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#184 An Evening With NT Wright live in London (Replay)

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

From the archives, from 2020: 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. • Subscribe to the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast: <https://pod.link/1441656192> • More shows, free eBook, newsletter, and sign up to ask Tom your questions: <https://premierunbelievable.com> • For live events: <http://www.unbelievable.live> • For online learning: <https://www.premierunbelievable.com/training> • Support us in the USA: <http://www.premierinsight.org/unbelievableshow> • Support us in the rest of the world: <https://www.premierunbelievable.com/donate>

Transcript

Thank you for joining us on this NT Wright podcast today. Before we launch into the programme, I want to be sure you don't miss out on an inspiring free resource from the archives of The Unbelievable Podcast titled, In Conversation with Tim Keller. As one of the leading apologists of our day, Tim was powerfully gifted to communicate the truth of the Gospel with relevance, windsomeness, and clarity.

While we're deeply saddened by his passing, we thank God that Tim's ongoing legacy of teaching and inspiration, which will continue to be a part of the podcast. Welcome to this replay of Ask NT Wright Anything where we go back into the archives to bring you the best of the thought and theology. 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 the rest of the world. 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 additions 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.

So 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 organized by SBCK and which I had the privilege of hosting and leading the Q and 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 Wycliffe 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 Abulography, History and Escatology, 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 are shared, the thoughts that come to our minds may enable us to be light in this world. We pray in your name, our men.

Tom, do you come up? Thank you. And do give a round of applause for Tom. 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 are you doing going to London? It's too crowded there. You should stay safely in Oxford, et cetera.

Let me tell you, Oxford is pretty crowded right now as well. 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 a four of 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 a pilgrim place 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 kind of 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 Byrd and I put together, really as a book to give to somebody who says, you know, I've been reading the Bible for a while and I'm getting a certain amount out of it. 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 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 our own.

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 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 church. 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, 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 future. 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 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 can't see God, but when we look at Jesus, then we're discovering who God really is.

Or John says, 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.

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, 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 the

Bible, he's not canonical as it were, you can learn an enormous amount from going back through here.

More 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 going to 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 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's 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 learnt 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, 1 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 earth. And the king likewise, 2 Samuel 7, 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 5th 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-modelling 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 generation or two 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.

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 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 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 1st century Judaism and Jesus and Paul gladly affirm that and Jesus, of course, in his own resurrection. The 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 and 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 of two gospels and think what that might mean in some key passages, because it will 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 a book the other day from a theologian from a generational Sogo 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 was 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 Escortology*, 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 and Paul were totally familiar with and 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 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 temple 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, because it's that time of year people do that, and I've done it many times myself.

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 stop 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 of 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, you may 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, 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, 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 lord it over their subjects, and their great ones bully them and exercise authority over them. We're not going to 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, et cetera. 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, 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 do 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 commerce.

And he knew about the Platonists, he knew about the Aristotelians, he knew about the ideas of a soul leaving the body and going somewhere else. And Paul already as a young Jew saw 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 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.

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 2 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 that it was full of quotations, because there are so many famous one-liners in it. But at the end of 2 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, there's much more I could have talked about, but I hope you've enjoyed that and that you'll enjoy the questions to follow.

Thank you very much. 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 are on, 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'd shiver nervously what on earth am I going to do? 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 has 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, 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, where British keep calm and carry on.

As though, 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, it'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, 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 would 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 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 doctorate, 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 will 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, oh, it will take a year or more to develop a vaccine. Well, gee, 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 central. 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 different ways. Well, I mean, I think to show an appropriate way of approaching the very real fear of death, et cetera.

And because we haven't had a war on our own territory in my lifetime, we haven't been used to thinking that in the way that. You've never had that quite as oppressing a crisis as perhaps this may turn out to be. Exactly.

But I mean, I was reading a piece in the paper, something you probably saw, I think it was yesterday, about the so-called Spanish flu in 1917-1918, when one of my great uncles died of, 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, ah, what's that about? And when you're faced with tragedies like that, then I think the thing that it brings to you is that you're not going to be able to be a good person.

And it calls forth, which we've not been terribly good at doing is lament. And the biblical tradition of lament, which is there all over the place, and 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 would 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 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 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-O-Ming Surrey says, how and when are we justified? Does your work imply two stages now and in the future? 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 1 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 there, 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 he 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 hang on, are you saying they're children of Abraham? And Paul says, yes, you bet they're children of Abraham.

Oh, but they haven't been circumcised. That doesn't matter. The Messiah has 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 Greek 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 denomination 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? 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's just a different route in English.

It's 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 sin when that's so clear throughout scripture? And that's, please don't dodge the question of wrath. So... Okay, I don't believe in dodging questions, especially about wrath.

I mean, I'm with those theologians who say, unless God hates child abuse, genocide, etc., God is not a good God. God must be angry at the many, many wicked things which people do. Many wicked things which I do, many things we all do.

If God doesn't hate those, God is not a good God. God is not just a benevolent old grandfather. Speaking as 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 wrath, 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 he 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.

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 worshiped 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, 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 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 substance.

There are many kinds of penal substitutions. Some are clearly not biblical. 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 brigand on the cross next to Jesus, and so on and so on.

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 by the way. Absolutely.

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' teaching? And another one, Keith asks, why does Paul say so little about the life of Jesus? So I thought those were sort of related questions. How much did Paul know about Jesus and his life? Yeah, 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 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 somebody 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, and 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, 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 hysterical to talk to Siphah, 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 10 days in Jerusalem, presumably they didn't spend the whole time talking about the weather. 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 it were, ethical rulings of Jesus. He does sometimes, as in 1 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 and 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've 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.

So the fact that he's doing something different to Jesus doesn't mean that O.D. 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 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 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 that Paul faced.

And you can imagine in the early church people inventing sayings of Jesus to fit this. You know, circumcision is made from 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 road 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

it's 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 never 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 triking again.

So I'm worried about that because I don't think that's representing what I would have actually said. However, 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 as a devout Pharisee in the late twenties, early thirties 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 you have. And 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's supposed to be God, and 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 inside out. And we don't need to create a sort of dichotomy between the psychological and supernatural theory.

Of course, that God will be using that and that yes, that does things too and in his

psyche, but it isn't then and either all. 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 interesting and 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 1 Timothy chapter 2 and part of the problem is that it uses one or two words which are either unique to the New Testament or certainly very rare and which actually can have several different meanings. That's in verse 12 of 1 Timothy, I won't go to the Greek here, I expect that not everybody in this room is familiar with green.

But 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, 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 jewellery, et cetera. And Paul is saying, let's rule out those gender stereotypes, the mentioned 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, et cetera, et cetera. And I think that's what Paul expects 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 Cencrayae, 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 travelling 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, servants, 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 I would say a 75% probability that the first person ever to expound Romans in public was a woman, deacon, businesswoman from Cencrayae. 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 is an apostle.

But for me if I have to start the argument from the top, I then start with 1 Timothy. I start with John 20 where Jesus does not say to Mary at the tomb, Mary there is 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 and 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. In that culture all four gospels have the women as the prime witnesses to the resurrection. And here's the point, sorry I'm interrupting.

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, they will read a bit further than you took us to and they will say yes, I pull commands women to learn, but then it appears to say in silence or in full submission. And then there's this issue of and I do not permit a woman to speak. And so obviously that raises a whole set of questions about what's going on there.

You're conflating First Timothy 2 with the end of First Corinthians 14. I am. But I mean 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 husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the man, etc. Various theories have been propounded about that. As he does in chapter 6 and 8, he is quoting Corinthians logoi 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 gathering and women on the other side. And it's quite possible that the service would be going on in ordinary, coin, a Greek, but that the women might well only understand the local patois, the local dialect, and they would get bored and start to chatter. And so the women please keep silence in the church.

And if you want to know what's going on, your husband 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 so on.

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? Should our women exclude it 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 mean, I eat, but once you've got Mary Magdalene going to tell the world that the crucified Jesus has risen from the dead, then I think it's game over.

That is the foundation. Seriously. I think that is the foundation of all Christian proclamation, which then flows out into teaching evangelism, et cetera.

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, but 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 develop, I want to say absolutely those gifts have enriched the Church, and we'll 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 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? 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.

Obviously, some people got arrested in the process. Yes, and people do get arrested

sometimes, and there are brothers and sisters around the world who get arrested for bearing faithful Christian witness, and we must honour that. Although, as you see in the Acts of the Apostles, 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.

So even people who we would regard as bad rulers nevertheless have a God-given job which must be honoured. 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 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, what is truth, etc.

Because what you're seeing in John 18 and 19 is 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 and 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 carte blanche to do what they want for the next four or five years and then we can just boot them out.

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, Bonhoeffer in the Confessing Church, under Nazi, regime and so on, where they felt they had to make us. And so they had to stand against a regime.

It was done in the context that they realised 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. Oh yes.

It's something that will be part of that sacrificial element. And that of course is where the conversation between Jesus and Pilate ends up with Pilate actually crucifying Jesus. And the church has always realised that.

It's easy for me to say that because I'm not under imminent threat to 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.

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 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 translate the gospel into essentially today's contemporary secular culture? It's a great question.

Of course, what happened in the spread of Christianity through Paul and others in Turkey and Greece, et cetera, was, okay, Paul did start usually with the synagogue, but often he was out on the street or in the marketplace or in the Ariopagus 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 1 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 is shown the family photograph album, oh my goodness, this is, these are my children's great grandparents sort of thing. 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 justice matters, that beauty matters, that truth matters, that freedom matters, et cetera. I've 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, there's a building just up the road here called the Department of Justice or Words of that effect, with thousands of civil servants and they still can't do justice.

Because actually it's very difficult. Likewise, freedom. We all know freedom matters.

We all want it for ourselves and in principle for others. But actually when it comes down to it, it's difficult. Similarly with truth, similarly with power and certainly with beauty, et cetera.

Now, at the point of failure, when we realize that we've all messed those things up and that you could conclude, as 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 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 it. They said, we don't, you know, who needs to see all these pictures of old-fashioned torture? That's all the, 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 Ted? Thank you.