

OpenTheo

#100 Jesus the revolutionary - NT Wright at London Bible Week

January 13, 2022



Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Tom Wright speaks on 'Jesus the Revolutionary' at London Bible Week in 2017.

· Support the show – give from the USA or UK & Rest of the world · For bonus content, the newsletter, prize draws and to ask a question sign up at www.askntwright.com · Exclusive podcast offers on Tom's books and videos from SPCK & NT Wright Online · Subscribe to the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast via your preferred podcast platform

Transcript

The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast Hello and welcome back to the show that brings you the thought and theology of New Testament scholar and former bishop of Durham NT Wright. I'm Justin Briely and as usual the program is brought to you in partnership with NT Wright Online and SBCK Tom's UK publisher and indeed Premier Unbelievable. Well today marks the 100th edition of the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast.

Amazing. Thank you for all your support in getting us here and we'll be revealing a new look website soon where you can explore faith with Tom and many others in all kinds of different ways in 2022. On today's show we continue to give Tom a bit more legroom with some longer talks bringing you sessions that Tom led at Premier's London Bible Week a few years ago.

Today his talk is on Jesus the revolutionary. Just a quick shout out though to show listener Joel who says thank you so much for this content despite having listened to nearly every episode I'm still somewhat in shock that a theologian of Tom's influence would consistently give his time to answer not just deep theological questions but also personal pastoral ones. You're the real deal Tom.

Thank you. Thanks for rating and reviewing us Joel. If you do that too wherever you're listening to your podcast from it helps others to discover the show as well.

And if you want more from the show including regular updates and bonus content do sign up at [ask NT Wright dot com](http://askNTWright.com) right now. Here's Tom speaking on Jesus the revolutionary at Premier's London Bible Week. I've been asked to talk this evening about this whole theme which in my book is called *The Day the Revolution began*.

You may not have realized if you only saw the title of that book and not the whole front cover that it is about the meaning of Jesus death the meaning of Jesus crucifixion. It is one of the great and yet difficult themes throughout Christian theology Christian worship Christian liturgy the closer we get to the cross the more we are aware both that we are close to the very heart of God and that we are witnessing the place where evil did its worst. And somehow for me as I've talked about this stuff over many many years now I've had the experience again and again that when you come close to this topic all sorts of things go wrong sometimes ridiculous things like I'm in the middle of a lecture and I just get to the crucial point and a lawnmower starts up in the field outside and nobody can hear or suddenly all the lights fuse and so on I've just become used to this over the years.

So if suddenly something strange happens then I yep that's just part of the course but I'm very grateful for the prayer both the prayer that Justin just shared and your prayers all of you because even though I have lectured on and written on this topic more times than I can possibly count I do not assume that I've just got the answers and can lay them out before you it's always massive and challenging and so it is again tonight. But the cross itself and this is where I want to start the sheer fact of the cross and the crucifixion seems to work on many people and in many cultures in a kind of pre-articulate fashion. There are many people who have discovered down the years and in different cultures that without having any theory without really knowing any neat preachers trick to say how the cross deals with our sin or anything like that it nevertheless carries a power and in the book I tell the story which actually since the book was published I've discovered who the story was about I tried to it's a famous story but somebody read the book and alerted me to a website that about oh about 50 or 60 years ago maybe a bit more than that now there was a young boy in France who and the story is being told by the way by a man who was Cardinal Archbishop of Paris through the 1980s, 90s and on into the beginning of this century a man called Jean-Marie Lustigre who tells the story about a young boy who with two other young lads thought one day they would have a bit of a joke and they were going to go into the local Catholic Church in the town where they lived and they were going to go into the confessional and they were going to confess in inverted commas to all sorts of crazy wild sins that of course they hadn't committed just to see what the priest would do and how shocked he would be and so they went in and according to the story the first two went in and jabbered away about something and then ran away laughing and the third boy thought he was going to see this thing through so he went in and he confessed all kinds of things to this priest and the priest said okay I'm going to give you a penance for what you've confessed I want you to walk through the

church up to the far end of the church unlike this building instead of a screen that would be a huge crucifix a larger than life size Jesus on the cross he said I want you to look at the figure on the cross and I want you to say you did all that for me and I don't care that much and then I want you to do it again and then I want you to do it a third time and so the boys the Archbishop said that the boy went up to the cross and the first time he said you did all that for me and I don't give that much you did all that and then he stopped and he couldn't go on because he realized what he was saying and what it all meant and the Archbishop concluded the story by saying the reason I know that story is that I was that young man and there are many many people in many different Christian traditions who have just been overwhelmed by the power of the cross before anyone has preached or given them a theory or given them a little mnemonic of how it all works and somehow the cross just does that of course we need the theories we need to work it out because without that then we preachers and teachers can easily go wandering off and do all sorts of odd things ourselves we need to think it through we are told to love God with our minds as well as our hearts and our souls and our strength but way back behind that and beyond that and in the realm that sometimes you can only get out through art and music I mean I think of some of the great paintings you may remember some of you around in London nearly 20 years ago when coming up to the millennium the National Gallery hosted an exhibition called Seeing Salvation many of you saw that any of you saw that yeah some of you did my wife and I were living in London and we went early on and we went again and we went again the newspapers panned the exhibition because it was mostly ancient paintings of the crucifixion medieval paintings or some modern paintings and the newspapers said why do we need to look at these images of a dead man you know we've grown up we've left all that stuff behind fortunately the general public ignored the critics of the newspapers and came in their droves all year because there is something about that story which the artists had glimpsed and were trying to communicate or how to this day if you lay on a performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Matthew Passion or John Passion people will come atheists will come I know choirs that sing it every year and there are atheists and agnostics that will sing in the choir because even though with their minds they they just don't get it there's something deeper going on about that story which transcends all other stories and somehow people seem to know that when you retell the story of Jesus crucifixion it isn't just he died for us in QED and of conversation there's a narrative into which we are enfolded a narrative in which all our sorrows can somehow be held a narrative in which all our puzzling and wonderings and wonderings can be placed into context and a sense above all that a God whom we might not even have named yet is present with us in the middle of it.

At the heart of the New Testament's presentation of the cross it's a dangerous thing to say because there's a thousand different things the New Testament says about it but this is the point of the book at the heart of the presentation is that something happened on Good Friday as a result of which the world is a different place. It isn't that it was just a bit of celestial mechanism that sort of had to happen for certain other things to happen. It's

that this is the moment when a victory was won which does not have to be won again has to be implemented again and again does not have to be won again.

When I lecture about this I often say to the students I want you to ask yourself this question by 6pm on Good Friday what is it that's different about the world? Nobody at the time realized there was anything different because the disciples run away and they were hiding, they were weeping, they were in terror for their own lives and also in shock and horror because they let Jesus down. Big time. But in the light of Easter they looked back and the way they told the story was not to say just that Easter was the victory though of course Easter was the victory but that Easter happened because the underlying victory was won when Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross.

How was it won? What does that mean? What are we talking about? Paul says in Colossians 2 that on the cross he disarmed the principalities and powers and held them up to public contempt. Of course it looked as though it was the other way around. It looked as though the rulers and authorities of the world starting with Herod and Pilate and Caesar on the throne and the chief priests and all the rest of you as though they were holding up Jesus to contempt and saying look at him he thought he was the Messiah and this is what happens when you think you're the Messiah and find out too late that you're not.

Paul says no actually the real truth of it was that he was holding them up to contempt. He was celebrating his triumph over them. What sense does that make? It makes all the sense in the world once you realize with Paul that what was happening was he loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians chapter 2 will come back to that. And so this idea of a victory which is won resonates right through. Think of Revelation chapter 5 when you get this glorious vision when the veil between earth and heaven is drawn back and John the seer sees from his earthly perspective what is going on all the time in the heavenly dimension.

This is not a vision of ultimate future in heaven. It's a vision of what's happening now in the heavenly realm suddenly visible to the eye of John on Patmos and he sees the heavenly court worshiping God the Father and he sees God the Father holding out a scroll and saying who will take my purposes forward. And John weeps because nobody can do it.

And then one of the angels says don't cry because the lion of Judah has conquered. He's won the victory and he has the right to open the scroll to take God's plan for the world forward. And John the seer looks and instead of a lion he sees a lamb.

A lamb as one who had been slain and they sing a new song and they say you are worthy to open the scroll. In other words to unroll God's purposes to take forward God's rescuing plan for the whole creation because you are slain and by your blood you

rescued humans for God to make them kings and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth a theme which comes again and again in the book of Revelation. We have sold ourselves short in the Western Christian tradition and it's taken me all my life to this point to get so that I finally steal these different bits and please God in the next years I'll see more too because we used just to say he died so that we could go to heaven.

We used just to say I'm a sinner he took the penalty therefore I'm all right now. Well I'd much rather people said that than they didn't say that but it's a much bigger picture. He died so that we could be rescued from sin in order to become genuine humans at last which means to reflect God's glory into the world that's the royal bit and to reflect the praises of creation back to God that's the priestly bit.

This my brothers and sisters is our task as human beings to be God reflectors to the world and reflecting the praises of creation. This is what it means to be made in the image of God, to be an angled mirror so that the love of God flows out to the world through us and the praises of God from creation flow back to the Creator. We are liberated from sin not just in order that we aren't sinners anymore, important though that is but so that we can re-assume that genuine human task and the point is this is possible because the Lamb who is the Lion won the victory on the cross.

This is the revolution by the evening of the first good Friday that it happened even though nobody knew it had happened until Easter morning when of course the victory over death was the sign that the victory over sin had been won. We'll come back to that. I was saying this afternoon that the Kingdom of God and the cross of Jesus which are the two major themes in the four gospels are difficult for us to put together.

I think that difficulty goes back in church history for maybe a thousand years, maybe longer I don't know because these are huge themes and they are hard to hold in one's head altogether and I spoke before about some parishes I know which focus on the Kingdom of God. Jesus rescuing people from what we think of as social injustice or evil in one form or another, going about healing the sick and caring for the poor and so on with no sense of what the cross has got to do with it and other parishes which are all about the cross Jesus saving us from our sins but no sense of what all that other stuff was about so that you might as well not have had all the middle chapters of the gospels. I want to say as clearly and strongly as I can that in all four gospels these two absolutely belong together and they interpret one another.

It's fascinating I have dozens of books at home about the meaning of the cross. You accumulate theological books it's notorious we professors they pile up and when I was writing my own book on the cross I got as many recent ones as I could to see what was going on and so on. Again and again and again people who write about the cross in the New Testament they jump straight to Paul and to Hebrews and they hardly touch the

gospels.

It's as though the gospels are simply supplying the back story oh yeah he was crucified and now let's get to the interpretation somewhere else. That's completely wrong. The gospels offer a rich diverse but converging set of interpretations of the meaning of the cross and unless you take that seriously I think you will read Paul himself wrong and I speak as someone who spent many years trying to understand Paul.

The gospels are in fact telling a single story of how Jesus inaugurates the kingdom of God on earth as in heaven through defeating the powers of evil that have thwarted and opposed God's purposes for the world. The victory of the cross is the victory of the kingdom. And you can see this again and again in the way in which the telling of the story of the cross is all about Jesus becoming king.

What do they put above him above his head on the cross? Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews, all four gospels tell us that. Historians don't doubt for the most part that that is actually something that really you know historians doubt all sorts of things but this is pretty clear that the Romans tended to put the crime of which you were accused on a notice above your head when they crucified you. Jesus' crime was supposedly to claim to be the king of the Jews.

Jesus is Messiah and is revealed as such. Ironically when he is enthroned on the cross, think of that scene in Mark 10. You remember the famous scene comes in Matthew as well where James and John come to Jesus and say, "Yeah, we've got a favor.

What's it want you to do something for us?" On their way to Jerusalem and Jesus says, "Well, what is it you want me to do?" He knows perfectly well what's coming. And actually James and John are trying to steal a march on those other two brothers, Peter and Andrew because they're probably frightened that if they don't get in first Peter and Andrew are going to get the top jobs. And so we would like to sit one at your right and one at your left when you come in your - they want to be foreign secretary and home secretary or whatever it is when Jesus is the boss.

And Jesus says, "You have no idea what you're asking for. You really think you can sit at my right and my left when I come in my kingdom and we realize with the shudder what he means and what Mark means, that there are people that Jesus right and Jesus left when he is enthroned as king. But James and John didn't want to be those two people." And then to make the point, Jesus says, "Listen, the whole thing that we're about is a redefinition of power.

One of the most famous verses in the gospels about the meaning of the cross is Mark 10:45, the son of man came to give his life as a ransom for many. And many people, both Christians and non-Christians, theologians who come from a Jewish or other background, they say, "Well, that's a bit about the cross. He came to give his life as a ransom for

many.

And even if Jesus didn't say it, then that's what Mark says." They fail to see that saying means what it means within that discourse as a whole, within the conversation between Jesus and James and John as a whole. Because what Jesus says is, "Listen. We are all about the redefinition of power here.

The rulers of this world do power one way by bullying and bossing and harrying people and kicking people out of the way. We're going to do it the other way. Let the one who wants to be greatest be your servant, the one who wants to be number one, be the 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." You understand the meaning of the cross when you understand it at the heart of the redefinition of power, because Jesus' gospel is all about a different sort of power, the power of all conquering love.

The son of man loved me and gave himself for me. The gospels are all about the redefinition of the messianic agenda, as we were thinking some of us earlier this afternoon. There were many in Jesus' day who were longing for a warrior king, a new David who would kill the great Goliath of Rome or would get rid of the Romans anyway.

There were other military movements before Jesus and after Jesus, there are military messianic movements. In each case, there's a little complex of ideas that goes with the whole thing, always with this sense of an ongoing narrative. Israel's God has done it before.

He has liberated us from our enemies before. Sooner or later, he'll send us a king through whom this will ultimately happen. Jesus is constantly saying yes to the hope and no to the way that they're thinking the hope is going to work out.

A different battle, a different victory, because it's a different enemy. Not that Rome was actually a perfectly good and benign governor, it wasn't. Not that Herod and Pilate and the chief priests were good people, they weren't.

But Jesus sees that underneath all of that is a darker force, the force that he calls Hasatan, the Satan, the accuser, which is a kind of shadowy term, not terribly specific, but for the fact that something very real, namely that evil somehow surges into one place and does terrible things and somehow seems to be concentrating itself at this point. And so the whole agenda from the Psalm, Psalms like Psalm 89 or Psalm 72 or the great passages in Isaiah that speak of the coming wonderful day, they are there, they matter. God is going to put the whole world right, but Jesus has glimpsed because he sees it in the Psalms and in Isaiah and Zechariah and elsewhere, that the way this will happen is not by military revolution, but by the Son of Man going to his death at the hands of the enemy, paradoxically to win the victory over the real enemies, the real dark forces.

We see this particularly in Jesus' attitude to the temple, attitude may be the wrong word, hold it for the moment. The temple is really, really, really important throughout Jewish history, even when, as now ever since the satey 70, it doesn't exist anymore, but it still hovers as an idea over Judaism to this day. Because the temple and the tabernacle before it were for the Jews a sign of heaven and earth being held together.

At the beginning in Genesis, heaven and earth are a single creation, like a great temple. That's how people are reading the story in Genesis 1 and 2 now, is the creation of a temple which is God's cosmos, heaven and earth together. And when that all goes horribly wrong in Genesis 3 with the fall, the story, the narrative arc, runs on first of all to the call of Abraham, but way beyond that, past the exodus to the tabernacle, because the whole point is that when Moses is given the instructions to build the tabernacle in the wilderness, the tabernacle is like a new little creation, a heaven and earth space, a little local and moveable sign of new creation.

It's a forward pointing sign to the fact that one day God will do the Eden thing again, and the Jews tremblingly have to learn how to live with this extraordinary and dangerous thing in them. It's heaven and earth coming together. How can we possibly take that? And the same when then Solomon builds the temple in Jerusalem.

And Jesus is constantly saying throughout his ministry, in symbol and in hint and in parable that he is upstaging the temple. If you wanted to get forgiveness in ancient Judaism, where'd you go? The temple, you offer the sacrifice, you do the thing, tell the priest, you get forgiveness as sociological as well as theological reality. Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven." That's like somebody approaching you on the street, in Victoria's street or somewhere, an offering to issue you with a driving licence or a passport, just as a private inter... You know, you can't... You have to go to the government office a bit further up the road to get that.

Jesus is behaving as though he's the temple in person. That's an entire theme. But that explains why when he comes to Jerusalem for the last time, the city isn't big enough for both of them.

And there is a clash and he pronounces God's judgment on the city and the temple and its rulers that had failed to see what God was doing, the way of peace which Jesus himself was offering. But it's why as well, in parables like... Remember the prodigal son in Luke 15 and the other two parables that go ahead of it, the woman with the lost coins and the shepherd with the lost sheep. The point of those parables is to explain why Jesus is having a party with all the wrong people.

Yeah, people are saying, "Oh, he's gone. He's eating with those publicans and sinners. How can he possibly do that?" And so Jesus tells these stories and says, "Listen, the angels are having a party in heaven right now because people are repenting.

So it's fitting that we should have a party here as well. What is Jesus saying? That where he is, heaven and earth are being joined together again, dangerously, puzzlingly, no doubt." But he's saying, "This is where new creation is happening. This is the reality to which all along the temple had been pointing." And his feasting, his healings, they all are pointing in the same direction.

So that when John the Baptist sends from prison to say, "Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for somebody else?" Jesus says, "Go and tell John what you see in here, the blind receive their sight, the leper healed, the lepers at cleanse, etcetera. Blessed is the one who has not offended in me." The hint is, "This is the messianic agenda going forward, even if you...even John was looking for something different." And so the story that the Gospels tell focuses on the final Passover. You could actually deduce almost everything you need to know about the meaning of the cross, from the fact that Jesus chose Passover as the moment to go to Jerusalem and do what had to be done.

You know, when I was growing up, and for many years, even as a priest, as a theologian, I just kind of took it for granted that, yeah, he went to Jerusalem then, and that's when he got killed. Then reflecting subsequently on Jesus' nights of prayer, Jesus' agonies of prayer, Jesus wrestling with issues, you realize Jesus was not unreflective. He wasn't just a robot, a kind of divine automaton, just going on to autopilot and doing this stuff unreflectively.

Jesus chose Passover. He didn't choose the day of atonement, didn't choose Tabernacle, Hanukkah, any of the others. He chose Passover as the moment to go, "Why Passover?" Because Passover is the great victory over the dark power.

The power of Pharaoh, the power of Egypt, the power that had enslaved the people of God, the power that was threatening to snuff out the promises of God to Abraham and through Abraham to the world. If Israel had stayed in Egypt, there would be no salvation for the world, not just for Israel. Passover says, "God is coming down to where the people are in a mess, are enslaved, and is rescuing them, bringing them out with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm." And Passover leads directly to the giving of the law and then particularly the building of the Tabernacle.

It's because they're rescued that heaven and earth can dangerously be reconstructed as one, the rescuing victory. We therefore have to assume if we're to understand what the gospels are saying to us about the meaning of Jesus' death, we have to assume that entire biblical narrative, which I was talking about earlier today, the story of God and the world, God and the world and Israel, God and the world and Israel going into exile and then what the exile being extended, what's God going to do? You know, for many Western Christians, people say, "Oh, well, the Israel plan went wrong, so God then cut out that stage of the purpose." There are many people who when they summarize the story of the Bible, Israel simply sits there in the background as a sort of example of

something. It isn't an example.

It's the rescuing project, but the trouble is that the rescuing project itself needs rescuing. It's as though the fire engine is on the way to a fire and the fire engine falls into a ditch so that somebody has to get the fire engine out of the ditch before it can then deal with the fire. Israel is God's means of rescuing the world, but the exile as all the prophets make very, very, you know, this isn't a Christian idea projected back.

It's all there in the prophets. The prophets all say, "We have failed. We've all got it wrong.

Now what is going to happen? It can only be a fresh act of divine grace." And it's at that point in the story of Isaiah that we find the suffering servant. It's at that point in the story of Jeremiah that we find the promise about the covenant being renewed. And it's at that point in the prophecy of Ezekiel that we get the prophecy at the end of an extraordinary new temple with Israel's God coming back at last in person to dwell in the midst of his people so that when you then read the beginning of John's gospel and you see that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and the Word became a flesh and tabernacled in our midst.

The Greek is *eskenosen*, which is the word for a tent or a tabernacle. The Word became flesh and pitched his tabernacle in, wait a minute, John, what are you saying? Are you saying that when we look at Jesus we are seeing Israel's God coming back in person? John said, yeah, of course, can't you read? That's obviously what's going on. But now read on.

What will it look like when Israel's God comes back in person? It won't look like a blazing flash, won't look like the whirling wheels of the throne chariot from Ezekiel. It will look like this young Jewish prophet with the light of prayer in his eyes, denouncing the rich and careless, rescuing the poor and helpless, transforming the meaning of the kingdom by his constant parables and his turning everything upside down in the Sermon on the Mount and ultimately going off to do what had to be done in Jerusalem, to meet with his friends at the table where he breaks bread and drinks wine and speaks of his body and blood and then going off to confront the great Pharaoh, the great Satan, the great Babylon to win the victory. The Gospels, therefore, don't just tell the story of Jesus.

They tell the story of Jesus as the focal point of the story of Israel. This is where that entire narrative was going all along. And they tell the story of Jesus as the story of God.

This is where God was finally going to reveal who he really was, how it really was, unveiling his own nature as uncompromised, unyielding love. John 13, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end, to the uttermost. But the Gospels are also, and this is part of the crucial point, the Gospels are also the story of how evil rose to its height.

I said before that often when I've lectured or spoken about the cross, all sorts of odd things will happen to meet people in the class, whatever. But this is only a pale reflection of what's going on in the Gospels. Jesus comes announcing the kingdom of God and immediately there are tortured souls shrieking at him in the synagogue.

There are scribes and Pharisees and Herodians plotting in the background trying to kill him. There are all sorts of things going on. People threatening him, Herod is going to kill you or watch out because if you're saying this about tribute, then the Romans aren't going to be pleased.

And so when they finally come to arrest him, Jesus says, "This is your hour and the power of darkness," Luke 22. Jesus has sensed all through his public career that just as the kingdom of God is going forward, the darkness is closing in and trying. Many of you work for the kingdom of God day and night.

You work prayerfully, humbly, energetically. And I bet you know, I bet there are hundred and more stories around this room tonight. Places where you can see the kingdom of God going forward and at that very moment something is happening which seems to be thwarting it or getting in the way or trying to stop it.

That's classic. I could tell you many stories from my own ministry and my own helping of young ordinands who are just setting off on their first ministerial job and something drastically horrible happens in their family or home or whatever it is. It happens again and again.

We need to pray for one another. But ultimately for Jesus, as the kingdom of God is going forward, so the darkness closes in. Jesus can see it coming.

And Jesus knows that it has to come. Why? Because this is how the victory will be won by evil doing its worst to Jesus himself and being exhausted. You see this in one of the earliest statements of Atonement Theology in Acts chapter four, when the disciples are being threatened by the authorities and when they go back to their friends and they pray and they pray Psalm two.

They say, "Lord, you spoke by your servant David saying this wonderful psalm." Psalm two is actually full of pre-Christian-Christian theology. Why do the nations rage and the peoples imagine a vain thing? They say, "That's what was going on here. We had Herod and Pilate in this city plotting against the lords anointed." The psalm goes on and the prayer goes on to celebrate the fact that God has vindicated the Messiah over against the forces of evil.

Evil has done its worst and it has been defeated. Easter shows it. And so as we read the story of Jesus going about his ministry, we see him doing all kinds of things which you might have thought would make him impure, would actually corrupt him.

When he goes into feast with people who are sinners, people assume Jesus is becoming a sinner himself. But for some reason it doesn't work that way. He seems to take the full force of that and exhaust it so that Zacchaeus is rescued from his life and so on.

Like when Jesus touches the corpse in Luke 7 or when he is touched by the woman with the issue of blood. He should become unclean but he doesn't become unclean. Instead the people get healed, the corpse gets raised.

And finally he goes out to die in the place of Barabbas. He goes out to die alongside somebody who says, "Lord remember me when you come in your kingdom and Jesus is actually today. Today you'll be with me in paradise."

Paradise is not the ultimate goal. Ultimate goal is resurrection but paradise is the resting place on the way there. Again and again and again.

We find Jesus saying, "I will do this for you. I will take your uncleanness. I will take your sinful status, your sinful nature and I will exhaust it." That's what his death is all about.

So that when in John 13 Peter is blustering as Peter always does and Jesus is talking about going to die and Peter says, "You won't be doing that. I will lay down my life for you." And Jesus looks to him and says, "Are you really going to lay down your life for me, Peter?" Classic Johannine irony of course because the whole story is about Jesus laying down his life. As he says in John 15, "Greater love has no one than this than to lay down your life for your friends." And Easter reveals the fact that this is how the victory was won.

And all the Gospels say, all four Gospels say, "This is what it looked like when Israel's God came back in person as he'd always promised to do for Israel and the world what they could never do for themselves but to complete the purpose for which God called Abraham in the first place, to complete the purpose for which God called Adam and Eve in the first place, to be the ones who would be the true image bearers so that as we look at the cross, this is why the pre-articulate thing is so important, as we look at the cross we sense the love of God reflected into the world and our only appropriate response can be to reflect it back in praise and gratitude and adoration. So how does this then work out? How can we think it through? How can we make it our own both in thought and in action because the final section of the book is all about being Passover people. And interestingly, I have a friend in New York who's read most of my stuff over the years and he said to me when he read this book, a bit of a backhanded compliment actually, he said those concluding chapters are the best bit of the whole book and I thought that's actually I like the earlier bit too but he said because we need to see how this works out in practice in our culture today.

We need to see where the shoe pinches, where our witness should be focused. It's no good simply mouthing old evangelical slogans from the 50s and 60s. The world has

moved on and we've learnt a lot since then.

So the cross and the renewed vocation is part of my themed title which I didn't write somebody else wrote but I'm happy to pick it up. The idea of when we stand in front of the cross, like that young boy who ended up as an archbishop, we find that our lives are transformed and our vocation is renewed or maybe given for the first time. Back to Revelation 5, we are now to be the kings and priests.

That goes back to Exodus 19 of course where Israel is told you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. You will be in other words the true image bearing people for the Gentile world. But now because Jesus has come as the true king, as the true high priest, summoning us to be his disciples, his followers, he wants us to be that.

Was the problem that the cross is the answer to is so much deeper than we in the western traditions have normally imagined and the solution therefore is all the grander? Let me dangerously, it's eight o'clock at night and it's a warm room and all the rest of it. Let me dangerously try and summarize this. I was warned that I should throw in lots of anecdotes and little stories and I haven't done that nearly enough.

Sorry about that. But let me just try and do this. We in the west have imagined that the name of the game is to go to heaven when you die.

Yeah? I've preached those sermons, you've preached them, you've heard them. We have often talked about this in terms of our soul leaving our body and the soul going to heaven. And some Christians have even thought that that's quite a good thing because the body is a shabby old thing and we want to get rid of it.

And so they've then heard the language of resurrection and thought, well, it doesn't really mean that. That's just a metaphor for going to heaven. And I've often said to students, if you go into the first century looking for somebody who is teaching that the body is a shabby old thing and the soul is the real thing and the point is to leave earth and go to heaven in your soul, the person you're looking for is called Plutarch, not Paul.

He's one of the middle platonists towards the end of the first century. He's a pagan, he's very intelligent, nice, good guy, biographer, intelligent man, he had a nice sort of chap to have dinner with, but not a Christian, not a Jew. The Christian hope is not for pie in the sky when you die, but for the new heavens and new earth in which justice and righteousness dwell, when we will be raised from the dead to be more like ourselves now than we'd ever imagined.

I've often said, you know how it is if you see somebody in the street who's been sick and you've knew them before, you say, "Purl, so and so," just a shadow of his former self. If you are in Christ, if you are indwelt by the Spirit, you tonight are just a shadow of your future self. There is a real you, more like you than you've ever imagined.

And God loves that you and wants by the Spirit to help you grow into me. And that's possible because all that hinders you from being that was dealt with on Good Friday. So forget the platonic eschatology, but the trouble is if you have that idea, my soul needs to go to heaven, how's that going to be done? What's the problem? Well, the problem is that I'm a sinner.

And so we have moralized our anthropology. That is to say we've imagined that the only real question to ask about being human is, have we kept the rules or not? And we all know the answer, of course we haven't kept the rules. So everyone's going to be, "Oh, Jesus has kept them on our behalf," or, "Jesus has paid the penalty for that." Well, fine in a sense, but being human was never a matter simply of keeping rules.

That is to put the knowledge of good and evil before the knowledge of God, which is precisely what Adam and Eve did in the garden. Being human was always about being image bearers, as I said before, reflecting God into the world and the praises of the world back to God. And the rules are there as the guidelines to enable you to be a free, glad image bearer.

And so if you muck around with the rules, the problem is not just that you're guilty as sin, so to speak, but that you're not doing the image bearing stuff. And as a result. We've had this idea of the soul going to heaven.

We've had this idea that the only thing that matters is rule keeping either us doing it or Jesus doing it on our behalf or something. And so we have turned the New Testament's vision of Jesus' death into something much more like the sort of thing that you find in the ancient pagan world with an angry God and an innocent victim. I have said this on many occasions over the last few years.

And I've had theologians stand up halfway back and say, "You're caricaturing. Nobody actually teaches this." And I could show you emails. I could show you records of conversations with students, with children, where people again and again, even if this isn't what is being preached in the pulpit.

People have had the distinct impression that they're supposed to believe that the gospel is all about God being very angry with us and fortunately somebody standing in the way it happened to be his own son who happened to be innocent. So that's all right, isn't it? And hardly surprisingly many people hear that story and they think, "If that's God, I don't want only to do with him. He sounds like a horrible bully to me." And worse, a lot of people in our culture are aware of bullies and abusers who have always said at the height of the bullying and the abuse, "Of course, I really love you." So to have a God who's a bully and an abuser but who also says, "Actually, I really love you.

It just makes matters worse for them." And so as I say in the book, there are many people who instinctively think that John 3 16 ought to read, "God so hated the world that

he killed his only son." It doesn't, God so loved the world that he gave his... somehow we've got it wrong. And I think it stems from the Platonic eschatology and the moralized anthropology. Sorry, that's enough long-ology words.

And the solution to all of this then, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "The Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures." What have we done with that? We have said, "Okay, the Messiah died for our sins because we know that we're sinful. We deserve to die so God killed Jesus instead and I can find three proof texts, Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, maybe Daniel 7, which I could use in that." That's not what according to the Scriptures means. But this huge flowing narrative from Genesis all the way on through is talking about the single saving plan of God for the cosmos.

And it's in accordance with that plan that the Messiah died for our sins. How does that work? What does that mean? We need that whole Old Testament story because it's a love story. My friends, it's about... Have you ever read Isaiah 40 to 55 out of run? If you haven't, please go home tonight and if you do nothing else, just read 40 to 55 and listen for this note.

I have loved you with an everlasting love. I've graven you on the palms of my hands. You are my people.

I know you're in a mess. I know it's all gone horribly wrong, but I love you so much I'm going to do everything that it takes to rescue you. That's the story which dominates the skyline as far as Jesus himself was concerned.

So if the human vocation was to be image-bearers reflecting God into what happens when we humans worship idols, idolatry is the primary problem, not sin. Sin is what happens when you worship an idol, you may not realize you're doing it, and then the idol distorts something in your humanness and you mess up with other people's lives as well. And so when we humans worship idols, whether it's money or sex or power or whether it's other more complicated things, though those three, one or other of them are often in the middle of it somewhere, what we are doing is we are giving away our proper human power and responsibility to the forces we're worshipping.

And the idols say, "Thanks very much. I'll take that." And they swell and they grow and this happens at certain periods in human history. Many would say it happened in the middle of the 20th century when people in Russia and people in Germany worshiped idols to do with their statehood and their nation.

And there was a ground swell of evil which did terrible destructive things, but it happens in our personal lives as well. How are the idols then going to be overthrown? How is Jesus going to win the victory over the ruler of this world? Because make no mistake, that's what he says he's doing in John 12 and elsewhere. The answer is the idols have their grip on us because through worshipping them we are sinning and as long as we're sinning

they've still got us where they want us.

But if forgiveness of sins happens the idols have lost their grip. That's the very center of it. How does forgiveness of sins then happen? People have accused me since I read this book of not believing in penal substitution.

I do believe in penal substitution. It's taught in the Scriptures and I've always taught it myself. But penal substitution, the idea that there is a punishment which is borne by Jesus so that others may not bear it, does not in the Bible go in that story of an angry, bullying God and a helpless victim called Jesus.

It goes in the story of the covenant love of the one creator God and everything looks different as a result. That's why in Galatians that whole train of thought goes. Galatians 1, 4, he gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.

There you have it. The deliverance, 1 on the cross. Paul picks that up again in 2, 19 following.

The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. It goes on all the way to chapter 6, verse 12 where in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters because what matters is new creation because through the cross the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. This is the victory over evil which has won on the cross.

In Romans 8, Paul says it more sharply I think than anywhere else when he says that there is no condemnation for those who are in the Messiah Jesus because on the cross God condemned sin in the flesh of Christ. Interesting. Say God condemned Christ.

He says God condemned sin in the flesh of Christ. Sin as the accumulated evil force, the dark force that itself had to be put to death. There's much more I could say about that but you can follow that up and read it if you want in the book.

The results though again and again and again in the New Testament is the new humanity. The vocation renewed to be the royal priesthood for the world. This is why worship matters.

This is why all renewal of worship is to be welcomed when it's focused on Jesus, on his victory on the cross, on his new life and the resurrection, on the power of the Spirit. It's wonderful to see new movements of worship even if culturally sometimes I seem to come from a different millennium never mind a different century. Our vocation to be the royal priesthood contains all the other Christian vocations there are which cover the whole range from medicine and justice and art and music and goodness knows what.

Because we are to be, I'm going to finish this, we are to be Passover people. We are to be communities in which the victory over the powers is manifest. Think of that sequence of thought in the letter to the Ephesians.

Verse 1, 10. Great verse. The purpose of God from the beginning was to unite in Christ all things in heaven and on earth.

No ultimate separation between heaven and earth. They're made to one another and in Jesus they are held together. Ephesians 2 applies that to the coming together of Jews and Gentiles into the church.

Church unity matters because it's a reflection of what God's purpose is for the whole cosmos. And the result, Ephesians 3 verse 10 is that through the church being that sort of people the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and powers in their heavenly places. When the church is being the church celebrating the victory of Christ in this way and living it out in practice, then the powers are confronted with the news that Jesus is Lord and they are not.

That's what it's all about. That's why at the end of Ephesians going through 4, 5 and 6 very quickly, why not only there's this great focus on marriage on the coming together of man and woman in marriage, which is such a struggle in this day as it was in Paul's day, but then in chapter 6 on spiritual warfare because if you're going to be people who are living at the intersection of heaven and earth and demonstrating that to the watching world and the powers that still hover around knowing they're defeated but still doing their worst, then you are going to run into spiritual warfare. I've seen it, you've seen it again and again.

But thank God, it happens, it can be done. I just give you a couple of tiny examples. One particular parish, I had 250 parishes under my care in Durham and I loved them all, but there were one or two where I saw some really special things happening.

I remember once being in one such parish in Holy Week and I was visiting in Holy Week every day that parish and I would turn up at 8.30 in the morning for the morning communion service and then we'd take it out from there into the prison or the hospital or the schools or wherever we were going. One morning I turned up for the Eucharist, the communion service and nothing was ready, nothing was prepared. The vicar was standing there talking to a young man who had a baseball cap on and I thought, "What is this? He knows the bishop is coming.

He ought to get ready." So the vicar turned to him and said, "Sorry, Bishop, we're not actually ready because we're just figuring out who from this parish is to go with this young asylum seeker to his tribunal today to help interpret and make sure that the right things happen." And I said, "I'm sorry. I misjudged everything. You have just prepared for the Eucharist.

This is the church being the church and somehow breaking the bread and drinking the wine had an extra richness that morning because of that sense of the church being." And the other thing, good Friday that year, I went and joined the street pastors. You know

street pastors, they happen all over the place. You wear yellow high-vis jackets and you go around the clubs and pubs starting about 9 p.m. and going through to about 3 or 4 a.m. And you are there as a benign presence to give help and solace to young people who are in a mess who may need to get home, who may not have the money, etc., etc.

And before I went out, I had my purple cassicon with this yellow high-visged jacket. I was upstaging all the strange young ladies in these clubs, I tell you. I went and saw the chief of police and he said, "Beshibi said, 'I'm an atheist.

As far as I'm concerned, none of this means anything." He said, "But I'll tell you, since your lot started doing this stuff, crime on the weekends in this town has fallen through the floor." And he said, "Keep going." And I thought, "Well, there is a sign to the powers that there is a different sort of power and it's the power of love." Those are just small signs but so, so important. The worship and the witness, the royal priesthood, the sign to the world that Jesus is Lord. And we are all to find our personal vocations within that.

Somewhere, there will be vocations for all of us at whatever stage of pilgrimage we're at. For many, I hope and pray, it will be a pattern of prayer. We need more prayer.

We need more people to commit to pray. And we need to be the people in whom the victory of God is lived out in the world. We need to be pass over people.

Thank you very much. And let's do what we're going to do. Thank you for listening to today's talk from Tom on Jesus, the revolutionary recorded a few years ago at London Bible Week for Premier in partnership with SBCK.

And we'll be back with another talk from the event next week before we get back to some of Tom's usual Q&A format on the show. Don't forget that SBCK, Tom's UK publisher, have some special deals as well on Tom's books for podcast listeners. Do check the show notes for the link.

For now, God bless and see you next time.

[Music]

[Music]

(upbeat music)

(buzzing)