

Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast

Does God Do Evil?

TRAVIS: Hello, everybody, and welcome back to the Bible study podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. I hope you enjoy this conversation.

We're back. Hi, Wes.

WES: Hey, Travis. How are you?

TRAVIS: I'm going great. How about yourself?

WES: Doing very well.

TRAVIS: As you said before we got started, we've got just an easy, light topic for today's episode. No big deal.

WES: Yeah. I told you earlier this week -- I was like, yeah, I don't have a whole lot of time to prep this week, and so we'll just do something that we can talk about off the top of our head. But then I got the same question twice, and so after I get a question twice, then I think, oh, we should probably talk about that. But it is not really a light, fluffy topic, so I had to do a little bit more prep than I thought I was going to.

TRAVIS: So for the listeners, what is our topic today?

WES: So our topic is -- we're kind of calling it "Does God do evil?" "Does God do what is evil?" I'll read the questions. One of the questions was posed, and, basically, they just asked how would I answer an unbelieving neighbor who asked, "How does your God get all the credit and none of the blame," which is a great question.

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: So if God gets the credit for the good things that happen in the world because God is in charge of all things, then wouldn't God also get the blame for the bad things that happen in the world: earthquakes and famines and hurricanes and tornados?

Another person asked -- and this listener specifically asked in order for us to talk about it on the podcast, and he's talking to his brother, and he said that his brother has rededicated his life to Christ, which that's wonderful. Congratulations on that. And so he's really searching and asking some really deep, good questions, and he says one of his brother's questions was, does God do evil? And he brought up stories like the Egyptians dying in the Red Sea. Then this listener thought of stories like the Great Flood or when God commanded King Saul to kill all the Amalekites, so he wants our opinion on does God do what is evil?

So before we jump into that, anything that comes to your mind right off the top of your head?

TRAVIS: I think, often, when we talk, we bring up these topics that are sort of central questions, I think, that every human being, to some extent or another, has asked at some point and for as long as we've been here, and this definitely, I think, feels like one of those questions. You know, does God do evil? I might not have asked that specifically, but certainly, in a roundabout way, I've asked that question. And it's -- I think, for Christians especially, it's uncomfortable to talk about because there are a lot of stories in scripture that you and I struggle with. I don't know what to think about that, so, yeah, I think this is such a good topic for conversation.

WES: Right. And it's at the foundation of a lot of skepticism in the world.

Like this person said, how do I answer an unbelieving neighbor who says, "Why does your God get all the credit and none of the blame?" And sort of what I'm inferring from that type of question is that the unbeliever who might ask a question like that is an unbeliever who is kind of cynical about religion or, specifically, about Christianity, and this idea that God is probably -- you know, quote-unquote, if there is a God, and this God is all powerful, then why should we not blame him for the things that happen in the world? And this is one of the questions behind a lot of atheism in the world, that if there is an all-powerful God and there is an all-loving God, then there shouldn't be any pain and suffering in the world.

And that question makes sense philosophically, but what I want to do is kind of examine what scripture says -- I don't think necessarily as a response to that because scripture wasn't written to respond to those accusations -- but I think once we know and are comfortable with the story of scripture, the story that scripture is actually telling about the world and about God, it doesn't necessarily alleviate or remove these questions, but it does kind of put them into a certain context so that we can live in the world in which we live and be patient in our suffering.

So let's look at a couple different things. First of all, I think, is defining the word "evil." A good example is Isaiah 45. So Isaiah 45:7, this is the King James Version. It says, speaking from God's perspective, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." So there, specifically, God says, "I create evil." Now, we have to ask, what does that particular version of the word "evil" mean? The ESV and most other translations read, "I form light and create darkness; I

make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things." So there's a couple different ways to understand the word "evil," and I actually think "bad" -- The Bible Project guys, even when they're talking about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they put it in terms of "the knowledge of good and bad," and I think "bad" is probably a better word than "evil" because when we think about evil, we think about moral evil, like doing something that is immoral that God obviously -- I shouldn't say "obviously," but God absolutely does not do what is morally wrong, what is evil in that sense. But it can mean -- "bad" can have a lot broader range of meaning in English than "evil" typically does.

So "bad" can mean like I'm having a bad day, or, "How do you feel?" "I feel bad." Like what we mean by "bad" can mean immoral bad, but it can also mean bad like, "This hurts. I don't like this. This is not enjoyable. It's not pleasant. It's not comfortable," so it's bad in that sense. So "bad" can have this much wider, broader range of meaning, and so I think that might help us to get a little closer to what, like, Isaiah 45 means. Evil, in this sense, or bad, or -- again, I think "calamity" is a great word in this instance, that God brings about, or is said to bring about, things like destruction, punishment, and there's a sense in which that is bad. It's not comfortable. It's not pleasant. It hurts. It's painful. Even like the evil spirit that is said to have come on Saul. When God's spirit was removed from Saul, there was an evil spirit that came from the Lord that tormented him. Now, evil in what sense? Well, evil, I think, in the sense that it was painful. It was not comfortable. It tormented him. He needed David to come and play the harp and to calm him down and remove that evil spirit from him, that painful,

tormenting spirit. So I think that gets us a little closer to what we mean by what sort of evil or pain or destruction or punishment does God bring about.

But even in the context of this question that was asked, it was like the parting of the Red Sea and then destroying the Egyptians as they went through the sea; or the flood, when all but eight people in the world were destroyed. So let's kind of walk through and just kind of say how should we think about God and punishment and even just the pain and suffering that exists in the natural world -- hurricanes and earthquakes and tornados.

So I think, first of all, what we have to understand is the character of God. Earlier, I said God obviously doesn't do what is immoral, and I guess there's a sense in which I could use the word "obviously," but it depends on who we're talking to whether or not they think that's obvious. But what I'm saying by that is when you -- if we're going to take God at face value based on the story of scripture, then who that God reveals himself to be is a God who is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Those words are used over and over and over again about God, that he's patient, he's longsuffering, he's not a quick-tempered God. He is patient. He endures. He tolerates. He puts up with. We talked recently about God allowing himself to be wrestled with by Israel and by humankind. So God is a patient God, but we also find things like God is good, the goodness of God, the righteousness of God. When scripture says that God is righteous, it means that God keeps his covenant. He is faithful to his covenant promises.

I think what's interesting is that in the modern world, we think about God having anger or being wrathful or punishing people, and we're a little bit scandalized by that, and we're like, I'm not sure how to talk about that or

think about that. In the ancient world, that wouldn't have been scandalous at all. They wouldn't have been shocked at all that a god would have wrath or would punish people that crossed him or did what was wrong. That would have been the obvious thing. Like they would have been like, well, obviously, a god has wrath. What would have been shocking to them is a god who's patient, a god who's longsuffering, a god who is gracious, a god who is merciful, a god who continues to put up with human beings who continually disobey him, and he continues to love them. This kind of God of love, that's what was shocking and surprising. So yes, there is an element of punishment and wrath, but the overwhelming message about who Yahweh is is that he's a God that is shockingly gracious and merciful.

But then I think passages like James 1:17 are really helpful. It says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change," that the good things are from God, that God is a God who gives good gifts. Jesus described God to people almost entirely in terms of -- to God's people, to people who followed Jesus, as a heavenly Father, and he would ask questions like, if your son wants bread, you don't give him a stone. If he wants a fish, you don't give him a snake. Like God is a God who gives good things. And then, to kind of top all of that off, the prime example and description that we have of who is God is not words; it's a person. Jesus is the embodiment of who God is. He is the perfect embodiment of the character of God. So if we want to try to understand what things should we see as coming directly from God -- should we see God as vindictive, should we see God as wrathful, should we see God as punishing and destructive and

all these bad things coming from God, sort of like two sides of the same coin, like, well, God does a lot of good things, but he also does a lot of bad things -- I don't think we can look at it that way, primarily because Jesus shows us who God is.

Now, that doesn't mean we don't have to deal with all of those other texts, but it does mean if you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. And Jesus comes, and he won't even break a bruised reed. He won't put out a smoldering wick. I mean, he doesn't raise his voice in the streets. He doesn't come with a sword in his hands. Even when Jesus is talked about in apocalyptic literature with a sword, it's coming out of his mouth. It's with his words. He's not this destructive, vengeful, vindictive king figure that you would expect. And so all of that is to say that if we want to deal with what category do we put destruction in, we have to first understand the character of God, that God is the person we see in Jesus.

Let's kind of stop there for a second and see what reaction you have to that.

TRAVIS: Yeah. First of all, I love that you brought up how the people, at the time the scriptures were being written, would have thought about this, and that's what's so amazing about Jesus, right, is that the norm and how you think about God, or a god, would be, yeah, he's all-powerful and does what he wants and sometimes can be sadistic, and then Jesus comes down and shows us a different face of God than many of his own people had. You know, many of his own people -- I'm going to bring it up again because I've been thinking about this scene the whole time we were talking, but there's an episode of *The Chosen* where Jesus is reading the passage from Isaiah, "The

spirit of the Lord is upon me," and he stops. And they say -- the Jews in the synagogue say, you know, "Why don't you keep reading? Why don't you keep reading the part about vengeance?" He says, "That's not what I'm here for. That part comes later." And I love that because that would have been like -- to use your word, very scandalous. You know, isn't God supposed to be all about justice? It turns out he's also about mercy, even though justice is a vital aspect to the nature of God.

One thing I keep thinking about, though, is -- and I've thought this for myself and when I've heard other people ask this question, you know, I've heard atheists describe God as a -- God's a bully on an anthill with a magnifying glass, that kind of sadistic behavior. When you read stories like Sodom and Gomorrah or the flood or the conquest of Canaan, I see how it's -- you can come away with that picture. But I think when we're asking this question, well, is God capable of doing evil, is God sadistic, is God -- you're also asking -- you're asking not just a question about God himself, you're asking a question, I think, about reality itself.

WES: Yes, yes.

TRAVIS: Because you do have to -- we all have to make a decision, and I think it is -- if it's something you're just going to intuit or feel, well, then you're going to be led by emotion; you're going to be led by reaction to things. So I think it is a decision that we have to make: Is life ultimately good or is life ultimately bad? There's so many stories in scripture that deal with this. I'm thinking particularly about Job. But that sort of philosophical question that people have been asking for a long time, a lot of people come down on the side of nihilism and that life is ultimately -- it's just suffering

and there's just these little, happy moments that sometimes distract us from that, but ultimately, life is bad. That's sort of what I think we're getting at when we look at stories that are very difficult to understand.

But we hone in on those and we forget the fact that God does a lot of good and that he is a Heavenly Father and that there's so many times where he provides for his people. I don't know why this one came to mind, but I think about him with Elijah and all the turmoil of Israel. What does he do? He gets Elijah out to a Gentile widow because she needs his help. She needs food. She needs -- you know, her son, ultimately, needed to be raised from the dead. You know, there's so many stories about God's goodness, and yet we look at those impactful, destructive stories and they tend to be what makes up our focus because, I think, like in a lot of ways, negative can be a lot stronger than positive. It affects us deeper in a lot of ways, but I think that's a reflection of our attitude. That's a reflection of our cynicism. And so, again, all that to say, when I think about this question we're wrestling with, it's not just about God himself; it's about everything. It's about reality itself.

WES: Yeah. I'm glad you brought that up because that's exactly right.

That's really kind of phase two of this discussion, is that -- first, is understanding the character of God. God is good. In fact, God created a good world. I mean, if we read the Bible -- if we read the story that scripture lays out about what happened and how we should interpret reality, then we would interpret reality as this good, perfect world, and it became infected when humans sinned. That we opened the door -- humanity opened the door to the forces of darkness and evil, and that's how the corruption -- we could

think of it the way -- one of the metaphors scripture uses for it is like disease, that a disease -- if you think of the entire creation as a healthy body -- in the beginning, it was created as a perfectly healthy body, this system that was perfectly healthy, and that God oversaw and that he partnered with humanity to cultivate and to help it to flourish, and then humanity rebelled and opened the doors to the forces of darkness and evil -- every time we see God doing, quote-unquote, bad things in scripture, it's actually to eradicate a portion of the disease.

So one metaphor that I really like is the idea of a surgeon with a scalpel. If you see someone coming at you with a knife, well, one way to interpret that is that they're a bad person who wants to do you harm. But if that person is a doctor who's coming at you with a scalpel -- same instrument, different type of a person, different character --

TRAVIS: It has the same effect on your body.

WES: Right. He actually is going to cut you, but his intention is to cut away what is bad and what is infecting the rest of the body. You might say, well, what if the doctor actually cuts away some good things with the bad things? And the truth is that's going to happen every time. It has to happen. In fact, that's why scripture says God doesn't step in more often because that's what always happens. When God steps in -- whether it's the flood -- yes, there were innocent children that got swept away with the flood, and what would have happened had God not caused the flood to come? That disease would have infected everything. As it were, there were only eight people that were preservable. The cancer had infected the entire creation. And so God preserved those eight cells that were still good and wiped

everything else out and started again. And then over and over again when God has acted in judgment -- Jericho, the armies of Pharaoh, whatever it was -- he was eradicating a portion of the disease so that he could preserve what was good in order to bring about an even greater good, so this is the picture that we see.

In fact -- we always go to Romans 8, and so I know listeners of the podcast, probably every time they turn on this podcast, they're like, I bet, at some point, Wes is going to Romans 8.

TRAVIS: It's the Romans 8 podcast.

WES: Yeah, exactly. But Romans 8:21 says that creation is in bondage to corruption, but Paul says that won't always be the case. At some point, it's going to be liberated from its bondage to corruption, but we have to understand creation right now in those terms. We'll get more into the idea that God is sovereign over creation. He's still ruling over creation, but we have to understand that he is ruling over a diseased, corrupted, enslaved creation that he didn't corrupt. You know, when people ask, well, why is there pain and suffering in the world? Because we opened the door to the forces of darkness. And I think we also have to understand that; that when bad things happen -- and I say bad things like a mass shooting or bad things like an earthquake. In both cases, I think there can be -- sometimes directly, and sometimes indirectly, there can be forces of darkness that are involved in that. I don't know how that works, but I know that Paul says that our struggle is against the forces of darkness.

Now, if forces of darkness aren't doing bad, harmful, destructive things through lies and corruption and however Satan operates in the world,

then why would we be struggling against those things? But we are in a battle against those things. So yes, in a sense, God gets all the credit for the good and none of the blame for the bad. If I go into a doctor and he does an operation on me, even if I die because I was beyond the point of saving, I don't blame the doctor. The doctor didn't kill me, chances are. The doctor didn't kill me; what killed me was the disease. The doctor was trying to save me. And so, again, even if in a successful operation when they remove bad things, sometimes they have to remove a lot of good things, too, because it's corrupted, and this corruption works like a disease in creation.

And so when we look around, we do see a lot of good that remains from God's original creation. When it was all created, God said it's good. Human bodies are good. The stars and the moon and the sun are good. The trees and the water are good. The animals and the plants and the birds, they're good. All of this is good. All of these things are good. But then there's also a sense in which it's a little bit off. All of it's been a little bit corrupted, and sometimes a lot corrupted, and all of this destruction, and so Paul says in Romans 8 that the whole creation is like a woman in childbirth pains crying out, waiting for redemption. So we have to understand that the pain and suffering that exists in the world is all due -- again, not necessarily directly; it's not because if I get sick, well, it's because I sinned. No, that's not how it works. But if I get sick, it's because sin originally opened the door to destructive forces of sin and death and darkness and disease and corruption into God's good creation.

I just want to take a short break from our Bible study to tell you that if

you are enjoying this discussion, you might also enjoy my book "Beyond the Verse." You can find the audio version of the book at RadicallyChristian.com/audible. If you're not already an Audible subscriber, you can actually get my book for free when you sign up for a free trial, so go to RadicallyChristian.com/audible. Now back to the Bible study.

WES: Okay. So we've gotten to the point that God is good and creation is good, but creation is infected. Creation is infected with sin and disease and death and corruption. It's in bondage. It's crying out in pain. It's looking for deliverance. And, actually, that's what the cynic and the skeptic and the atheist is actually admitting, whether they know it or not.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: By even saying there is evil in the world, there are bad things that happen in the world --

TRAVIS: You're making a judgment about the nature of -- yeah.

WES: Right. So you're saying this shouldn't be this way, and the Bible affirms that, and I think that's where we should start with our atheistic friends or our agnostic friends or our skeptical friends: "You're right. It shouldn't be this way. And you're right that a good God would do something about this. You're absolutely right. A good God would not allow this to last like this forever. You're right. You're absolutely right."

And, in fact, I would even say, as kind of my third point, is that if God is sovereign over all things, if he rules and reigns over all things and is able to stop bad things from happening, then you could say there's a sense in which -- hear the nuance in my voice here -- there's a sense in which God is

responsible in the same way that I'm responsible for all the bad things that happen in my house. Like if my kid -- I won't say which kid, but if one of my children, like, intentionally take a lamp and smash it on the floor, then I, as a dad, could walk in and say, "Who's responsible for this?" And I could blame the son who did it. But if it was a priceless artifact that I was borrowing from the museum, and while it was in my house my son did that, then who is going to be held responsible? Well, me, because it's my house. I'm sovereign. I'm in charge there. And so God is in charge of the world and he allows these things to happen.

And to your point about Job and so much of scripture, it's like, okay -- so many of the Psalms. "Okay, God. What are you doing about this?" Now, the gospel is the answer, that Jesus is coming, not as a surgeon to cut out all the evil and destroy it right now, but is coming as a medicine that's actually healing the body, and that new creation, that future reality where there is no more sin and there is no more disease and there is no more bad in the world, that's actually begun in Jesus. As soon as Jesus was raised from the dead, the healing, the holiness, it began to spread, and we are being healed from the inside out, and so that actually changes the world. Like, people that are following Jesus don't commit genocide. They don't go and shoot people. Like, that is beginning that change in us.

Now, you say but there's still earthquakes and there's still tornados and there's still other people that murder people and all of these bad things that are still happening. If Jesus is the cure and the answer, why are these things still happening? Now, Peter addresses exactly that question. So II Peter 3, another one of my favorite passages -- II Peter 3 is talking about the flood,

and he says that there's going to be skeptics that say, "Hey, you've been saying that your God is going to fix all of this and that he's going to get rid of all the evil, and everything's going to be great forever. Where is he and why doesn't he show up?" And he says in II Peter 3:8 -- in fact, you want to read that for us? And just keep reading until I interrupt you rudely.

TRAVIS: You got it. "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 is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should preach 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. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 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 in which righteousness dwells."

WES: Okay. I didn't interrupt as much as I thought I would. But, yeah, so Peter is talking, and he's comparing that coming of the Lord to the flood, and he's saying a day is coming in which there will be a cleansing fire, that the skies will be dissolved. It's like the skies are like a curtain over the earth between God and humanity, and the skies will be burned up, and it's like everything is going to be -- the word there is "exposed," laid bare, and it's all going to be exposed to the judgment of God, and what is not good --

whatever is not good, whatever is bad, will be dissolved. It will be burned up. It will be obliterated so that --

TRAVIS: And what's bad about you and me will be burned off.

WES: Right. Exactly. And so he says that's why right now we have to live in holiness, because if we're living holy lives -- if we're cleansed by the blood of Jesus and we're living holy lives, then we welcome the judgment of God. In fact, that's the ironic thing, is that the same people that could say, "How dare God destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? How dare God send a flood to destroy all of these evil people?" And the same people turn around and say, "Well, why doesn't God show up and deal with all the evil?" You tend not to like it when God does that.

TRAVIS: How would you like God to deal with the child sacrificers and the morally repugnant?

WES: Exactly. And so the way God is dealing with it is that he's given the world the medicine of the Holy Spirit, the medicine of the gospel, and is allowing that to do its work in bringing us to repentance and change, and there is a day coming where there is going to be a radical surgery in which everything that is bad is going to be cut out and destroyed. And Peter says, why doesn't God show up and do that now? Because he's patient. Because as soon as that happens, then everybody's opportunity to repent is gone. This is everybody's opportunity. He wants those bad cells -- I'm talking about human beings like cells, but take the bad parts of humanity, and he wants them to become good and healthy and strong so that they survive into the age to come, so that they're redeemed. He wants to redeem humanity. He doesn't want to destroy. He wants to change what is evil into what is

good. That's what God wants, and so he allows it for the same reason that -- again, to go back to the parent analogy. If I'm responsible for what happens in my house, then every time my son -- again, I won't tell you which son -- but every time one of my sons backtalks me or disobeys me, then I'm responsible for that. I'm responsible to discipline them and to stop that behavior, but I don't do it right away because I want to be patient. I want it to be their idea, for them to realize, "Oh, Dad, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have" -- in fact, that exact thing happened yesterday. One of my sons came and said, "I'm sorry I was irrational. I'm sorry I acted that way," and so that's what I want. That's what God wants. He wants repentance; he doesn't want destruction.

And so the whole world, both -- that's what's ironic. Both believers and unbelievers are actually, in their own way, asking for the justice of God. Now, we're asking in different ways. Like we want the justice of God because we recognize that evil people and evil things, evil parts of the corrupted environment continue to bring death and destruction, and we want the justice of God because we want to be free from all of that. Now, unbelievers and skeptics, they're also asking for the judgment of God, but they don't recognize that there is evil in them, and they're not willing to say, "Wait a second. If God's judgment came now, I wouldn't be ready for his judgment. I couldn't stand before the judgment of God," and the only reason we can stand before the judgment of God is because we stand forgiven because of Jesus.

TRAVIS: Yeah. I think -- man, I love what you just said there, and I want to make a point on that because I think we have a tendency -- like you

brought up, there's observably malicious acts of evil or bad, like a mass shooting or something like that, and then there's less -- we're less able to attribute what -- is it evil? Is it neutral? It's certainly destructive, with things like earthquakes or hurricanes or tornados. They can cause so much damage and destruction and tragedy.

WES: Those are amoral. They're an amoral evil.

TRAVIS: Yeah, I like that. But I think sometimes we look at those things because they affect us quite a lot and they scare us, they worry us. Before they -- whether or not they come or before they happen, we look at those things and we have a tendency to say -- you know, we're just set against it. I can't do anything about the evil in the world, whether it's amoral or it's malicious. And so then we turn to God, and we think, "Why are you allowing all this? Why are you doing all this?"

But an interesting point, you know, we sing a lot of songs in church about -- we talk about what Jesus did on the cross. He paid our debt. We owed a debt of sin, and Jesus paid it, or he died for our sins. He died for the forgiveness -- to offer us the forgiveness of our sins, use that kind of language. Somebody I follow described it like this, that Jesus took responsibility for our sins. And I don't know why, but I never really thought about it in those terms, and this person was making the point that not only was that profound -- the most profound thing that could ever happen, in my opinion, it also gives us an example to take responsibility for the sins of the world.

WES: Yes, yes.

TRAVIS: I can't do it like Jesus did it without having contributed. I have

contributed. But to relate it back to what I was just saying and what we were talking about, we look at the evil that happens and we turn to God -- and understandably so. I've done it, and I'll probably do it again, and I go, "Why?" I've done that this week. "Why God? Why would you allow this?" But the ultimate mission of, I think, any person, Jesus showed us, is take responsibility for not just your sins, for the sins of the world. And why? How? Because you contributed. And it's easy sometimes to say, "But I'm not doing all of that. I'm not doing those malicious acts. I'm not -- you know, I'm not causing tornados or earthquakes." But you are contributing. You might just be one little number, but you are contributing.

WES: It came into the world through our father, Adam, and then it wasn't like we were like, "Hey, Dad, Adam" --

TRAVIS: "Let's cut that out."

WES: -- "we're not going to do that anymore." Like we did exactly the same thing, so we're as responsible. We blame Adam and Eve all the time, but we followed in their footsteps. And so all of this -- you're right; we opened the door to all of it and participated with it. And I love what you said about take responsibility, because that actually is my fourth point, is that we have -- Jesus gives us the hope that it's not always going to be this way, and we're right to say, "Why do you keep allowing this?" And, "Come, Lord Jesus. Come fix this. Eradicate the corruption and set us free from this bondage." We're right to cry out that way.

But also, to your point, Jesus gives us a new way of looking at the sin and suffering in the world in that now, as forgiven people that have been set free, now we join him in his work of redemption. And I'm preaching this

week on Galatians 6 that says if somebody is caught in a transgression, you who are spiritual, you who've been filled with the Spirit, you bear one another's burdens. You restore that person in a spirit of gentleness, and you bear one another's burdens. And when you bear one another's burdens -- you just said it -- take responsibility for the situation people are in. Even though you didn't do it, like you didn't make them sin, but you've done stuff just as bad, and you might do stuff again, and so we do for others what Jesus has done for us. He wasn't responsible for our sin, but he took responsibility for the situation we were in and he bore our burdens, and so that's what we do for each other.

And then, even like the things that -- like earthquakes and tornados and hurricanes, why help people with those things? Because as this new royal priesthood that have been cleansed, we are the new creation stepping into the old creation. Again, I like to think in terms of being time travelers. We -- in Christ, we're from the future, the future world where there is no sin and dying and death and suffering, and we're here in the past as exiles, time exiles, and we're living here in the old creation bringing a bit of new creation with us everywhere we go, alleviating the suffering, helping people, including ourselves and our family and the people we know and love that are dealing with the effects of sin and suffering.

And so Jesus gives us not only hope for the future when all of this is eradicated, but a new way of thinking about suffering, and even redeeming the suffering so that now, in Christ, we can say, James 1:2, "Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you face trials of various kinds because the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." Like we actually believe that God can

redeem suffering, that God didn't directly cause it; God didn't want us to live in a world of suffering. God didn't send an earthquake to teach me a lesson, but God sovereignly is overseeing all of these things and is allowing it, one, because he's being patient, but, two, because God teaches us that I can actually become a better person when I go through these things, so he doesn't rescue me from every little bad thing that might happen in my life even though it might genuinely be bad. Like it's genuinely not a good thing and it indirectly was caused by or directly caused by sin, but even though that's true, and even though the forces of darkness and evil may intend it for evil, God intends it for good.

I always go back to Genesis 50:20, Joseph with his brothers, and they sold him into slavery. What they did was genuinely evil, but what they intended for evil, God intended for good. Romans 8:28, God is able to cause these bad situations to work out for good. He thwarts their end result. So Satan somehow wants all of these painful, destructive, horrible things, these lies -- he wants all of this to end in something bad. And God, for those that belong to him and who love him and who are called according to his purpose, he's able to take those bad things and redeem them towards something that is good.

TRAVIS: You know, I love that you brought up -- like in the case of like an earthquake or a tornado, a lot of times you'll see relief efforts, and when I've been cynical and asked, you know -- and really not just theoretically, but in really cynical terms the kind of questions we're discussing, "Is the universe indifferent? Is God evil?" When I've asked those kind of questions, one of the things that kind of pulled me back was, but what about all the Christians

that help people? It's not just Christians, but it's -- a lot of the time if there's good going on, there's probably a Christian somewhere in the center of that. And that, to me, was so encouraging. Like, well, these people that seem to think, you know, that -- and the way I've been raised to think God is good, they live that way. Not all the time, not in every situation, and not certainly all of us. Like I'm saying, I've struggled with that. But that's one of the things that -- you know, do we live in an indifferent universe? Is God evil? It's like, but you and I aren't all indifferent or evil. You and I have the ability -- and so many Christians and people around the world, they do respond to evil with "Let's go to work. Let's help. Let's try to make -- we can't fix it, but let's try to make it better."

So that, to me, is not -- we've not been -- it wouldn't make sense for us to have been given a spirit that is in direct contradiction to the father that created us, so the spirit of cynicism and throwing our hands up and saying it's all for nothing, that -- it occurs to me that's a really good strategy of the evil one. You know, like you said, he intends those things for evil. It's like, yeah, because it would -- it's really easy -- it's very easy to respond to tragedy and suffering and malevolence in your life with throwing up your hands and saying it's -- you know, now it doesn't matter what I do. I have a blank check now to do whatever I want in response to that. And it's -- that's a really good strategy Satan uses against us all the time.

WES: You know, it's funny how the modern world has been so influenced by the gospel and doesn't even realize it a lot of times, that the way that even the skeptic thinks, if there's a God, he should be a good God. He should be a loving God. Again, that has been a transformation that has come about

because of the preaching of the gospel, because the world has been so influenced by Christian teaching. The idea that sick and hurting people should be cared for, that has come about because of Christian teaching. In the ancient world, and unfortunately in a lot of the world that is pre-Christian that hasn't really been influenced by Christianity, they look at sick and hurting and dying people like they must have done something wrong; they deserve that. They did something in a past life where they deserve to suffer, so there's no sense helping them because that's the status and the fate that they deserve. Or survival of the fittest: "I'm bigger. I have the gold; I make the rules." That's the way the world has normally operated.

The way that we tend to say good people should take care of hurting people, that's justice, righteousness that has come about because of the preaching of the gospel, that even cynical, skeptical people just accept that as a self-evident truth. But it hasn't been self-evident for most people throughout human history; it's only because of the teaching of the gospel. And, again, to your point about Christians, things like hospitals -- Christianity created things like hospitals. That was not a concept that people were familiar with. In fact, "hospitality" means taking care of, or care for, strangers, the word from which we get hospitality. And so -- and, again, "hospital" is about caring for strangers. Before the gospel and the spread of Christianity, it was -- you just take care of your own. You take care of people that look like you. You take care of your own family. You take care of your own tribe. You don't take care of strangers. But Christianity has changed the world. Again, it is this medicine -- the Holy Spirit is this medicine, and even people that haven't really accepted the gospel as true and

become Christians, they've been affected, in a good way, by the preaching of the gospel and the spread of the Holy Spirit throughout the world.

And, again, I don't want to close without saying that there's still this hope of, yeah, but I'm ready for all of this to be over, and we all say, "Amen and amen. Come quickly, Lord Jesus." But we also have to recognize that his patience has meant our salvation, that if Jesus had come a hundred years ago because of all the horrible things that were going on a hundred years ago, I wouldn't have experienced the resurrection when he comes again. But his patience has meant I get to be part of the resurrection, and if he waits another thousand years, that's a thousand more years, many more generations of people who will get to be part of the resurrection.

Thank you so much for being part of the Radically Christian Bible Study podcast today. We hope that you've enjoyed this episode. I want to give a special thanks to Travis Pauley and to our McDermott Road church family for making this podcast possible. As always, we love you, God loves you, and we hope that you have a wonderful day.