

Paul says, "I'm willing to fight wild beasts in Ephesus." Maybe he did fight wild beasts or maybe he's just being hypothetical, I don't know. But he's saying, "I'm willing to fight wild beasts." Why? "Because I believe in a resurrection of the body. I'm willing to put my life on the line. I'm willing to do everything for the sake of the gospel." Why? "Because I believe in the resurrection of the dead. I believe that Jesus will raise us from the dead."

Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. Each week I visit with Wes McAdams, minister and author, and together we explore biblical passages and topics. I hope you enjoy this study.

WES: Okay, Travis. I thought we'd do something just a little bit different today. We typically read an e-mail or a message from a listener, and we certainly have some that we have received here recently. In fact, I haven't gotten to listen to it yet, but I know that we've got a voicemail that's waiting for us.

TRAVIS: Great.

WES: So if anybody else wants to call in, the number is (707) 238-2216. So call, leave us a voicemail, and we would love to get to that. We're not going to do one of those today because I have something else on my mind that I'd like to study about and think about. And, oh, man, there's so many different directions we could go with this, but I want to talk about context and why context matters and just understanding how important that is when we interpret scripture and when we apply

scripture. So biblical interpretation is, what does that mean, right? So like what does this mean? And, really, before we even ask what does it mean for me -- because that would be application, like what does this mean for me? Like how do I do something with it -- first we've got to ask what did it mean from the original audience -- or from the original author to the original audience? And that's part of the context, and understanding the context helps us to understand what the meaning is.

And I feel like when we say the term "context" -- I always do this to you at the beginning of every show, is like, well, what do most people think when you say "context"? So if you don't mind, what do you think most people think of immediately when you say "context"? "What's the context of that verse?"

TRAVIS: Like the whole -- the whole situation, the whole -- it's not just the phrase you could pull out of the sound bite, as it were. It's the whole passage. It's the whole story.

WES: And I hope that that's exactly right -- and that is exactly right. I hope that's what most people think of. It wasn't always what I thought of. And it's funny, like if you go to biblegateway.com -- and I use Bible Gateway all the time and I love Bible Gateway, but if you look -- like let's say you look up the word "faith" and you just do a search for "faith" and then you're going to get a bunch of individual verses that say, you know, faith, faith, faith, faith, faith, and then you click on one of the verses, it gives you the opportunity -- I think it's Bible Gateway -- and one of the options is see the whole chapter, and then one of the options is "in context." Well, it will give you like the verse before it and the verse after

it and then that verse, so it will give you three verses. And I think that that's what I always thought of when someone -- when I was growing up and somebody would say, "What's the context," I would read the verse before it and then I'd read the verse after it and I'd think, oh, okay, well, I've got the context now. And you're so right; it's way more than that.

You have several layers of context. You have cultural context -- and that's not even textual context. So you have like what's going on in the culture. You have the context of the language that they spoke at the time. You have the historical context. You have the context within that book, but then you also have the context within the story of scripture. We call that -- in biblical, you know, theology and those kind of ideas, we call it the "metanarrative," this big-picture narrative that -- this overarching story of scripture, and so that's part of the context, too.

And we have to consider all those things, but I think sometimes we make it supercomplicated. So if somebody's talking about metanarrative and talking about cultural context and -- you know, the average Bible reader is like, I don't understand what you're talking about. Like that's way over my head. I don't know what you're talking about. I just want to understand, what does this verse mean? The thing I always come back to -- and this is my -- if I have a hobby horse, this is my hobby horse. You probably know what I'm going to say already -- you're smiling -- but it's read the book, read the book, read the book, read the book. You know, start at the beginning of the book, read to the end of the book. And some books, that's hard. You know, I mean, yes, Deuteronomy or Exodus, it's a long book. But it's going to take you three

or four hours, maybe, but I mean, every -- you know, I was thinking about that. You're a movie guy. We like to talk movies, and you have a degree in that sort of -- what's your degree in, by the way?

TRAVIS: I studied creative media.

WES: Creative media, yeah. So you lived in Hollywood and you've worked on movies and scripts, and things like that, and so you get that. Do you suppose that there's any movie that a director or a writer or producer made and they assumed, you know, people are probably going to consume this movie in five-minute increments? Do you think any movie --

TRAVIS: No.

WES: No, of course not. I mean, maybe -- you know, back in the old days -- I don't know if you remember this, but like some superlong movies -- *Dances With Wolves* was one of them, *Braveheart* was one of them --

TRAVIS: Intermission?

WES: I'm not recommending those movies, I'm just saying that they were made on two VHS tapes. So when you bought those movies, they came on two VHS's and you had to like stop one and then put in the other one. Yeah, and some movies, they had an intermission, you know, and there's still some old theaters that still do an intermission in the middle of a movie. And so, yeah, okay, they assume that you are going to consume it in two parts but that they would be pretty close together. It's like get up, go get a snack, and then come back and finish the movie.

Nobody ever tells a story like that assuming that you're going to consume it in 15-minute or five-minute increments, yet that's the way

we typically consume scripture. We typically read the Bible in 15-, 20-minute increments, and if you do that -- I mean, think about a movie. I mean, how well would you really understand a movie if by the time you finished it, it had been a month since you began it? You wouldn't.

TRAVIS: It would be unintelligible.

WES: Yeah. You wouldn't remember -- oh, you remember that scene in the beginning where this was going on? Or I think about -- I don't know, the first movie that came to my mind was *The Sixth Sense*. You know, there's so much -- like when you finish that movie, you're like, okay, I've got to go back and watch it again, because you've got to go back and it's like, okay, well, I know the secret to the end of the movie now. Now I need to go back and see how were they hinting at that all along and I missed it.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: And so you go back. But if it had been a month since you saw the beginning of the movie -- I mean, I don't even know that you would put any of it together, and that's the way we are with books of the Bible. And it's just such a shame that we read it that way because we cannot -- we cannot really understand the context. And when I say "context," again, I mean more than the verse before it and the verse after it. I mean what's the author's train of thought.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: When somebody makes a movie -- when a director or a writer makes a movie, they have this theme -- or they have several themes. They have subthemes that are running from the beginning to the end

and they're tying it all together into this big picture. And when we write a letter or when we write a book or when we -- whatever -- I mean, we do that, as well, and we want people to connect what we're saying in the beginning with how it's all going to end up in the end. And especially books that are narrative are that way, but even the books that -- you know, we call them "epistles," but they're letters. You wouldn't -- especially with a letter -- especially with a letter -- I mean, long movie aside or long novel aside, I mean, think about a letter. Nobody would get a letter from someone and say let's pick up in the middle of this letter, you know, or I'm going to only read a paragraph of this letter at a time. I'll come back to it tomorrow and then I'll read a paragraph, paragraph, paragraph, paragraph. You're not -- you're never really going to understand that letter. I mean, sure, read it through and then go back and read a paragraph at a time and really examine it.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: But I think, you know, when you put it that way, it almost seems silly, doesn't it?

TRAVIS: No -- yeah.

WES: I mean, you could almost overanalyze, like what did Travis mean by that word? Like he chose the word "house" instead of the word "home." He could have said "home," but he said "house." You know, what does he mean by saying "house" instead of "home"? It's like, okay, well, maybe there's something there. But if you don't understand that big picture and you're just like zeroing in on the word "house," it's like, wow, wait a second. I mean, that really wasn't his point.

So I think that that's one of the biggest mistakes that we make when it comes to scripture is that we zoom in with a microscope on a word, yet in doing so we've often ignored the big picture. I mean, there's a cliché, you miss the forest for the trees. You're so focused on that leaf that you forget that it's part of a tree and that tree is a part of a forest, and that's, I think, what we do so very often and we just pull out these verses and then we jump -- another mistake that we make is we jump so quickly to application. We read it and we assume that it's self-explanatory and that we ought to just be able to use it like ammunition, you know, against ourselves or against somebody else and say, see, right there, it says this, so boom. You should do that. That's what it says. And it's like, well, okay, yep, maybe. You know, maybe it is self-explanatory, but maybe it's not, you know, and there's nothing -- there's nothing lost by zooming out and saying, okay, well, what's the context? There could be something lost by not doing that. By failing to do that, we often don't realize that, oh, it doesn't really mean what I tried to make it mean, so context is so incredibly important.

TRAVIS: Well, and a personal story about that, I remember a couple of years ago I was sitting in church and hearing another lesson. I think I was out in California and I was hearing another lesson about, you know, how Jesus is a loving God and he's -- you know, he's tender and he's merciful and he's all these things. And I just remember sitting there thinking that's not how I read his words. When I -- for as long as I can remember, I was thinking, man, I read Jesus and I read the verse -- a verse -- pick out a verse from the Sermon on the Mount, and it's very -- it

comes across very cold to me --

WES: Wow.

TRAVIS: -- at the time, and I remember thinking, okay, but I don't believe that. That's how I hear it, that's my perception, but, you know, I'm confident enough in my faith that I know I don't believe that. I have a different relationship, almost with another guy, that it doesn't even seem to be the guy that I'm reading the verses, you know, as very coldly and --

WES: Wow, that's powerful. Yeah, so context helps to set tone.

TRAVIS: Well, and I think that part of the problem I was having was a lot of times when we -- you know, when we quote the Sermon on the Mount or we quote a parable, we might just do -- even if you just do the parable itself, I think that could be problematic because it's like, you know, it was a string of parables. What about the explanation he gave privately to his disciples, you know? And I was missing so much. It was like, yeah, I knew all the stories. You know, I had great parents and great teachers growing up that I know a lot of the Bible. But I still find myself having to -- well, for the sake of context and so that I can understand how people -- you know, how people at the time, when they were getting these letters from -- you know, from people writing about Jesus and this good news about like -- it's getting passed around about Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount and they're reading and they're probably sitting down, like you said, and reading the whole thing, and it's this complete story of Jesus. And I realized that a lot of how I was taking it in was being affected by the fact that I was usually taking in a verse at a time.

Or you have sermons that, you know, are just about a verse, you know, and that's something I know I've really benefited by -- by having people, and in my own personal study, kind of be guided through an entire block, and it's night and day how I read it. And I think a lot of it also came out of this desire to keep it sacred, you know, and then sometimes I forget it's like, well, I have serious moments in my life; they're few and far between. And so I think, you know, yes, we're not -- it even -- I think John says, at the end of his book, you know, these are not all the acts of Jesus.

WES: Yeah, yeah, if you wrote them all down, the world couldn't contain all of them.

TRAVIS: Couldn't contain them. So it's like -- but even then we're getting these snapshots, often extended periods of time, and it's like, you know, some of that -- like I imagine him laughing as he said it, and I remember -- it's been a change for me because it's like that's not how I read it for the longest time. It was always very cold, very methodical, very much just God has come to earth and he's going to set us straight. And it's like, but that's not how we talk about it. That's not how I feel about it, but it was how I was perceiving it.

WES: Yeah. No, that's superpowerful because I think that that is affected. And it all goes back to -- I always like to -- whenever I start a class on how to study the Bible, one of the first things I always talk about is knowing the genre of the book that you're reading. And so, you know, I always ask the class, what would happen if you read a phone book? It's amazing how many of my examples are nonexistent anymore.

TRAVIS: Come on, Wes, you're a millennial.

WES: But what would happen if you read a phone book like you were reading a cookbook and you just assumed, as you opened it up, that you were going to take a recipe out of that book and make something out of it? It's like you would have a really hard time. And if you forced it to work that way, you could be like, ah, "bob," "apple." Okay. So that means -- you know, if you understand what "bob apple" means, it means that when you bob in water for an apple, then you take that apple, and then you go to the next line, you know.

TRAVIS: Yeah, it would be craziness.

WES: It would just not make any sense. So, obviously, that's silly, but if you read -- again, if you read a novel like you were reading a reference book, again, it would be problematic. You wouldn't enjoy it the way you were supposed to because you weren't appreciating the literary context of what you were reading. And so understanding the genre is so incredibly important, but, again, we can make that sound so complicated that the average person says, well, I don't have any idea what you're talking about. It's just read the book, and if you begin at the beginning and read to the end, you get it.

And I did this in a Wednesday night class. I don't know if you were in that class or not, but I read like three chapters in class out loud, and people came up to me afterwards and they were like I never -- I never heard those verses that way, because we don't read them like that. We don't read it with enthusiasm; we don't read it out loud; we don't read it congregationally; and we don't read large, large swaths of text. So -- and

this verse that I want to look at for just a second, it actually came out of my last Wednesday's class because I think it's funny the way we take this one out of context.

So in I Corinthians 15:33, Paul says, "Do not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals." Now, I mean, that seems to be as self-explanatory as it could possibly be. It seems like a proverb that you could put in a fortune cookie and just pull it out. And, you know, commentators and probably even in your footnote it will probably say that "Bad company ruins good morals" is a quote from a pagan play, a comedy of Paul's time, probably, so he was probably quoting somebody else. But it sounds like one of those sort of statements that you could take and just apply it. It's just self-explanatory: "Bad company ruins good morals." And so, man, when I was a youth minister I used that all the time. You know, hey, watch who you hang out with. If you hang out with bad kids, they'll ruin your good morals.

Now, I mean, is any of that untrue? No, not really, I don't think. I mean, I think there's some application to be made there, but I think people would be shocked if they actually understood the context of what Paul is talking about. Well, what's he talking about in I Corinthians 15? Well, I Corinthians 15 is all about the resurrection. Like from the beginning to the end, the entire chapter is about resurrection. And he begins the chapter by saying, "Now, I would remind you, brothers" -- this is verse 1 -- "of the gospel I preached to you which you received." So he talks about what is the gospel. And then you go down to like verse 12. "Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of

you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" And then he deals with the fact that if -- to deny the future resurrection is to deny the resurrection of Jesus that's already happened, because, apparently, there were people in Corinth that were saying there's not going to come a resurrection. Apparently, they didn't understand that that was at odds with the gospel itself, which, at the very core of that, is Jesus' resurrection. They were simply saying there's not going to be a future resurrection of all of us. And so there was -- apparently, there were people in Corinth that were beginning to believe that, and Paul said to deny the future resurrection of the dead is to deny the resurrection of Jesus, and if you're going to do that, then our faith is in vain. Like nothing we are doing makes any sense if there's not a coming bodily resurrection of God's people.

Now, I mean, there's a lot of people like right now that their idea -- and I don't know what they thought. You know, maybe they still believed in an afterlife, but they didn't -- apparently, there were people there that didn't believe in a bodily resurrection, because, let's face it, I mean, that's kind of a strange doctrine, right? I mean, like dead bodies, like God's going to put them back together again and they're going to walk out of tombs and graves? That's a pretty radical idea. But Paul said, listen, everything hinges on that. Everything hinges on that. Maybe they still had some sort of a -- like a fuzzy idea about an afterlife. And I think that's where a lot of us are today in our culture is that we have this fuzzy idea of, well, a better place, and, you know, heaven, and float away, and we'll be spirits, and we have this sort of fuzzy idea of the afterlife.

And I don't want to get too much into that. I want to do a future episode on all of that, but we very much have kind of fallen victim to the same ideas that I think were being taught in Corinth, that bodily resurrection -- like, really? Like our bodies, like, resurrected and then transformed into immortal bodies? Is that really what you're saying, Paul? And Paul said, not only am I saying that, I'm saying that everything hinges on that.

Then when you get down to Paul saying this, "Bad company" -- "Don't be deceived." Well, be deceived about what? Well, in context, don't be deceived about there not being a resurrection. And then he says, "Bad company ruins good morals." Well, what company is he talking about, in context? The company of people that say there's no resurrection. That's the company he's talking about. He's not talking about people that hang out in biker bars, and he's not talking about people -- I mean, obviously, that's true, too, you know, to a certain extent that if you hang out with people that have a potty mouth or you hang out with people that are drunks, or whatever, yeah, that could affect your morality, you know, and he has said, even in this same book, that, you know, any so-called brother that is living in sin -- you know, but that's not what he's talking about in context. He's not talking about hanging out with people with bad morals. He's talking about people that -- he's talking about hanging out with people and listening to people who say there is no bodily resurrection, and to hang out with those people will ruin your morals.

Wait a second. Why would a doctrine -- why would disbelieving or disconnecting from the doctrine of resurrection -- why would that ruin

good morals? Well, Paul says, listen -- I mean, in context, he's like, "What" -- this is verse 32. "What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus if the dead are not raised? If the dead aren't raised, let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." If all we have is this, like, fuzzy idea about the afterlife, and maybe there's something else, and who knows, and nobody's ever been there so who knows, and whatever, and Paul says, yeah, right, nobody's been there. Jesus has already been raised from the dead. He's the first fruits of what's going to happen. There will be a future bodily resurrection, and if you accept this idea that there's no resurrection, then the only logical thing to do is just eat, drink, and we're going to die tomorrow, you know, so just enjoy yourself, you know, whatever. It will ruin your morality to accept this doctrine. Paul says, I'm willing to fight wild beasts in Ephesus. Maybe he did fight wild beasts or maybe he's just being hypothetical; I don't know. But he's saying, I'm willing to fight wild beasts. Why? Because I believe in a resurrection of the body. I'm willing to put my life on the line. I'm willing to do everything for the sake of the gospel. Why? Because I believe in the resurrection of the dead. I believe that Jesus will raise us from the dead. So do not hang out with and do not listen to these people that are telling you there is no resurrection of the dead, because to accept that is to deny the faith and it will ruin your morality. It will ruin the way that you live your life.

And so the context -- the context of Paul saying that is about -- again, the big fancy word is "eschatology." You know, it's about people that are changing the way you think about what's to come are ruining

the way you live right now in the here and now. Now, that's a much deeper and more important and contextually bound application than just, you know, don't hang out with people that drink or don't hang out in biker bars, or whatever. Nothing against bikers. But, I mean, you know, if that's -- you know, I guess you could make an application like that, but it would certainly be a very, very shallow -- and an application that is totally disconnected from the context. In the context, Paul is saying guard yourself against people who are messing up your eschatology. And I feel like that's an incredibly relevant -- incredibly relevant application for us today, because we don't know what's to come. We have this fuzzy idea about the afterlife and we've lost our hope in bodily resurrection, and so we're at a point where that changes how we live our life.

You know, somebody asked me -- I guess we were in Life Group this past week, and they were just saying that they were in the workplace and somebody asked them, you know, why -- they were kind of putting them on the spot. And they said, "Well, you're a Christian, right?" "Yeah, I'm a Christian." "So you don't think that Hindus and Buddhists and Muslims are going to heaven. Like you only think Christians are going to heaven." And he's like, "Well, you know..." Well, wait a second. Wait. Because if you were to keep things in the context of the New Testament, my hope is in resurrection. So I could -- if I was in that conversation, like I would -- and I'm not saying the person who was in that conversation handled it poorly; I think he probably handled it well. But I would turn the conversation around and say, well, listen,

what I believe in is I believe in a resurrection of the dead. Like I believe that God will raise up those who have died and give glorious bodies to those who belong to him. Now, I believe that that happened to Jesus and will happen to all of Jesus' people. What makes you think that that would happen to or be the promise or the hope of other people that aren't Jesus' people? That's our hope. But if it's all just this fuzzy like go to a better place -- like there's a sitcom on TV now, *The Good Place*. You know, it's like how good do you have to be to go to the good place, and who gets into the good place, and whatever. Well, that's an incredibly un-Christian way of thinking of the afterlife. Of course other religions and other philosophies and other ideas put things in those terms. Like good people go to a good place and bad people go to a bad place. If you live a good life, you go to the good place; if you live a bad life, you go to the bad place, but that's not Christian theology at all. Christian theology --

TRAVIS: That's karma.

WES: Right. Absolutely. That's exactly right. And so, yes, of course Christianity comes across as very exclusive, like we have an exclusive heaven just for Christians. Well, no, I think that that is disconnected from the story of scripture. The story of scripture is about God making all things new. It's about resurrection of the body. It's about what happened to Jesus, what happened to all of Jesus' people, that there will be a judgment, that it all comes down to whether or not a person is in Jesus, but it's about bodily resurrection. Well, that's a whole different conversation. And we've really lost sight of that conversation, and

because we've lost sight of that conversation, then we've just like -- well, I guess we need to just live good moral lives and hope we go to the good place. You know, it's like no, just stop. It's actually affecting our life because we don't have our sight set on hope.

But, again, to go back to this passage, that's exactly what Paul is saying. Paul is saying bad company, bad eschatology, bad theology, bad doctrine leads to corrupted morals. It leads to a weakened -- a weakened resolve. He ends the chapter by saying -- talking about, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O, death, where is your victory? O, death, where is your sting?" And then he says, "My beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." He knows that that kind of steadfast, immovable, abounding work in the Lord is contingent upon -- it hinges on a person believing in bodily resurrection. And if a person loses their -- loses sight and loses their faith in bodily resurrection, then they're not going to be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord because they'll feel like, well, maybe my labor in the Lord is in vain. And Paul says it's not because death has been swallowed up in victory. So it's just so incredibly important that, if I'm going to understand what does he mean by "Bad company corrupts good morals," I've got to actually look at the context.

And there's so many passages like that. And I don't mean to spend the whole time talking about resurrection, but I do want to bring out context, you know, because when I say things like that, people are just shocked, like I had no idea, because they've heard that phrase their

whole life, "Bad company corrupts good morals," but they had no idea that what Paul was talking about about "bad company" was doctrinal bad company. You know, it's listening to false teachers who are messing up your idea of what comes next.

TRAVIS: Yeah. I think -- what do you think about Paul and -- because I feel like, when we talk about context, a lot of the time we end up talking about how something is taken out of context and usually it seems to be something of Paul's. And I think a lot of -- there's a lot of argument in Christendom, as a whole, about what -- what if Paul's letters were -- you know, when he's giving them instruction, what if it was cultural? What if it was -- I feel like the only chance we have to discover that is to stop just reading the verse that says, you know, "Slaves, be subject to your masters." That one can be taken wildly out of context.

WES: Right, right.

TRAVIS: And then I was having a conversation with somebody last week about that, and how it's like today -- I think we're all pretty much in agreement, that one, you know, it doesn't apply to us because we've -- you know, we've come to an understanding over the years that slavery's wrong; it's not right, and those verses telling slaves how to treat their masters and vice versa were not justifications for it. It was dealing with a cultural problem.

WES: Right.

TRAVIS: But then I often wonder, why do we think every other -- like how -- okay. So why don't we approach every instruction with that same attitude? Not that it's a given that it was just a cultural thing and

we can ignore, but just asking the question of -- okay. He goes on a list here. He does it in Ephesians, I know, and a couple other letters, and I always wonder, how do we approach that?

WES: Oh, man, that is such a tremendous question, and I think that that's exactly right. I think that context is exactly how we have to discover that, and following the author's train of thought, and that's what it always comes back to, is following the author's train of thought. And I think it's not as hard as it sounds, and I think that people are capable of doing it, and it requires -- it may require conversation around it. You know, let's talk that through. It may require meditating on it and just really thinking about it. But I think it's very possible to understand that the author's train of thought -- you know, this isn't a passage from Paul, but from Peter, but your statement about slaves and masters made me think of that.

So I was reading from I Peter the other day. When I was talking about the fact that I read several chapters, it was from I Peter, and so I read to them, I think, from chapter 2 to chapter 5, maybe, or something like that. I read several chapters from I Peter, and part of that -- or part of what Peter talks about in there is to slaves, you know, and Colossians would be another example, Ephesians would be another example of times where slaves are given instructions to obey and submit to their masters. But when you read the context and you follow the author's train of thought -- why? To what extent or to what end? To what purpose? Why were they being given those instructions? Well, I mean -- man, so this is I Peter chapter 2:18: "Servants, be subject to your

masters with all respect. Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust." So I mean, that was taken out of context by slave masters for hundreds of years who would read that to or have that read to their slaves to say, "See, if you believe in God, you've got to obey me even when I'm harsh on you, you know, because that's your job. You've got to do that." Well, that is a travesty.

When you read the context and you follow Peter's train of thought, his entire argument is to a group of Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. A group of Christians, a group of followers of Jesus, who were writing, probably asking him what do we do now that -- life is so hard now that I'm a follower of Jesus. Is this -- has God abandoned us? Why is it this way? Why are we suffering? They weren't dying yet, but they were being persecuted, and they were asking Peter, you know, what do we do? And his answer was do good even if you suffer, even if they hurt you. Do good. Do what is right. Love people, serve people, help people no matter what your role is. If you're a wife and you have an unbelieving husband, love him and serve him and do good to him and bless him, and who knows? Maybe he'll become a follower of Jesus. And if you're a husband, love her and serve her and take care of her and do what Jesus would do for her. If you're a servant, here's what you do. And so Peter goes through the list, and Paul does almost exactly the same thing in his household codes in Ephesians and in Colossians. The whole context is you're a follower of Jesus, so do what is good and do what is right and bless those that you have the opportunity to bless.

Now, if you are claiming to be a follower of Jesus and you own another human being and you're whipping them for not doing what you want them to do and you're treating them like cattle, do you really think, on any level, you're obeying the heart of what any of these apostles were saying to their audience? Absolutely not.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: Now, did Paul and Peter give instructions to people that had servants in their houses? Yes. And I often think, you know, if you just woke up in 1830s America, 1830s in Mississippi, and you were, you know, a slave owner and you just really read Jesus and read these letters from his apostles, how should you have read them? You know, because I think a case could be made that, man, listen, if you just suddenly -- like I have not been following Jesus, or these people that claim to be following Jesus, this is not -- this is not Jesus stuff, what would you do? Well, I mean, history is full of examples of what you would do. There are so many examples of people who would go to slave auctions and buy slaves so that they could set them free. They would take them up north and set them free. Not just in Americas, but all across the world. In Rome slave owners would -- or people that weren't slave owners would go and buy slaves so that they could set them free. They realized that what the gospel was teaching them is to bless people and do good to people and serve people and help people. Could a case be made for -- you know what? This servant that works in my home -- and in Rome it would have been more like indentured servitude. Like he's got two more years and he works off his debt and he's done. It's not like American slavery. Like

he has two more years and then he's done, and what am I going to make his life like for these two years? I'm going to -- I'm going to -- what's so amazing is in Ephesians 6 -- I'll turn over there real quick, Ephesians 6.

So he's talking to husbands and wives and then children and then parents. And he says, "Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart." Now, he's talking to Christian servants that are serving non-Christian -- probably -- non-Christian masters, and he's saying, serve them like you would Jesus, "not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." Serve them like you're serving Jesus. That's his instructions to everybody. Serve your wife like you're Jesus serving the church. If you're a wife, serve your husband like you're the church serving Jesus. If you're a servant, serve your master like you would Jesus. No matter what your role in the family is, serve and bless and do good.

And then he says, "Masters" -- verse 9, "Masters, do the same to them." Wait. What? Do the same what? You're saying render service -- this is what he says to the servants: "Render service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, that he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them." Do what? Serve them.

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: Serve them. If you have a servant working in your home and he's an indentured servant for you for however many years, as long as he's with you, do whatever you can to bless his life and make his life better.

Now, I suppose that could be manipulated or taken out of context, like, well, I'm good to all my servants. I'm good to all my slaves. They all love me. Yeah, they don't love you, not if you treat them like a slave, they don't love you.

But so, you know, you just think, what should a follower of Jesus have done if they really read this? Probably set them free, if that was an option. If it wasn't an option, you consider yourself their servant. Not their master, but their servant. You love them. You put them above yourself. Philippians chapter 2, what does it look like to have the mind of Christ? It is to consider others to be more -- not *as* significant -- but *more* significant than yourselves. So if you follow that through to its conclusion, what would it look like for a master, somebody who has servants -- what would it look like for him to consider his servants to be more significant than himself? That is radical.

But all of it has to be interpreted -- and here's the lens -- the lens through which everything in scripture has to be interpreted. Everything, especially in the New Testament writings, everything that Paul said and Peter said, even everything that Jesus said, is all interpreted and meant to be interpreted through the cross, everything. This is what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus: You make yourself less; you make others more. You love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul and your strength and your mind, and you love your neighbor as yourself. You feed yourself, so you feed your neighbor. You take care of yourself, so you take care of your neighbor. If you're hurt, you bandage your own wounds; if your neighbor is hurt, you bandage

their wounds. You do for your neighbor whatever it is you would do for yourself, and everything -- everything -- has to be interpreted in that context.

So when you think through some of these specific passages like, you know, Paul telling men not to have long hair or not to cover their head in prayer, or women to cover their head when they pray, or -- how are we supposed to interpret that? You interpret it through the cross. He was trying to bring about gospel obedience. Obedience to the cross, obedience to the story that we're a part of. And what does that story look like? It looks like considering your neighbor as more important and more significant than yourself. Serving them, putting yourself underneath them so that you can lift them up, whatever your role is. If you're a husband, love and serve your wife. If you're a wife, love and serve your husband. If you're a child, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. If you're a parent, don't provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If you're a master, serve your servants.

All of this is an incredibly radical way of turning the entire world upside down, so to just take something out of context, to force someone else to do your will, that is anti-Christ. That is anti-gospel. That's not the context. The context was always you -- you, whoever you are -- if you're a husband, it's you; if you're a wife, it's you; if you're a servant, it's you; if you're a master, it's you. So whoever you are, you love and serve; you do not force other people to love and serve you. That -- if any passage in scripture is ever used that way, like, "This verse tells you to

love and serve me," you're misusing it. You're misreading it. That's not how you were meant to read it. You were meant to read it in such a way that it turns you into a servant, that it turns you into someone who is more like Jesus. That's the context. That's the overall context. But we have this tendency to read scripture in such a way that it allows me to do what I want to do, while at the same time allows me to force you to do my will. And whatever -- whether we're talking about at home, or on the southern plantation, or we're talking about in the church, if I read scripture in such a way that I find loopholes for myself and I find a way to --

TRAVIS: Compel.

WES: -- compel -- it goes back to something we've been talking about a lot lately. To compel you to do what I want you to do, I'm misreading it, and, you know, I mean, that's what religious people have tended to do. That's what the people of Jesus' day did. They heaped up burdens on other people while they relieved themselves of that burden, and Jesus did the exact opposite. That's the cross. That's the lens through which we have to interpret scripture. That's the greater context, is what does the cross teach us to do?

And Jesus -- the gospel of John makes it so clear. The gospel of John has one command, like one. Like everything is summed up in one command. Like Matthew, it's more, you know, unpacked, we might say. So you mentioned the Sermon on the Mount, and so he unpacks that one command throughout all kinds of teachings. But in the gospel of John, there's one command. One command. Like he'll often reference obey

my commands. Listen to my words. Keep my words. It's like, well, what is that? Like what's your word? Like what's your commandment? And it all comes down to "Love one another as I have loved you." "As I have loved you." That -- how did Jesus love us? That becomes the lens; that becomes the Christian hermeneutic. That's how we interpret scripture. Our lens through which we interpret every passage of scripture is how did Jesus love? That's why the tag line for the show is "learning to love like Jesus." That's what Bible study is all about, and if it's not driving us to that, and if it's not interpreted in that lens, it's not Christian Bible study.

TRAVIS: Yeah. And I think about -- we talk about context. We live in a very sound-bite-centric culture. We get news and we get updates about what's going on in the world and we get the chance to react to them publicly immediately, often when all we've heard or read is a line.

WES: Yes.

TRAVIS: And I -- as we've been sitting here talking about this, I think, man, I know I can remember times where I've done that with scripture, where I've taken a verse because it suits me, even though -- because I have a wider knowledge of scripture, I know somewhere that I'm wrong. I know that this is not what it meant. I very conveniently left this or that out. And I just -- you know, man, I never want to do that and I never want to approach God with, you know, how is he going to serve me, although I think it's very easy to do. But I think that's -- the Bible can serve you in that way --

WES: Sure.

TRAVIS: -- you know, by picking out a verse and, again, compelling people around you, maybe, is one way to do it. To kind of live by that verse, even though maybe you don't have to.

WES: Yeah. And I think that's why keeping in mind the larger context -- again, I was kind of halfway joking when I called it the "metanarrative," but that's what it is. When you keep in mind this big-picture context -- the big picture is God is attempting to reconcile humanity to himself through Jesus, and part of that is transforming us so that we look and act and live and speak like Jesus. And if that's our goal -- if our goal, when we sit down and read scripture, is, Father, make me more like your son. May the image of your son be seen in me -- if that's our goal, and our goal isn't to find ammunition to use against somebody else or our goal isn't to, quote-unquote, do church right, or whatever, even though, you know, there may be times where I have to correct someone or where you have to correct me, and you say, "Wes, that isn't in keeping with the gospel," even that can be like Jesus, but it -- that has to be your goal, not "I'm going to find ammunition to use against Wes," or "I'm going to find where Wes is messing up and I can tell him where he's messing up." And I feel like that's the way some people read scripture is that we're just trying to find something to use against someone else or we're trying to -- and sometimes it's just we're trying to medicate ourselves and we're just trying to find a verse that makes us feel good. You know, there's nothing wrong with feeling good; that might be a good side effect or a good side benefit, an additional benefit that we feel good and it lifts our spirits. But our goal has to be, Father, bring me closer to yourself

and help me be transformed to be more like Jesus in every way. And if that's our goal, then we're going to read scripture in that light, in that context, and I think that's the only right context to read scripture.

TRAVIS: Well, the point you made earlier about it being kind of like a movie, I was -- I meant to tell you that when you did that on a Wednesday night and read a lot of I Peter in one sitting, what I noticed was, you know, some people I could see kind of following along, but I usually prefer to just listen in that kind of situation. And I remember just sitting there thinking like, after a while -- just because we had been reading a while -- you had been reading a while, I felt like I was in -- I had the same sense of urgency that the passage demanded. It was like you had made the point before, but then you just kind of let the scripture speak for itself when it's like Peter is talking to people who are in trouble, and they're scared and they're worried and their faith is under attack, not -- you know, not metaphorically, not by words, but with -- it looks like we could die any day. And that -- man, you could just feel your heartbeat kind of increases a little bit when you hear that, and you hear it like a movie where it has its ups and its downs and it has its beats that it hits. It's like I found myself thinking after that, man, I give that credit to a movie where it's like I have a respect for movies where it's like I don't really want to start and stop it. If I'm going to sit down and watch it, I want to sit down and watch the whole two, two and a half hours. If it's a three-hour movie, let's just watch the three-hour movie, and I'm going to get annoyed if people take bathroom breaks.

WES: Right, because you know it messes up the flow.

TRAVIS: It messes up the flow of the movie. But I think it's like, why don't I approach scripture that way? You know, why don't I approach scripture that way? Because it's like, if that much thought goes into something that, let's face it, is about making money, about making a quick buck -- I know that's why I'm a fan of it -- if that much thought goes into that, how much more thought goes into the truth of scripture that's the word of God, you know, that it has a narrative and that it has a larger theme, not just in a book but between books, between blocks of books, between the whole thing. How much more of a narrative is that going to have that requires my undivided attention?

WES: Yeah. And I can't even imagine -- so if people take nothing else away from this, that if you go to scripture with the intention of being more like Jesus, with the intention of being transformed to think like him and live like him and talk like him, to love like Jesus -- if you go to scripture with that intention and you read books from beginning to end, man, you've got it made. I mean, if every one of us approached scripture that way, with that mind-set and that method, man, we can't help but win.

I want to thank my church family, the church of Christ on McDermott Road, and our editor, Travis Pauley, for making this podcast possible. And thank you for listening. If you haven't already done so, please rate, review, and subscribe to the podcast on Apple Podcast, or wherever you're listening. I also want to invite you to check out Logos Bible Software, who has partnered with us to give our listeners a great discount. Just go to RadicallyChristian.com/logos. I

think you'll love the software and you'll get a great discount by using that link.

As always, I love you, God loves you, and I hope you have a wonderful day.

- Wes