we because we think that Luke was the author of Acts and that it looks as though the we passages in Acts this is the traditional reading many have tried to pull away from it but we keep coming back to it some of us anyway and that Luke was doing research that Luke had at least early drafts of Mark or something like that but also that there was a lot of what we would call oral tradition around it's very interesting I was talking to some of the other day and I forget who it was and said this about one of the junior royals who had been told just up the road here in Buckingham Palace who'd been told as a young man remember that whenever you talk to anybody you will never remember what they say but they will remember for the rest of their lives what you say to them even if it's trivial because they will go straight home and say oh do you know what Prince so and so said to me and they will remember it and in the same way when Jesus was going around Palestine doing all the things that he did people would be astonished and they would immediately tell their neighbors about it and what you've told five people down the street you probably remember and so there was an immense amount of oral tradition and I think Paul will have easily tapped into that not necessarily through having too many written sources but just an awful lot going on there's one particular point in Galatians chapter one when he says that he went to Jerusalem to it's a difficult Greek word to translate it's hysterecyte to talk to Siphah's to Peter that is probably about okay I want to catch up on some of the detail here which I may have missed as one scholar said if he was with Peter for ten days in Jerusalem presumably they didn't spend the whole time talking about the weather you know the chances are there was some exchange of information but then the second question is it's really interesting because Paul doesn't



often quote as if they were ethical rulings of Jesus he does sometimes as in 1st Corinthians 7 and others but what he does is to see the whole life of Jesus as the messianic achievement climaxing in the cross and resurrection so when he's talking about the crucified and risen Messiah then this sums up everything about the earlier life of Jesus and actually in doing that he is being true to the same impulse that the gospel writers themselves have because they tell the story of Jesus as the story which climaxed on the cross and was then freshly interpreted through the resurrection so that even though we don't hear about the parables and Jesus miracles and so on I think Paul is taking that for granted and subsuming it under the messianic achievement now obviously a lot of people have said that what Paul ended up doing was effectively creating what we know as Christianity and it was rather different to Jesus and there's a question along those lines from Andrew who asks did Paul preach the same gospel as Jesus yeah and the answer to that is yes no of course like many of the best questions what do you mean by the same gospel Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand and that is the good news track back to Isaiah 52, Isaiah 40 which are the good news passages in Isaiah and that is the gospel this is the time for God to become king and Jesus is saying therefore join the movement come with me and watch this is how it's going to happen but this is before the crucifixion what Paul does is he looks back at those events and says God has now done this God has revealed his saving power and love and righteousness in the death and resurrection of Jesus so it's the same message but from the other end of the telescope if you like from a different perspective or another image which I found very helpful is that Jesus is like the composer who has written the amazing oratorio and Paul is like the conductor who's going around the world gathering choirs and getting them to sing it and so Paul's job is not to rewrite the oratorio that would be disloyal but so the fact that he's doing something different to Jesus doesn't mean that oh dear Paul is muddling it up or making up a different thing there are different roles and sometimes that question implies that Jesus and Paul are really teachers of us of a way of religion or a way of being spiritual or a way of getting to heaven and that they don't seem to be doing it the same way and that's not the point just like people say oh well Jesus preached about God but then Paul preached about Jesus ah but yeah there's there was an easy slur from liberal theologians of a previous generation the point is Jesus taught about God in order to explain what he himself was doing Paul talked about Jesus in order to explain what God himself had done you know this fits together it's a different role the thing that I think Paul is different in is that he is taking this message out into the wider world Jesus said that would happen but Jesus never addressed what it would look like you know Jesus says many will come from East and West sit down at the table with Abraham Isaac and Jacob and you might have expected that somebody would pop up from the crowd and say but Jesus will they have to be circumcised that's the question the Paul faced and you can imagine in the early church people inventing sayings of Jesus to fit this you know circumcision is made for man not man for circumcision or something like that perhaps not that but that never happens so Paul is facing new situations and he has to teach people to think through these new situations on the basis of the facts and

the meaning of those facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus so Paul is doing a different kind of task but it is the task that was necessarily bequeathed him by the achievement of Jesus himself so there is differentiation but appropriate differentiation turning to Paul himself and his wrote to Damascus moment Matthew from London asks I've heard you describe Paul's conversion or encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus in psychological rather than supernatural terms could you say a little more about what you think happened to Paul and why you think the text lends itself to your interpretation yeah I'm not sure whether psychological rather than supernatural comes from but as I said right at the beginning this evening I'm very suspicious of the word supernatural because in the last two centuries it's been co-opted into that either or that's either something coming down from upstairs or it's something coming up from below and kind of of the twain shall meet the word supernatural has a long history but in the Middle Ages what it meant was that God is always at work in what we call the natural world and that sometimes God does surprising and unexpected things within that world but that's not a supernatural over against natural and when you have that polarization be instantly suspicious this is the modern retrieval of epicureanism's striking again so I'm worried about that because I don't think that's representing what I would have actually said however God I mean I have this sort of silly belief that God can do whatever God wants if God is God this just sort of makes sense but that regularly because God loves human beings and they are made in God's image when God acts in someone's life one of the things that is happening even if it's shocking and sudden and you seem to be totally passive is that God will be working in a sense with the grain of the person and no doubt to change and direct and rebuke and warn and send them back in the other direction but there's still something about that person which God is using and working with so that I have suggested and it is only a suggestion you can't prove it that Paul has a devout Pharisee in the late 20s early 30s as a young man one of the things he does is pray and one of the things we know about Jewish prayer in roughly this period is that one of the ways that people meditated and prayed was on the first chapter of Ezekiel and Paul is on a long journey we don't know whether he's on a horse as in Caravaggio or whether he's just walking but he's on this long journey and he may well be praying he may be meditating on Ezekiel 1 the throne chariot and when you meditate on Ezekiel 1 you start with the whirling wheels and you pray your way up in the hope and the prayer that one day please God you might be allowed to see the figure sitting on the throne this by the way wasn't my own idea I've met it in other scholars as well that it's quite plausible that Paul was praying like that and that when he arrived at the figure on the throne it was Jesus and that it's supposed to be God and then it's then it's Jesus and that would be quite enough to knock him off his horse if he was on one to blind him because it means simultaneously that everything he has ever believed is validated and true and everything he has ever believed is turned totally upside down and side out and we don't need to create a sort of dichotomy between the psychological and supernatural in that theory of course that that God will be using that and that yes that does things too and in his psyche but it isn't then and either or let's turn to some questions around women and

ministry and Paul because this has come in for a number of different people so there's a few questions I'd like us to get to here often one of the most sort of interesting controversial areas obviously here's a couple that are very much related here Julia in London asks how can you help Christian women overcome the destructive interpretation of Paul's teachings about how they should behave and be treated and Alexandra in Fulham says what would Paul think about the modern-day debate about women in ministry yeah I mean there is one passage which is very well known towards the end of First Timothy chapter two and part of the problem is that it uses one or two words which are either unique to the New Testament or or certainly very rare and which actually can have several different meanings that's in verse 12 of First Timothy chapter I won't go to the Greek here because I suspect that not everybody in this room is familiar with Greek but the the the problem there is taking that verse out of context where it seems to be saying look there are gender stereotypes for men that they're always rowing and fighting and shoving each other you know like the Scotland France rugby match the other day did you watch that that's the classic thing of what Paul is saying you shouldn't behave like and that the stereotype of women is that they should be sort of meek and mild and concentrate on their hairdos and their jewelry etc and Paul is saying let's get let's let's rule out those gender stereotypes the men shouldn't behave like this and the women shouldn't behave as though that's all they are and when he says that the woman should learn and should have the space to learn this is extraordinary this is like Mary and Martha Mary's crime is not just not helping Martha with washing up it's that she is sitting with the disciples listening to Jesus teaching which means she is becoming a disciple and you become a disciple in order then to be a teacher yourself etc etc because woven in through the New Testament again and again are strands about women and what they do and what Jesus and Paul expect them to do which make it quite clear that the way we have read a passage like first Timothy 2 cannot be right and I mean cannot be right think of Romans 16 where Paul commends Phoebe who is a deacon in the church in Ken Krayai she is carrying the letter to the Romans to Rome now the less the Romans in my humble opinion is the most important letter ever written by a human being and it is entrusted to a businesswoman from the Eastern port of Corinth who is traveling to Rome on her own account it doesn't say she's with her husband or anything she may well have one or two assistants servant slaves whatever but Phoebe is the one who takes it to Rome and in that culture the person who took the letter is pretty likely I would say 75% likely to be the one who would read it out and the one who would interpret it when people said what did he mean by that so that I would say a 75% probability that the first person ever to expound Romans in public was a woman deacon businesswoman from Ken Krayai but then it doesn't stop there because there are other women in that list in Romans 16 which are hugely important like Junia who's an apostle but for me if I have to start the argument from the top I then start with with first Timothy I start with John 20 where Jesus does not say to Mary at the tomb Mary there's a very important announcement that needs to be made but obviously it has to be made by a man so please really go and get Peter and the others because I want to tell them to then go he says go and tell my

brothers I am ascending to my father and your father to my god and your god and it's fascinating to me that in a culture where women's testimony was not highly valued and that's an understatement Josephus says we don't allow women to give evidence in court because of the levity and folly of their sex gee thanks in that culture all four gospels have the women as the prime witnesses to the resurrection and here's the point sorry interrupting and here's the point the announcement that the crucified Jesus has been raised from the dead and is the Lord of the world is the foundation of all Christian ministry and preaching and the first person to do that is Mary Magdalene of course when people do get back to first Timothy yeah we'll read a bit further than you took us to and they will say yes I Paul commands women to learn yes but then it appears to say in silence or in full submission and and then this is this issue of and I do not permit a woman to speak and and so obviously that raises a whole set of questions about what's going on there you're conflating first Timothy to with them with the end of first Corinthians 14 I am well but I'm but but I mean it's it's it's really important because people regularly do this and they also put together with that the idea of headship from first Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5 and you can't just simply pick these passages squash them together and produce a composite because they're actually making quite different points first Corinthians 11 is difficult when he says that the the the the husband is the head of the wife has Christ is the head of the Christ the head of the man etc various theories have been propounded about that whether as he does in chapter 6 and 8 he is quoting Corinthians slogans in order to modify them I don't have an opinion on that at the moment but what I do know is that in first Corinthians 11 he assumes that women will be leading in worship and he wants them to look like women when they do so rather than like identical men or whatever and that the passage in first Corinthians 14 which is about women keeping silence is almost certainly and I got this from Ken Bailey who was a missionary in the Middle East for many years that in the assemblies of his day as Bailey experienced in the Middle East you wouldn't have men and women mixed together as we do you would have men on one side of the of the gathering and women on the other side and it's quite possible that the service would be going on in ordinary Koine Greek but that the women would might well only understand the local patua the local dialect and they would get bored and start to chatter and say the women please keep silent in in the church and if you want to know what's going on your husband's will explain to you later that is one plausible way of reading first Corinthians 14 again these are very difficult texts on which to build an entire theory of not ordaining women and not allowing them to preach granted the strength of John 20 Luke 10 that's Mary and Martha and Romans 16 and just to finish this sort of set of questions on that sort of issue James in Welling asks are there any circumstances where you would see a difference between preaching and teaching when it comes to male and female roles any differences in levels of teaching and it should are women excluded from any of these activities regardless of definition I mean I've watched as different churches particularly in America actually but also here have tried to sort of slice that differently and say well women can do this but not that I simply don't see that as I say I may be naive but once you've got Mary

Magdalene going to tell the world that the crucified Jesus is risen from the dead then I think it's game over that that is the foundation seriously I think that is the foundation of all Christian proclamation which then flows out into teaching evangelism etc now that's not to say that men and women are identical you know there were two quite different arguments going on when we first ordained women we in the Anglican church in the early 90s some of the older theologians who'd argued for it argued for it on the grounds that men and women were identical there was no difference so it was a justice issue but actually the more postmodern approach I think was much healthier which is to say men and women have significant differences there are overlaps but significant differences and God wants to bring those gifts into public ministry and as a bishop having ordained several women and watched their ministry and mission developed I want to say absolutely those gifts have enriched the church and will continue so to do thank you so much just wanted to finish up maybe with a couple of more sort of practical questions regarding some of the issues going on at the moment here's here's a great one from Tristan who says in light of the protests over the climate crisis what responsibility do we have as Christians to speak truth to power can it even be appropriate for a Christian to break the law given that we're commanded to actually submit to authorities and I suppose you may have in mind things like the extinction rebellion movement and some of those protests we saw last year in order to raise this as an issue in the public eye obviously some people got arrested in the process yes yes and and people do get arrested sometimes and there are brothers and sisters around the world who get arrested for for for bearing faithful Christian witness and we we must honor that although as you see in the acts of the apostles it's it's always a kind of ambiguous thing because biblical political theology is predicated on the fact that the one God who made the world wants the world to be wisely ordered and wants the world to be wisely ordered through human beings and so even people who we would regard as bad rulers nevertheless have a God given job which must be honored and the parade example of that is when Pilate Pontius Pilate in John 19 says to Jesus don't you know that I have authority to have you killed or to release you and what does Jesus say to him it's it's stunning he says you could have no authority over me unless it was given you from above therefore the one who handed me over to you has the greatest sin in other words if even Jesus acknowledges even Pontius Pilate as having a God given authority over him then I think we have to say even in cruel wicked stupid governments there is a role which is God given now having said that of course Jesus is arguing with Pilate and putting him right and saying things which Pilate can't understand you what is truth etc because what you're seeing in John 18 and 19 is the the Jesus focused application of what Jesus had said in John 16 which is that when the spirit comes he will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment how does the spirit do that the spirit equips God's people to be the people who speak that truth to the wider world including to power I mean basically in the first century Christians in the first few centuries Christians and Jews weren't particularly bothered about how people in power had got to be in power because there were all sorts of different ways conquest or whatever some vestiges of

democracy and some bits of the Roman world but yes and no but they were extremely concerned to hold up the mirror to what they were doing once they were in power so the modern democratic idea that because we voted well that gives them can't plan to do what they want for the next four or five years and then we can just put them out that that's that's simply not how they fought at all and it strikes me as well that when you look at examples from the last century I mean on offer in the Confessing Church under Nazi regime and so on where they felt they had to make a stand against a regime it was done in the in the context that they realized this could result in certainly imprisonment and more likely death so there was this kind of whenever Christians do that I think they have to accept that this will result potentially it's something that will be part of that sacrificial and that of course is where the conversation between Jesus and Pilate ends up with Pilate actually crucifying Jesus and the Church has always realized that it's easy for me to say that because I'm not under imminent threat of that myself so far as I know but yeah I mean many Christians many of our brothers and sisters around the world are facing those issues right now when it comes to climate change the thing is that there's always okay take a step back we Christians should always have been concerned about the health of God's world because we are stewards we are gardeners we are image bearers that's who we are so much modern Western Christianity has forgotten that and has backed off from that and has left a vacuum which then secular climate change campaigners have come into and some Christians oh we better get on the bandwagon here actually this should have been our show in the first place but had it been we might have done it a bit differently and therefore to join in with something naively might be a failure on the lines of being wiser serpents and innocent as doves but that's not a way of saying therefore there's nothing we should ever do but I think that some of the things that some such protesters have done and some of the groups that get in on the act there's some people who just love to have a good smash-up protest and you know they're helpful and less helpful exactly exactly perhaps as time is against us we'll end with this question which I think is a good question to send us on our way it comes from a Don in Dorset who asks how should we be summarizing the gospel for our contemporary secular culture which has so little scriptural background that the traditional approach which evangelicals have taken may not be the most appropriate way so how do we how do we translate the gospel into essentially today's contemporary secular culture yeah it's a great question of course what happened in the spread of Christianity through Paul and others in Turkey and Greece etc. was okay Paul did start usually with the synagogue but often he was out on the street or in the marketplace or in the Ariapagos or somewhere and was addressing a culture that had vaguely heard of Jews and Judaism but knew next to nothing about it and one of the things that his converts quickly had to learn and you can see him teaching them in first Corinthians particularly is to think Jewishly to think back into the Old Testament and to realize heavens if we have come to believe in Israel's Messiah as the Lord of the world then all that stuff from Abraham and Moses and David and so on that is our family story now we've like somebody who gets married into a family and has shown the family photograph album oh my goodness this is this is these

are my children's great grandparents sort of thing and it's but that's the kind of exercise and we ignore that at our peril however I've argued in history and eschatology that there are certain signals which I call signposts within all human cultures which both are and aren't pointers to the gospel you can't simply argue up from them we all know in our bones that we that the way that justice matters that beauty matters that truth matters that freedom matters etc that I listed seven in the book the problem is that we all know that we mess them up we don't do justice in our own case or nationally or globally or whatever and we're puzzled about that and we have hold there's a building just up the road here called the Department of Justice or words that effect with thousands of civil servants and they still can't do justice yeah well because actually it's very difficult likewise freedom we all know freedom matters we all wanted for ourselves and in principle for others but actually when it comes down to it is difficult similarly with truth similarly with power and certainly with beauty etc now at the point of failure when we realize that we've all messed those things up and that you could conclude a Jean Paul Sartre that life is just a sick joke then when you read the story of Jesus in the gospels Jesus going to the cross you suddenly realize this is a story of justice denied of beauty squelched of freedom stamped stamped on of truth denied of power abused and suddenly those things which we all know in our bones are as I've called them in a forthcoming book broken signposts they point to the broken signpost of the cross and this is why I think the cross retains a kind of subliminal power in our culture so that some of you will remember 20 years ago when Neil McGregor was director of the National Gallery he put on an exhibition called seeing salvation which was mostly pictures of Jesus on the cross from the medieval times and so on other things as well the newspapers rubbish did they said we don't you know who needs to see all these pictures of old-fashioned torture that's all the public ignored the newspapers and came in their droves because the crucifixion whether sung or painted or read or whatever speaks to our sense of a world out of joint in a way that absolutely nothing else does so I would that's one of the ways I would want to start because it's actually a shorter journey to the foot of the cross than you might sometimes think can we give a round of applause to Tom hope you enjoyed today's show another on the way next week as we approach Easter we'll be back to the usual format and taking your questions on the crucifixion and the atonement for now do get registered over at [askntwright.com](http://askntwright.com) that's for bonus content the prize draw for Paul a biography and of course to ask your own question again that's [askntwright.com](http://askntwright.com) for now best wishes stay safe and we'll see you again next week you've been listening to the askntwright anything podcast let other people know about this show by rating and reviewing it in your podcast provider for more podcasts from premiere visit [premiere.org.uk/podcast](http://premiere.org.uk/podcast) you you [ Silence ]