

" In the new world, it won't be breaking down, but it will be a world. It will be an earth. At least that's the way I read the scriptures. I don't -- I really don't know any other way to read it than to read it as changed, transformed, but still a new earth."

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 first part of our study on the new heavens and the new earth.

TRAVIS: All right, Wes. And we're back.

WES: Another opportunity for you to surprise me with questions.

TRAVIS: I'm back and I'm ready to surprise you with a question.

WES: It went well the last time --

TRAVIS: It did.

WES: -- I think. We've recorded it. We haven't seen what people's reaction to it is.

TRAVIS: Not yet, but I'm confident.

WES: But I still trust you, so that's the good -- the good news is I still trust you.

TRAVIS: That's good, because we wondered about that.

WES: Yes, absolutely. But no, I still trust you to throw questions at me.

TRAVIS: I know you know the topic today is new heavens and new earth.

WES: Yes.

TRAVIS: But I'll start by asking the question, why does new heavens and new earth matter?

WES: Wow. That's a deep question. So we've done this before on the podcast before your time here, and so I interviewed Joshua Pappas and we did -- maybe you were editing for us.

TRAVIS: I was editing at the time, yes.

WES: You were editing at the time so you weren't on the podcast, but Joshua Pappas and I talked about it, and -- you know, so I would encourage anybody that hasn't listened to that conversation to go back and listen to that one maybe before you listen to this one. Pause it, we'll still be here, or afterwards, and go back and listen to that. But it was great, and I asked him the same question: Why does this matter? And maybe we ought to define it first. I don't know. I mean, you and I know what we mean by that, by "new heavens and new earth," and everybody -- you know, even those that push back against what I would call and what I refer to as "the new heavens and new earth," the people that I would consider my opponents -- I hate to even put it that way, but my brothers and sisters that think that my view is not representative of the right view or the biblical view, even they would say that no, we are waiting for a new heavens and new earth because that's what Peter says. They would affirm that, but their definition of that would be different.

I won't presume to speak for anybody else. I will say that my view prior -- my previous view was that I didn't know what that term meant. Like that was my view, was like I don't know what that means. I don't

know what Peter means by that other than he's using a reference to Isaiah. But I don't know what he means by, "We're waiting for a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells," because my view was that there wouldn't be an earth. It wasn't that there would be a new earth; it was that there wouldn't be any earth. My view was that when Jesus appears, when Jesus returns, that he's going to take us all up to some spiritual realm, to heaven, and that we would live in a nonphysical world and that all physical things -- that's what I believed, was that all physical parts of the creation would all be destroyed by fire and that there wouldn't be anything left physical and that the only thing that would exist was spiritual, meaning nonphysical, and that we would live there and that all of this would be gone.

So if you had said to me, "Wes, what does Peter mean by saying we're waiting for a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells," I would have had to say I don't have any idea what he means by that. But that's not to say that those who hold an opposing view don't -- that -- maybe they have a better answer than I did; I don't know. Maybe they would have an answer to that and you'd have to ask them, I don't know. But I now believe that what Peter means is that when Jesus appears, that the current state of things, the current separation between where God is in the heavenly places and where we are in the earthly places, the seen places, that that division between the two will be gone. The way Peter describes it is that the sky will be burned up and that the heavens -- he calls it "the heavens" -- the heavens will be burned with fire. And that -- in fact, depending on your translation, Peter doesn't

even really talk about the earth being burned with fire; he talks about the skies being burned with fire, the elements being burned.

And I'll read for you from II Peter chapter 3. He talks about the dissolving of the heavenly bodies. Starting in verse 8, II Peter 3:8: "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord isn't slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."

There's some debate -- "textual variance" is what it's called, but there's some texts, some Greek manuscripts that says the earth will be destroyed and others that say it will be exposed. The better manuscripts say "exposed," which most people read that and say, "Exposed? What is that even supposed to mean, 'the earth will be exposed'?" So really -- I'm reading from the ESV -- the ESV gives us the idea that the sky will dissolve and that the earth will be exposed. Now, what does that mean? Well, I think what Peter means is that the sky is representative of the division between the place where God is, the heavens, the unseen places, and the earth is where we are and that that separation between the two will be dissolved. The curtain in the temple actually represented that division, and so the Holy of Holies was the place where God dwelt, and then everything else, to lesser and lesser and lesser degrees, was where

humans were: The temple courts and then outside the temple and everything else. And so humans were out here and God was in there, and in between the two was this thick curtain.

At the death of Jesus, that curtain tore, and that is a glimpse and an image of what Peter says is to come, that on the day of the Lord the separation, which is the skies, the veil of the skies, will -- in fact, we have a song that we sing, "The skies will be rolled back as a scroll." And the prophets talk about it that way, and Peter is talking about it that way, that the sky is dissolving; it's being ripped apart. It's like the curtain and the temple is being torn so that heaven and earth are exposed to one another. Specifically, earth is exposed to the judgment of heaven, and now you see God and God sees you. Not that God doesn't see us now or that, to some degree, we aren't exposed to his judgment now, but on that day it's like everything -- you think you're hiding over there in the corner, but then all of a sudden the separation of the skies that separate heaven and earth are torn back and then God sees everything and judges everything and that all evil -- in fact, he says -- he started this whole conversation by saying, verse 7, "By the same word" -- as the judgment that came upon Noah in his day -- "the heavens and earth that now exist are being stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly." So that's what he says is going to be destroyed, is the ungodly. That on that day, that God's judgment and destruction will be poured out on the ungodly and so that the earth and all of her works will be judged.

And then Peter wraps all of that up by asking, in verse 11, "Since

all these things are thus to be dissolved" -- and the dissolving was, again, verse 10, the heavens, the sky, burned up and dissolved -- and since all these are going to be dissolved this way, "what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?" So now -- right now you're supposed to be living holy and godly lives in light of the fact that Jesus is going to come and that everything is going to be judged and exposed to the judgment of God. And, you know, to your first question, why does this matter? This is why it matters. To Peter, this is why it matters, because how we live -- and that's not to say that those who hold a no-earth view rather than a new-earth view, that they don't believe we ought to lead holy lives; obviously, they do. But this is the picture that Peter is giving, and saying because we believe this is how it's all going to come out in the end, this is what we believe is going to happen, you ought to be living holy and godly lives, "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn. But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth" -- and, again, he's quoting from Isaiah 65, 66; Revelation 21 makes the same reference -- "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

And so I believe that that new heavens and new earth is this new reality that will be the case after all ungodliness and sin and judgment is taken away and it's all gone and heaven and earth now are totally united; there is no unseen place. Everything is seen, everything is exposed. Heaven and earth -- again, Ephesians 1:10 says that's Jesus'

ministry is to unite all things in heaven and on earth. And the way Revelation pictures it -- again, it's a vision and so it's figurative and I understand that. We all understand that it's figurative language, but the way John pictures it is that death -- death and Hades, the place of the dead, are thrown into a lake of fire and destroyed. Death is destroyed as if it's some tangible thing that can be thrown into a lake of fire and it's gone. And then the City of God, the New Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven from -- comes down out of heaven to the earth and God makes his dwelling place amongst us.

So what does "new heavens and new earth" mean? I think it means that time that we are waiting for, when creation and heaven are fully and totally and completely united. And it's new in the sense that it's totally, totally one hundred percent unlike what it is now. This heavens and earth is different. Heaven and earth are not united in the -- we're not saying -- by saying "new heavens and new earth" we're not saying -- one, we're not saying that this earth is wadded up and thrown away and there's a new planet. I don't believe anything in scripture teaches that, but nor are we saying that like God's going to come and set up house in LA or even in Jerusalem, or whatever. That's not what we're saying, either.

TRAVIS: Right. It's going to be remade.

WES: Right. We're saying that this planet is going to be -- and the way Peter puts it in II Peter is that it's going to be -- the world after the judgment is going to be as different, if not more different, than the world after the flood. So he says that the way that the world of Noah's day was

waiting for the flood of water, this earth is waiting for a flood of fire. And he says that that world -- Peter says the earth that existed in the days of Noah no longer exists. And we don't often, like, stop and think about that, but Peter says that world was destroyed, and we understand that. Like everything before the flood is gone, and the judgment that came destroyed all of that, and then the world that was borne through the flood and after the flood was totally different than that which existed before. And Peter says, in the same way, that this earth is being reserved for fire and that, specifically, the sky will be burned up and everything will be exposed and all the ungodliness will be judged and destroyed and taken out of existence and then we'll have a new heavens and new earth. It's going to be brand-new. It's going to be -- I believe the picture is that it will be like it was in the beginning, in creation, that this will be a new creation. Not in the sense that this planet will be thrown away, but nor in the sense that God's just going to come and take up residence on the planet as it is. It's neither of those things. It's that in the reconciling of everything in heaven and on earth, everything will be brand-new and that there will be no separation between God and humans and that everything that is evil and ungodly will be taken away, including -- Paul says in I Corinthians 15 -- the last enemy, which is death. It will be destroyed and will be nonexistent.

So the world that we're waiting for is a world -- like it's a world. That's what Peter says. I didn't say it; Peter said it, so if you want to believe in an eternity without an earth, then you've got a problem. And, again, I mean, I believed in that. I believed in an eternity without an

earth. That's not what Peter says. Peter doesn't say we're waiting for a new heaven and "no" earth. He says we're waiting for a new heavens and a "new" earth. And so the earth, in some way that I don't know -- I haven't seen it yet so I don't know in every way that it will be new, but one of the ways it will be new is that death will no longer exist and ungodliness will no longer exist and evil will no longer exist. None of those things have any place in the new heavens and the new earth.

I apologize for the interruption, but if you're enjoying this Bible study you might also enjoy the audio version of my book "Beyond the Verse." If you're not already an Audible subscriber, you can get the book for free with a 30-day free trial of Audible. Just visit radicallychristian.com/audible. Now back to the Bible study.

TRAVIS: Okay. I have so many questions.

WES: Yes.

TRAVIS: But let me just start with one, because you mentioned you used to believe another way.

WES: Yes.

TRAVIS: And so correct me if I'm wrong, but I -- because I used to believe that, as well, and I've kind of recently been -- from you and some other sources -- learning about this new heavens and new earth doctrine, and I think about what I thought before, and I have -- and it was such a rough idea. It was such a vague understanding, and when I talked about it with other people, that was always what we came back to

was, well, we don't know. We don't know what heaven's going to be like. You know, again, the idea was the earth is going to burn and it's just going to burn away.

WES: Right. Annihilation.

TRAVIS: And the concept -- this is where I may be getting too specific, and maybe most people don't, but I did study with people who were -- the consensus we came to was that well, what makes sense, if God is spirit, is that the physical will be done away and that we'll sort of -- we'll be, I guess, just spirits, and that's -- again, that's where the "We don't know," "We don't know what it's going to be like" comes from, I think, is because how can we -- we can't really fathom what an existence would be like if we were just spirits. And the idea was we return back to God so we're all just sort of -- there's no real identity anymore. We're just -- when it really got specific, it was like we're going to be -- it's more like energy, which starts crossing over into a --

WES: New Age.

TRAVIS: -- more New Agey stuff that doesn't feel like -- that feels as far apart from Christianity as can be.

WES: Yes, yes. And you're really hitting on it because, really -- the biblical emphasis is really on resurrection, and I think that when you really wrestle through that idea, that's really where a lot of this shakes out and that's really where the rub is, is on the idea of resurrection.

And we've talked about this quite a few times. In fact, somebody gave me a hard time the other day that every lesson I teach and every podcast that I do I come back to resurrection. But I think that that's

biblical to do that. I mean, Paul says in I Corinthians 15, which is a chapter I love -- but Paul says in I Corinthians 15 that without that, none of the rest of it matters, that this is the pivotal doctrine. And, I mean, I don't mean to, you know, defend myself by saying, well, Paul did it. But I mean, every sermon that he taught -- even when he was teaching in places like Athens -- when he's on Mars Hill and he's among a bunch of Greek philosophers, he doesn't talk about, "Hey, well, you believe in an afterlife and I believe in an afterlife; let's just talk about where you're going to spend forever. You believe you'll spend forever somewhere; I believe we'll spend forever somewhere. Let's talk about that." That's how most modern Christians would approach that conversation. They would say, "Well, hey, you believe in, you know, Hades; you believe in torment; you believe in paradise; you believe in, you know, some spiritual afterlife. So do I. Let's talk about that."

That's not what Paul does. Paul does something radical. He talks about resurrection of the dead, and that's where he lost people. And people were like, "Oh, that guy's crazy because he's talking about resurrection of the dead and people don't come back from the dead." And so, for Paul, everything comes back to that. And so Paul's entire doctrine -- Paul's entire doctrine, Paul's entire gospel revolves around -- when I say "Paul's," I don't mean it's unique to just Paul; I mean the gospel that he preached, because everybody -- because the other apostles preached it. It all revolved around resurrection of the dead. That the Jewish people believed, because of the promises that were made all throughout the law and the prophets -- because of all of the

promises, they believed the only way for God to keep all those promises to all of those faithful people who were faithful for a very long time and who did not receive the promises for which they were waiting and expecting -- the only way for them to receive the things that God had promised to them was resurrection of their bodies. They believed that they would be resurrected.

Now, there was debate in Paul's day between, specifically, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and that was one of their big debates. And the Sadducees said, "No, no, no, no, we don't believe in resurrection. We don't believe that that's" -- they didn't believe in angels; they didn't believe in a lot of things. And the Pharisees, like Paul was one, believed in resurrection. When Jesus comes along, he believes in resurrection. He says the son of man is going to call out those who have done righteous things to a resurrection of life and those who have done evil to a resurrection of judgment. He confirms that there will be a coming resurrection. But the surprising thing is that Jesus, the faithful one, is resurrected. Not just like resuscitated; not just like he was raised to die again, because that kind of thing happened in the biblical -- not a lot, but it happened -- you know, Elijah and Jesus resurrected people like Lazarus. And so you had resurrections, but all of those people were resurrected to die again.

But Jesus resurrects -- Jesus is resurrected, is raised up by God immortal, never to die again. The Jewish people, as a general rule, with the exception of the Sadducees, believed that that was going to be the case, that all the faithful would be resurrected immortal, with immortal

bodies never to die again. What they didn't expect was one person to be resurrected that way, not at the very end, but right -- as one scholar in particular says a lot, right in the middle of history. That's what's shocking. And so for Paul -- Paul says this confirms all of the hopes, all of the expectations. This is what we've been saying all along, that there's going to be a resurrection, and Jesus is resurrected right now so that you know that he is -- Paul puts it in terms of "the first fruit" -- the first fruit of the coming resurrection. And so we have to understand that when he says "resurrection," he doesn't mean become a spirit. He doesn't mean become a spirit and float off to live in some nonspiritual world. That's not what "resurrection" means. That's not what the Greek word meant; that's not what it means in English; that's not what anybody means by "resurrection." "Resurrection" means your body dies, is buried, and then comes to life again.

Now, it's -- your resurrected body is different than your preresurrection body, than your dead body, in that it -- Paul says it's immortal, it's imperishable, it will not be defiled. So it's different, but it's also the same. It's connected in some way to your preresurrection body. If it wasn't, it wouldn't be resurrection. If it was just you're a different person now, you have a different body now, "different" as in not just changed but disconnected, it's not resurrection. I made this example before, but --

TRAVIS: It sounds like possession.

WES: Right. And there's a difference between me saying, "I'm driving a new car" and "I'm driving a restored car." If you say, "I restored my old

car" and then I come out and I see, "Wait a second. That's a brand-new car. That's not the car you had before." You say, "Well, I'm just using the word 'restored' differently." It's like no, no, you're just using it wrong. That's not a restoration. Like a restoration is you took the old thing and you made it into a new thing. That's restoration, that's resurrection. When you get rid of the old thing completely and then you get something totally different and you say that's a restoration, it's not. You're just wrong. That's not how the word works.

So if we're saying "resurrection" and we're meaning we just got rid of our body and our body doesn't matter, then we're using the word wrong. That's not what resurrection is. In the biblical -- I mean, you can believe whatever you want about whether or not there will be an earth -- and, again, I don't mean to be disparaging about anything or anybody, but resurrection for Paul and for me -- I believe for the gospel -- is pivotal. We have to believe that this body that we have now -- that it will be changed and transformed, but it will be this body, in some way connected to this body. Different, changed, transformed, gone through a metamorphosis, but still connected to this body. If it's not, then "resurrection" is the wrong word and we have to ask, why were you using that word? Jesus' body was the same body. It was the one that had the nail scars in the hands. It was his resurrected body. It was transformed; it was immortal. It's never going to die again, but it was still his same body.

And so we have to understand that this idea about eternity, this idea about the age to come and what's going to happen when Jesus

returns -- the idea that we won't have a body, that's not resurrection. And that's -- and I'm glad we had this because talking about, you know, what did I used to believe, that was the part that really confused me. It was like, okay, so I believe that when you die you go to be with the Lord. Your spirit goes to be with the Lord, and then Jesus is going to come back and there's going to be a resurrection, and then you become a spirit again and then go be with the Lord again. It's like well, that seems kind of like a redundant system. Like that seems totally unnecessary. Why do I need to be resurrected again just to go again to where I was or to someplace that's almost exactly like where I was before when I was dead? But the biblical picture is that you're going to be -- when you die your Spirit goes to be with the Lord, but then there's a resurrection to an inheritance -- to an inheritance.

And Jesus says -- again, Jesus says -- Matthew chapter 5, he says, "The meek will inherit the earth." Now, you can believe that's like a totally different earth or you can believe that maybe he just meant that as a metaphor, but you have to ask, why did Jesus say it that way? Well, he said it that way because that's what the psalmist said. He's quoting the psalms that say the meek will inherit the earth, and they didn't mean it as a metaphor. The psalmist meant it very literally, that if you are meek and you trust in the Lord, even though you're persecuted you will receive the land. And the Jewish faithful, the remnant of God's people, always believed the only way for us to receive our inheritance, for the faithful to receive their inheritance, is for us to be resurrected from the dead because many of us have died while we're waiting on God to fulfill

his promises, and the prophets say not only will we receive the land of Israel, we'll receive the earth, and we're waiting for that. And Jesus says it's still true and it's going to come true in me and through me and the meek will inherit the earth.

Now, yes, the earth will be changed and transformed and go through a metamorphosis and it won't be like what it is now at all because everything we know now is corrupt. Everything we know is corrupt. Everything is breaking down. Everything is breaking down. Trees are breaking down and dying, humans are breaking down and dying, the dirt is probably -- I'm not a geologist, I don't know, but I imagine everything has a half-life; everything is breaking down. And in the new world it won't be breaking down, but it will be a world. It will be an earth, at least that's the way I read the scriptures. I don't -- I really don't know any other way to read it than to read it as changed, transformed, but still a new earth, an earth that we will inherit. And I believe that the same as our resurrection bodies, the earth will be resurrected, changed, and transformed so that the earth, the creation, is immortal and imperishable.

I really hope you enjoyed the first part of this Bible study. We'll wrap up this particular conversation next week. Make sure you're subscribed so you don't miss part two. A big thanks to Travis Pauley, as well as our McDermott Road church family for helping to make this podcast possible, and a special thanks to all of you for listening. We love you, God loves you, and we hope that you have a wonderful day.