

TITLE: What is Heaven Like?

SPEAKERS: Wes McAdams and Kenny Embry

This episode was recorded as part of the *Balancing the Christian Life* podcast with host, Kenny Embry.

TRAVIS: Hello, everybody, and welcome back to the Bible Study Podcast. My name is Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus.

This episode of the Bible Study Podcast was recorded as an episode for the *Balancing the Christian Life* podcast with Kenny Embry, who talked with Wes about what heaven will be like. I hope you enjoy this conversation.

KENNY: How are you doing, Wes?

WES: I'm good, Brother. How are you?

KENNY: I'm not doing too bad. I'll go ahead and tell you, I stole one of your ideas and I started reading whole books of the Bible. I even started recording some of those. I've got to credit you; you know what you're talking about. That's a really good idea.

WES: It's amazing the things that we've read over a million times in isolation, sort of this -- an atomized verse and disconnected it from its overall context, and only when you see it in light of the author's train of thought do you really go, "Oh, that's what he's talking about. It makes so much more sense now."

KENNY: Yeah. In comedy, they call it the callback. They will plant a joke early in their set and then they will do a callback later on in their set. And

one of the things that I started seeing was, there are a lot of these themes, especially when I was going through Luke -- a lot of these themes that start off and end up -- and you can kind of see how that theme kind of comes to fruition, and that's just -- well, anyway, I'm just going to say, Wes, thank you for that. That was a really good idea.

Today, I want to talk to you a little bit about heaven. Let's just start really simple, Wes. Do you believe in heaven?

WES: Definitely. Definitely. I mean -- and I think, as we talk, we'll get some more clarification and definitions of what heaven is and what we mean when we say "heaven," because on the one hand, in one sense, "heaven" literally just means the sky, and so -- but we believe -- as Christians, we tend to believe that there is a place beyond the seen sky, and we tend to mean -- by "heaven," we mean the place where God dwells or the place where God's city currently resides, that God's city currently resides in an unseen realm, and I believe in that place even though I can't see that place.

First and foremost, I believe in that place for the reason I believe in Christianity in general, and that is there were eyewitnesses that witnessed the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension to that place, and they said that's where he went. He went to the city of God that resides in the unseen place beyond the sky and he reigns there at the right hand of God. So yes, I definitely believe that there is a place that we cannot see.

KENNY: You're going to say this at some point in the interview, and I know you will, so I'm going to get you to define it before we get confused by it. Some people call this stuff eschatology, so could you explain to me what eschatology is, and how did it get such a highfalutin name?

WES: Great question. As with any "ology," it's a study of something, and in this case, it's the study of the eschaton, which is a Greek word that means "the last" or "the end," and so it's the study of end things or end times, and so we could mean a couple of different things.

One, we could mean the end of this age. So the Bible talks more in terms of ages than we tend to speak or think, but the Bible -- the Biblical authors tended to think of things in terms of an age. And currently, we are in the present age, sometimes even called the present evil age because there's sin and death and all kinds of horrible things in this age that we suffer and we endure. And then there is an age to come, and that age to come is the final age, the last age. And so when we speak of eschatology, we mean the end of this age and moving on to the final age, or the last age, or the age to come. So eschatology is just all about that idea of how and when and what does it mean that this age is going to come to an end and what's that final age going to be like.

KENNY: Is this all preconditioned on the idea of time? Are ages just different chunks of time?

WES: Right. Yeah, no, I think that's exactly how we think of it, is that there is -- and what's really interesting -- not to go too far down this rabbit hole, but what's really interesting is that from a Christian perspective, we sort of believe -- or I believe in this sort of overlap between ages, that when Jesus began to -- well, when Jesus was resurrected and then he began to reign, he ushered in the age to come. So the age to come is marked by the resurrection. That's what marks the age to come, and we believe the resurrection has already started. There's going to be a general resurrection in

which everyone's dead bodies will be raised from the dead, but that resurrection began with Jesus, and Paul calls it the first fruits of the resurrection, and so it's almost like the harvest age, the age of the harvest, has begun, but it's begun with one person, with one resurrection. And so the last age, or the final age, or the age to come, has already begun in Jesus, but this current, present age continues to persist, that there wasn't a clean break between the present age and the age to come, that there's this overlap, and for the last 2,000 years, we've been living in that overlap of the present age and the age to come.

And so Christian people -- I like to say sometimes that we're time travelers. When we were baptized into Jesus, we were resurrected with him. In fact, in Ephesians, Paul says that even presently, right now, we are seated with Jesus in the heavenly places. There's a sense in which we are already at the table of the wedding feast. We are already present in the heavenly city, and so we are sort of people out of time. We are people from the future who are still living in this present age, and we're to live as new-creation people, as people that are living with a mindset that is oriented towards the age to come even as we persist in this present age.

KENNY: In just a moment I'm going to ask you how much gold is in the streets and you're going to paint me a very specific and detailed picture of what heaven is like, but before we get there, what is eternity like? Because I think one of the things -- you're talking about ages, and one of the things that I've grappled with for a long time is this idea of time in eternity. Does time exist in eternity or was time a construct of God that he gave to us for us living our lives, but once we leave this earth, the construct of time has no

relevance or doesn't exist? Let me just ask you about that. What is your concept of eternity, or do you have one?

WES: Yeah, I think that's a very philosophical question, and I don't know that scripture really dives into that although I've heard people kind of speculate about that idea that time won't exist anymore, and I just -- if that's true, I don't know how we could even conceptualize of there not being a before, during, and after. We experience -- you know, and perhaps in the resurrection we won't experience our reality that way, although I'm just not even sure how that would be possible.

I don't think that -- I think that there's several layers to the idea of eternity. When we see that word in scripture, it very much has to do with the age. In fact, it could almost even be interpreted that way sometimes, that "eternal" means something that pertains to the age to come, and there's a sense in which that is quantitative, as in without end, like it's not going to end, but there's also a sense in which it is qualitative. And so when something is described as eternal, it means sort of both of those things; it means both in a quantitative sense, that it won't ever end or that it won't ever be reversed, but it also means it is of a certain substance or quality that is fit for the age to come. So this age to come is eternal, both in its quantity and its quality, and so there's a sense in which we already have eternal life. We're told that believing in God is to have eternal life. We have this abundant -- Jesus calls it the abundant life, and we have that right now, and that's something that we will continue to possess and to live out, but it's not just about the number of years in eternity, but also the quality of that experience.

KENNY: All right. Let me get you to -- you believe in it. Paint me a picture, Wes. I mean, I know what we read in Revelation, but there's so much of Revelation that we do not take literally at all, and I'll go ahead and put my flag here. I think the description of heaven in Revelation is also extremely figurative. But other than Revelation, we don't read a lot about heaven. What kind of, what does heaven look like, if that is even a question that makes any sense?

WES: Yeah, and I think there's two -- I would want to sort of separate out two things here -- two ideas here. One is heaven and one is the city of God, and I think that what we tend to mean when we talk about heaven is the city of God. Now, currently, presently, the city of God exists in the unseen realm, and that's why we don't really have any description of it is because it's unseen. It's this place where we know it exists, and several different places in scripture describe God on his throne, so any time we read about the throne of God -- or Hebrews talks a lot about the city of God and really differentiates between the present Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem, and so there's this idea that in the place of heaven, in the unseen realm, which, by the way, includes more than just the city of God -- Ephesians talks about the cosmic powers of evil that exist in the heavenly places, and so the heavenly places is just a realm of -- that we cannot presently see that is separated by this veil, and even that idea -- the temple itself was sort of this picture of earth and heaven. So the holy place that was separated from the rest of the temple by this veil is sort of this picture of earth, where the people dwell, and this holy place, or the Holy of Holies, where God dwells, where his throne is, or the mercy seat of God is.

And so, presently, we have this seen realm that we can see, and then there's the unseen realm where the city of God presently dwells. And the beginning of the story of the Bible is that heaven and earth were united in a place called Eden, and so heaven and earth were united at that point, and because of sin, there was an exile, a driving out of the people from that place where heaven and earth were united, and now that paradise -- Revelation says that the paradise, the place where the tree of life exists, that those things are in the city of God, so that's one description I would want to say, is that the city of God is the place where paradise exists. It's the place where the tree of life exists, where the garden exists. And that -- I think that -- my opinion is that the metanarrative of scripture, the big picture of scripture, is that heaven and earth, or, more specifically, the city of God and earth will be reunited, that Jesus' entire mission was summed up by Paul in Ephesians 1:10, that he is reuniting everything in heaven and on earth, and so Jesus is reuniting that. And I think that's what we see in Revelation, is this, as you said, symbolic picture of the city of God coming down out of heaven to the earth so that there's this reuniting. John describes it like a marriage between heaven and earth, that the bride is being reunited.

And so, again, you're right, I think that that's all figurative language. Isaiah uses descriptions talking about the new heavens and the new earth and talking about peace and how a child can play over the hole of a serpent and won't be bit because all evil is gone and all pain is gone and all suffering is gone, so we don't really have maybe anything that we can say, well, this for sure will be there, other than God. But we know that when we talk about our eternity in heaven, we're talking about our eternity in what Peter and

John and Isaiah called the new heavens and new earth, when everything is reunited and all evil is destroyed.

KENNY: You're talking about what we do know. What kind of burning questions do you have about heaven? What do you not know about heaven?

WES: That's a really good question. I think that my questions aren't necessarily about what that will be like, because my questions that I look forward to asking the Lord are about things that have happened in the past. And so when I think about the future, I think about the fact that we will have an infinite amount of time to explore this place, this new heavens and new earth, this reunited existence where there is nothing painful, there is nothing bad, there's nothing sinful, and we will get to enjoy God's creation. I think the Garden of Eden is the perfect picture because that's how the story begins and ends, is with the Garden of Eden. Revelation ends with that picture; Genesis begins with that picture, and I think that's the very best picture of what we can hope for and expect for eternity, is this garden that will become and maybe is also a city, a city where God dwells and where all of God's people dwell, and it will be perfect forever. So I don't guess I really have a lot of questions about it because I'm just anxious to explore it. It's like if I go to a new place, it's like I almost don't want my questions to be answered before I get there because I'm going to have plenty of time to figure them out when I get there.

KENNY: It reminds me of a podcast that I heard -- it was hosted by this guy named Wes -- and he was talking about taking his kids overseas, I think to Estonia, and this guy had been to Estonia, but he did not -- he wanted his kids to be curious about it, but he also knew that he couldn't give them a

very good frame of reference for it because it wouldn't make any sense to them yet. Does that -- have you heard anything like that, Wes?

WES: I think I remember hearing that conversation.

KENNY: And I thought that was an especially good explanation. I think, when I was growing up, before I turned 16, I asked my parents a thousand times what driving was like, and I was so scared that I would have this two-ton machine that would be under my control that I could just as easily kill anybody, and that made me so scared. And they answered my questions the best they could, but one of the things that my mom said was, "It's different than you think it is."

WES: Yes.

KENNY: "It's just really different than you think it is. In some ways, it's harder; in some ways, it's easier, but these questions will be answered in about ten seconds and you'll figure it out." Does that make sense?

WES: Yeah, and that's the same thing I tell people about marriage and being a parent, that you kind of think you know before you experience it. You think, well, I've been around married people; I know what marriage is going to be like, and then you get married, and you're like, oh, that's different than I thought it was going to be. It's just different than you expect. There's some things that are better, obviously, and then there are other things that are just different and you would have never thought to ask that or never thought to wonder about that. You just don't even know until you experience it.

Like you said, I think that's a perfect way to say it, that in so many ways we don't have a frame of reference for what that's going to be like, other than the resurrected Jesus. The resurrected Jesus is our -- not only our

proof, but also our very tangible example of this is what the age to come will be like, and I think we get glimpses of that not only in the resurrected Jesus, but also in the demonstration of the Spirit. I think every time that Jesus healed someone, we get a glimpse: This is what eternity is going to be like. Every time a disease is taken away, every time sins are forgiven, every time tears are wiped from someone's eyes, this is a glimpse of what the age to come is going to be like.

KENNY: You know, it reminds me of a discussion that we all know in I Corinthians 13 where he's coming out of a discussion on, well, here's the miraculous gifts that you all want, but let me tell you the most important gift of all, and it's love, and you've already got it, and you guys are bickering about things that are -- and my language, not his -- second-rate stuff, and here's the most important stuff, and you got it and you can already use this. So yeah, you're right. When we think about the importance of so much of what heaven will be -- we'll go ahead and get to this question. Why don't you answer this for me: What makes heaven good, Wes?

WES: I mean, obviously, I think, first and foremost, is the presence of God, that God is there, that -- you know, again, Revelation describes it, and even if -- and I'll make this point, too, that I think we both would agree with, that symbolic language is not used by the prophets, by John, in apocalyptic literature -- symbolic language isn't used in a way that makes something less important. It's actually used when we have to have a truth and communicate a truth that literal language just can't capture. And so when we want to capture something that's even beyond -- that's even more important and more significant and more real and more true than we have language for, then we

have to dive into that well of figurative language.

And so when we read the description of the city of God in Revelation, it's like saying, "It's raining cats and dogs outside." I could just say it's raining, but if it's really raining, I need language that even goes beyond just the literal, and so that's what John describes. He describes a city where God's presence is so real and so at the center of the city that they don't even need a sun because God is its light. And so that's what -- the primary thing that makes heaven -- or the city of God, specifically -- what makes the city of God so good is that God is there in his complete presence, and so being in that city is going to be good for that reason.

But it's also good because of what's not there. What's not there is the weakness of our current flesh. What's not there is sin. What's not there is betrayal. What's not there is crime. What's not there is death. What's not there is grief. So there's so many things that are not there, and the absence of those evil things, those bad things, helps to make it even better.

KENNY: A lot of the reason that I wanted to have this conversation with you was a conversation that you had in your own podcast that I thought was a really smart question, which was, if God's going to have me there, how does he know that I'm not going to mess up there? And can we sin while we're in heaven? Because I've got that down pretty well down here, and if he's going to let me in, I'm afraid he's going to have to lower his expectations. Is that possible for us? Can we be sinless in heaven? Because we were not able to do it here.

WES: I think two passages that help us with that -- one is Romans 7, and another is I Corinthians 15. Paul describes our struggle with sin, particularly

the children of God's struggle with sin. We're not talking about non-Christians, because non-Christians may or may not have any desire to not sin, but even non-Christians -- most of us, we want to be kind. We want to be loving. We want to do what's right. And Paul, in Romans 7 -- you know, he was a religious person that had the law, and he wanted -- even before he knew Jesus, he wanted to do what was right and good, and in not doing those things, he felt like a slave, a slave to sin.

And so we tend to think about free will as being the ability to sin if we want to. Well, wait a second. Why do we think of it that way? Because I don't want to sin. I don't want to hurt people. I don't want to hurt myself. I don't want to disappoint God. I want to do what is right and good, and Paul says the reason we can't do the good that we want to do, or keep ourselves from doing the bad that we don't want to do is that we have sin dwelling in our flesh. Our flesh, not our physical body, but is sort of this metaphor for the fact that we are weak. We are weak mortally and morally. We get sick, we die, we get hungry, we get tired, but we also don't have the moral strength to do all the good we want to do and to refrain from the bad we don't want to do. Paul says the only hope that we have is Jesus and the transformation by the Spirit. That transformation has already begun. Hopefully, we're being changed into people where we don't want to sin, and he's giving us the power to begin to do what is right and good, but then that transformation is complete when we're raised from the dead.

When we're resurrected -- Paul describes in I Corinthians 15 -- our new bodies won't be weak like these, and so we will have the capacity to be the good people that we want to be and that God wants us to be. So it's not

that we won't have free will; it's just that our will and our bodies will be so completely transformed that we wouldn't want to do wrong, and we won't do wrong because we will have the capacity to do all the good that God wants us to do.

KENNY: You know, I remember you having that similar answer that you had on your own podcast, and one of the things that I was thinking about was Hebrews 12, where he talks about "just men made perfect," and that's something that my dad kind of impressed upon me. What does it mean that there are people who do justly but they still have to be made perfect? And that kind of impressed me. I think all of us have what you're talking about, which is that extremely confusing language in Romans 7:8, where he says, "That which I will to do, I do not; and that which I will not to do, I do." You can try and figure out the subject and the object and all that, and you're just going to start chasing your tail at some point, but the idea behind that really is -- and disagree with this if you want to, Wes -- when there is no temptation anymore, there is no opportunity or any more -- not necessarily opportunity. There's no motive for sin anymore, that the motive for sin has been banished. But go ahead.

WES: No, I totally agree. The tempter is not there. Satan is not there. The desire, the will has been transformed. Our fleshly nature that is weak and prone to sin has been transformed. And so, again, Jesus is the picture of who we will be, that he -- in his resurrected self, he's still physical. He's still able to eat and drink and be touched by people, but he's been transformed and he's new and he's different, and even at times he's unrecognizable. So there will be a transformation that we experience in the resurrection that will make

us where -- again, it's not about whether or not we're capable of sin, because we start to create all of these weird situations where we ask, well, could God create a rock that's so big that he couldn't move it? Or could God -- you know. And so it will be similar with us in the age to come, that we will be so transformed that we won't do the ridiculous, and sinning will be the ridiculous in the age to come. There's no purpose for it. As you said, there's no motivation to do that.

KENNY: Let me ask you this and get you to clarify this because I think I know where you're coming from on this, but I just want to clarify. Do you think we're born sinful? Do you think we have this inherent sinful nature that we just cannot help ourselves, we're going to sin?

WES: I think we're born weak, and I think weakness is the best way -- that's why I understand where -- like the NIV translators, in some of their versions, translated the idea of flesh -- "sárx" is the Greek word. They translated it as "sinful nature," and that leans towards that Calvinistic thinking that we're born with a nature that is sinful. I don't think that's true, but we are born with a fleshly nature, and when Paul uses that metaphor of flesh -- again, it could mean our skin, our body, but Paul seems to mean something other than that, that there is a part of our nature that is weak. Now, that doesn't mean that we have sinned. Paul says, you know, he didn't know what coveting was, and when he didn't know what coveting was, he didn't covet. But as soon as coveting -- the command "do not covet" came along, because of the weakness of his flesh, he was like, oh, I think I'm going to do that.

And so human beings are weak, and it doesn't mean we're guilty. We're not born with guilt. We haven't done anything wrong. We didn't

inherit guilt from Adam. But we are weak and we are born with a weakness, and that weakness means that when we are presented with temptation, we are going to sin. And so we haven't been born guilty sinners, but we have been born as people that have a weakness and a proclivity towards that, that when the situation is presented to us, every single one of us have failed the test.

KENNY: That's right. If we wanted to use some highfalutin terms, we can talk about Calvinism, we can talk about Arminianism, and those are big words that -- basically, where do you place the guilt: in the way that we're made or in the choices that we make? And if I'm characterizing this correctly -- and you correct me if I'm mischaracterizing this -- you're saying that we just make some really lousy choices sometimes.

WES: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that -- you know, there's reasons why people fall in both of those categories --

KENNY: Right.

WES: -- because there is something about our existence now, and some of that has to do with our nature; some of that has to do with our environment, the fact that we are surrounded by what the Bible calls "the world," sinful societies that lead us towards sin, and the devil and the presence of actual evil in the world. So we sin because of our own flesh, we sin because of the world, and we sin because of Satan, and so all of these things contribute to our sinfulness, but we are complicit in it, and because of our complicity, because we have participated in it and we've chosen to do that, that's why we're guilty.

KENNY: Yeah. One of the things -- I said this a long time ago. The

problem with God 's army is we're all double agents, that we have all fought on both sides of this.

WES: That's true.

KENNY: And our allegiance needs to be on one side. And that leads to a really terrible conversation, just -- in my opinion, just a complete misunderstanding of what grace is, that grace is not wiping the slate clean. Grace is a relationship. And -- well, I mean, I don't want to put words in your mouth and I don't want you to go down a road where anybody would get in trouble, so that part I'm going to edit right out. Why don't you help me -- I've heard heaven described as a relationship; I've heard heaven described as a place. Is there -- are those mutually exclusive? Is it one or the other, or is it both?

WES: Well, I mean, I guess the way I would say it is our relationship -- our covenant relationship is with a person, and the person is God, the triune God, the Father and the Son and the Spirit, and so our relationship is with him, and then he dwells in the city. And, you know, for that matter, the presence of God is even within us because of the Spirit, but God dwells in the city, and the city is the place, so, again, yeah, I do think that heaven is a realm, and the city is the place within that realm that we're waiting for and longing for, a place that -- in fact, a lot of the ways that scripture describes heaven and the city of God is sort of like a storage container, that this is a place where something is stored up, and our inheritance, our reward, is being stored up. Jesus says lay by, not on earth where rust and moth and thieves destroy these things, but lay up your treasures in heaven because we're putting our hope in the place. So God is the person, and his city,

which is currently in heaven, is the place, but it's definitely -- it's all about that relationship that we have with that triune God that we're longing for. And we -- you know, it's much like your home. You know, when we talk about a home, there's a sense in which it's a place because it's just a building, a place with four walls and a roof, but it's home because of who dwells there. It's home because of the relationship that we have to those people because this is a place of family. This is a place of past and present and future, and that's why heaven is -- or the city of God is so special, is because of our relationship to the one who dwells there.

KENNY: Yeah, that makes a ton of sense to me. I've always talked about how home is where Katie is. I suspect -- and, you know, we've lived in Tampa for a while. No matter where we end up living, wherever Katie is, that's just going to end up being home, and I suspect -- your wife is Hollee; is that right?

WES: Yeah. Good job. Yeah.

KENNY: I suspect -- and you better get this right, Wes -- home is wherever Hollee is.

WES: Yeah, absolutely.

KENNY: Does that make sense?

WES: Yeah, that's exactly right.

KENNY: Yeah. So I guess what we could say is -- and I don't know, because I think you're right; when you go to Ephesians, there's definitely the heavenly places and that there's war in those heavenly places, and I do think there is a place in Job 1 where God and Satan had a conversation about the pawn piece that would be Job, and that, to me, I think makes a lot of sense,

so -- that does make a lot of sense to me, that heaven is both -- it's a place that harbors a relationship. Does that make sense?

WES: Yeah. No, I think that's exactly right. That's exactly right. And that's why -- and to that point about heaven being a place where -- you know, in that broader realm of the unseen place where there is presently a conflict that is happening, that's why both heaven and earth need to be made new, how -- Peter describes -- II Peter describes the coming of Jesus as the tearing away, the dissolving of the cosmos, this veil that separates the seen world from the unseen heavens and how everything will be purified and cleansed and reunited on that day because, currently, there is evil that exists both on earth and in heaven, and in the age to come, none of that will -- none of that evil will exist. All of it will be destroyed and we will be reunited, and so, yes, so there's a reunification of people and presence and place all on the day of resurrection.

KENNY: What are we going to be doing there?

WES: That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? Again, I think that's why the Garden of Eden is such a perfect picture.

KENNY: Yeah, me too.

WES: So many times we tend to think of work as something that happened post-fall, but that's not the case. There was work that was happening pre-fall, and so Adam was created and designed to work and to keep the garden. What happened was that after the fall there was tension, there was conflict, there was -- it didn't work. There was disharmony within the created order, so now work was difficult and challenging and hard. Before that, Adam's work would have been complete joy. And I think we get little

glimpses of this even now when we do work that seems to really connect, and we just -- we kind of get in the zone and where time doesn't seem to exist and we just really enjoy doing the work that we do. I think that all eternity will be like that, where we'll be doing -- we will be working, and we will worship, and we will rest, and we will do all of these things in a way that there is no conflict, there is no tension, that just like before the fall in the garden, they were supposed to work the garden and keep it, but there was no -- there were no thorns. It wasn't difficult. There was no challenge. And so I think that we will have a tension-free, a resistance-free work to do in the resurrection.

KENNY: Are you saying that heaven is not going to be like one of these timeshares, that it's not going to be basically a place of constant leisure, that we're not going to have just a whole bunch of vacation time stacked up? Is this what you're trying to tell me, Wes?

WES: Yeah, I don't think -- I think those are the two pictures. I think one picture that people have is this never-ending vacation, and other people have this never-ending church service in mind, and, frankly, both of those ideas terrified me, and I think that they are -- they're terrifying because, I mean --

KENNY: Yes.

WES: -- you know, an hour or two, or a day or two, or, okay, ten years or so, great, sounds wonderful. But a million years of the same thing? You know, I mean, we think about that and we think -- and I think that's why we've sort of introduced that idea like, oh, maybe time won't exist kind of a thing, but I think that we were made like -- as image-bearers of God, we were made to do; we were made to create; we were made to help bring order

and organization to the world. And so, yeah, I think we'll be doing all kinds of things, the kinds of things Adam and Eve would have been doing and their offspring would have been doing had sin not entered the picture, and we will get back to that project. Whatever that project was going to be, that's what we're going to be doing for eternity, I think.

KENNY: I really agree with you -- with that, Wes. I mean, I don't have a passage that says God describes heaven like this, but, I mean, you and I, before we started recording, talked about the parable of the minas and how the parable of the minas talks about -- which is roughly comparable to the parable of the talents, but the difference is when the person who is given the ten minas gets ten more, he's told to rule ten cities; that he had responsibility, and as soon as he proved himself that he was responsible, he was given more responsibility. And I really love that, and that's not original with me at all. That's Phil Roberts, a college professor I dearly love, and I think he's right about that, and I think you're right about that. I think work is not a punishment.

WES: Right.

KENNY: There's another part of this -- and let me see what you think about this, because the greatest workaholic of them all, who basically was an overachiever and made everything in seven days -- or six days, decided to rest on the seventh. Was he just that worn out? What is the importance of rest to a Christian?

WES: Oh, that's so good, and I think that there's so many layers to that question. In fact, it so pertains to this because some of the Jewish thought around the Sabbath rest was that this was an example of one day where we

were going to pretend like we are living in the resurrection. We're going to pretend like we're living in the age to come. So whatever won't exist in the age to come, we're not going to do that during the Sabbath. So there's not going to be war, so we're not going to fight. It doesn't matter what's happening, we're not going to fight on the Sabbath because we're not going to fight in the age to come. We're not going to harvest grain because we're not going to harvest grain in the age to come. Because all of these things -- and I think especially as it pertains to work, it's impossible to do work in the present age without that conflict, without that friction -- "friction" is the word I've been looking for -- without that friction that exists now, so the only way to experience that frictionless existence is to cease from work, and that's what God is doing in the Sabbath, is he is ceasing from work.

But there's also the sense in which people are supposed to Sabbath and rest because we're trusting God. It's this demonstration, "I trust you that if I stop working, you aren't stopping working. You will keep the world spinning." Because we lie to ourselves and tell ourselves, "If I stop spinning these plates, everything's coming down. The whole world's going to come crashing down if I don't keep working every day, all day, every day," and it's a lie. And so in resting, we are trusting God, but we're also trusting God in -- when we move into that age to come, in the resurrection, it is this constant reliance on God. So yes, I think there will be rest, but I also think Jesus demonstrates what the Sabbath was made for. It wasn't that Jesus never did anything on the Sabbath. He did lots of things on the Sabbath. He healed people on the Sabbath and was quite scandalous in doing that because he made people realize the Sabbath was created for man. Man wasn't created to

serve the Sabbath; the Sabbath was created to serve human beings. And so it's good and right to do good and to help others and to love others and to make the world a better place, even as we rest, as a part of our rest.

And so I think that's a demonstration of what the age to come will be like. There will be rest in the sense that there won't be any more friction. It won't be hard. It won't be challenging. It's not going to be the sweat of our brow. It's not going to be thorns and thistles. But we're still going to be doing things; we're still going to be making things better. We're going to be engaged in helping, in loving, in doing -- I think, creating. And it's fun, I think, to imagine -- again, we're speculating a little bit here, but I think it's fun to speculate what would building or constructing or creating something be like if there was no more tension, if there was no more friction, if we could create and do the way God does. I mean, God created and did by speaking things into existence. There was no enemy, there was no conflict, and so we're going to be moving into a time where there is no conflict, where there's no enemy, there's no resistance, and so I think we're going to have work that is resistance-free.

KENNY: I'm not going to let you get away with this, which is -- you've got to unpack "Sabbath is for man." What does that mean?

WES: Yeah, I think it means that it serves us. It was created to serve Israel, to be a blessing to Israel. The Pharisees got into the mindset that they were supposed to serve the Sabbath and so they made it a burden, and it's hard. My family has tried to do this several times, where we've tried -- not as a matter of law-keeping, but as a matter of wisdom, to try to have a Saturday where we don't work and we don't get on our phones. We don't make a long

trip. We don't do anything that's not life-giving, that's not blessing to us and to others, and so we take it easy. But wow, that is incredibly hard in a world that doesn't slow down and doesn't stop. And so the Pharisees made it something that it was never intended to be and so it stopped being life-giving and it started to take life from people, and Jesus says it was never intended for that. It was supposed to give life, not take life. It was supposed to be a blessing, not a curse, and they had kind of turned it into a curse.

KENNY: Yeah. Often, Christians are -- especially Christians who are very conscientious and they are very understanding of the severity and the importance of God's law can sometimes slip into a pharisaical mindset.

"Why do we read the Bible? Well, we read the Bible because it's right, and make sure you read it all today, and make sure you do it tomorrow, and make sure you do it tomorrow," and there's a sense in which we take good actions and put bad motivations on them.

WES: Amen.

KENNY: And I was talking to somebody else about this, and he talked about the idol of scripture reading, and I had never thought of it that way, but the way he described it, it was like, duh. You can take some really good things and do some -- and put some really bad spin on it and -- just like the Pharisees. The one thing that I will say about the Pharisees is I think they started off with the best of intentions.

WES: Absolutely.

KENNY: I think they wanted to -- and the passage that everybody goes to, Matthew 23, I think that is the clearest demonstration of love that Jesus ever gave the Pharisees because he's telling them exactly, look, guys, I love you

and you've got to do -- you've got to stop doing this. You've got to stop doing this. And I can see myself doing that with my kids. "Look, I love you, and if somebody else told you, they would be hating you, but I love you, and you've got to stop doing this." Does that make sense, Wes?

WES: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's exactly right. I think the law was supposed to be this picture -- this pre-gospel picture of the best human flourishing possible in Israel, and so the gospel itself is the much fuller picture of human flourishing, of blessing and life giving, but when we turn ourselves into just law-keepers, that we're keeping the law as an end in and of itself rather than a means to an end -- and the end was Jesus. You know, he scolded the people of his day because he said you read the law, you read the scriptures because you think that in them you have life, but they actually are pointing forward to me. I'm the manifestation of the rules that you're reading, and you reject me. And so Jesus is the picture of human flourishing. He's the picture of what exactly it looks like and means to be a human who receives the blessings of God and who is a conduit for the blessings of God.

And then, I think, you know, to tie that into this discussion about heaven and the age to come is that in the city of God, for eternity, we get to see that and be part of that forever. But the goal is that we're living that out now, where we are beginning to live, like I said, as time travelers, where we're living right now in the present as if the future is already present, because in the Spirit, it is. Jesus is already reigning. The Spirit is already in us. We're already made part of the new creation, and so we're beginning to live that out right now in the way we treat each other and the way we live our lives.

KENNY: What parts of heaven do we already have?

WES: Well, I think lists like the Fruit of the Spirit, those things are like my go-to. And even to go back to Revelation, this idea of God wiping away every tear from our eyes, I mean, there's a sense in which the joy that we have, the hope that we have is this foretaste of what is to come, that -- I like to say that we live -- we really endure the present in light of the future, that because of what is and what will be, it changes our perspective on how we deal with right now. And so Paul will say things like, "We grieve, but we don't grieve as those who have no hope." We grieve with hope, and so the way we grieve is a reality now. The joy we have now, the hope we have now is a reality because we know that death will be destroyed. We know that death will be undone. We know that we will be raised from the dead. So I curse death. I hate death. I mock death. Death is an enemy. But I Corinthians 15 says death will be destroyed, and because I know that's true, I don't have to fear death. So I say things all the time like nobody should fear death as much -- or hate death as much, or fear death as little, as Christians. We hate death more than anyone else because we realize that it's an intruder on God's good world, but we don't fear death because we know what's coming. We know the resurrection is coming, so we already have that joy. We already have that hope.

And to your point about I Corinthians 13, we have love. And the love that we have for each other and the love we show to one another, it's a gift from the Spirit that will never go away. There will be a time where we don't have faith because we see God face to face. There will be a time where we don't have hope because our hope will be realized. But there will never be a

time that we don't have love, and our love for God and our love for neighbor and our love for one another is the ultimate reality of heaven that will exist forever, and we already have that, and we're already beginning to participate in God's love for us and our love for him and our love for one another. This is Jesus' prayer in John 17. It's that we would be one even as he and the Father are one. So that unity, that relationship that we'll experience forever, we're already beginning to experience that relationship in the Spirit, and it will just become even more full. So theologians tend to talk about this aspect as "the already and not yet" aspect of the kingdom, so there's a sense in which it's already, and also a sense in which it's not yet.

KENNY: Oh, Wes, I like that. I like that a lot. Again, I think about that conversation that you had with your kids. There's a joy that -- there's an excitement in anticipation they can have about taking a trip to someplace they've never been, and most of the times when you have that excitement, there's a letdown that happens when you get there. I can only say -- this is a really lousy example, but I'm going to say it anyway. I remember I was in London for a month during my doctoral work, and one of the things I didn't appreciate was how cool it would be -- Big Ben, the Eiffel Tower, all those things. Big Ben was the one I was like, this is cooler in person than it was in my imagination. And I -- again, imperfect, imperfect, imperfect metaphor or simile, or whatever it is -- comparison -- imperfect comparison. But the beauty is we have the ability to be anticipatory of what heaven will be like, and there is a joy that we can have in that and there's an imagination that I hope you have about that because you can build something up in your mind that can get you excited about going to that place. And I know this is

awfully poetic and it's awfully corny for me to say, but we also know that whatever we talk about can't match the reality that's there. I'm reminded of Paul, who, I think, is talking about himself when he's talking about the one caught up to the -- what was it, the seventh heaven or --

WES: The third.

KENNY: Was it the third?

WES: Yeah.

KENNY: And what he was talking about there was there was words that he could not utter, and I don't think it was forbidden. I think he didn't have the words that he could say on earth that would describe it well. Does that make sense?

WES: Yeah.

KENNY: That really is a gift. You can't really talk about heaven without talking about its antithesis. What does heaven teach us about hell?

WES: You know, it's interesting, and as I thought about -- you sent me that question ahead of time, and it's interesting that we tend to put those two things as antithesis to one another, and we tend to -- I've even asked churches before, "When I say 'heaven and' fill in the blank," our tendency is to go to "heaven and hell," but the way -- the two sort of sides of the coin that scripture puts them together are "heaven and earth." We never really see heaven and hell put side by side like that. We definitely see punishment and reward put side by side, but I think that part of the reason heaven is heaven, or the city of God is the city of God, or the new heavens and new earth are what they are and what we anticipate them to be is because, again, it's not just what will be there, but what won't be there.

And so we anticipate the judgment of God and, you know, that sounds -- in our modern world, it sounds kind of ugly and we don't want God to be wrathful. We don't want God's anger and God's punishment. But actually we do. We want that. We all want that. Every time there's a school shooting, people ask, "Where is God? Why doesn't God show up? Why does God allow these things to happen?" And the answer of the New Testament is there's a day coming that these things won't happen, that all injustice and all pain and all suffering, every genocide will be undone, and those guilty perpetrators will be punished. There's not a single guilty perpetrator that will go unpunished, that God's justice is coming. And the reason he delays in bringing that justice is because he's patient. He doesn't want anybody to be punished. He wants everybody to repent and to be forgiven and to experience the city and the age to come, his grace and mercy.

But part of the reason why the city of God is going to be so perfect is because God is going to rid creation of all evil, of all pain. He's going to throw all of it -- again, it's figurative language, I believe, but he's going to throw all of it into the lake of fire. All of it is going to be destroyed. Now, however you conceptualize "destroy" or what that means, for us, what it means is it won't exist. All the pain, all of the suffering, all of the evil, it will all be -- God's good creation, heaven and earth, will be purified of all defilement, and that should be exciting to us. We don't want anybody to be caught up in and swept away in that judgment, which is why we preach the good news. But we also are excited about the fact that there won't be any more war; there won't be any more death; there won't be any more suffering. We won't even shed tears in the age to come because everything that caused

that pain will be taken away.

KENNY: A buddy of mine reminds me all the time of a line by C.S. Lewis, where he says people who do not want God will eventually get their wish, and his argument is hell is wherever God is not. I don't know if you buy into that. I think you're right. I think there is a special place made for the devil and his angels, and one of the things you reminded me of, nowhere in there does it say fallen Christians; it's devil and his angels. Hell was never made for you. You have to choose to go there, and boy, that's just a really sad thought.

But one of the things I was -- when you think about hell -- and you've already kind of made allusion to this, which is that heaven -- an important part, and maybe the most important part, of heaven is that God is there. It's kind of like a house without my wife there. There's not a home in that house. Does that make sense?

WES: Yeah, yeah. And I think that that's exactly -- I mean, the place of hell, this place of -- the Bible uses words like "destruction." The Bible uses words like "death." Revelation calls it "a second death," that this is a place where all life is removed. Life is taken away because life is where God is, and so it is a death because there is no life there.

And so, you know, again, we could take that in several different directions, but the fact of the matter is if you want to be where there is life, if you want to live -- life is a gift. Life is something that God gives, and he gets to choose to whom he gives life -- life now, presently, and life in the age to come. And if you want to be where the life is, you have to submit yourself to God. You have to surrender to God because God is the one who

gives life as a gift, and hell is the place where there is no life.

KENNY: Right. It also reminds me of all the names of God. I'm not talking just about Yahweh, but that God is light, God is love. Think of all the things that God is, and now take those things away, and that's where you're choosing to live.

WES: That's right.

KENNY: Does that make sense?

WES: Yeah. And I would even say that's where you're choosing to die, because we even use -- it's really hard for us not to use words like "live."

KENNY: You're right.

WES: But, yeah, it's a place where there is no living. There is no life. There is no good. It is the place where all of those things -- where people and beings have chosen to be because they have rejected the one who gives all good things, so there is no good thing, including life itself.

KENNY: Right, right. Okay. We've talked a lot about heaven. What did I miss?

WES: I don't know. I don't think there's necessarily anything that you missed. I will say this. One way I like to think about the resurrection and the age to come is that all good things that we experience now are sort of like a song that is just a little bit off key or sung just a little bit out of tune or just a little bit off. And we're like, that's a really pretty song but it's just a little off and I'm not really sure why. Every beautiful thing you've ever seen, every good thing you've ever experienced, whether it's a good meal or being with your spouse or seeing the Grand Canyon or a sunrise or the ocean -- all of these good things, they're good. They're so good, but there is a

brokenness to everything now. There's a brokenness to me. There's a brokenness to every relationship, even my relationship with my wife. We have a great marriage, but it's just slightly off key.

In the age to come, every relationship and everything that exists will exist in perfect harmony. Nothing will be out of balance, nothing will be broken, nothing will be off-kilter. What will that be like? I don't know. I can't wait to experience the resurrection and the new creation and everything that exists there and then. Will we eat in the resurrection? I sure hope so. But it will be a meal like we've never experienced because every meal we've ever experienced has been slightly off. And so whatever we experience in the age to come will be so much better than whatever we've experienced now, but all of the good things, I think, are pointing forward to the ultimate existence and reality.

KENNY: Wes, I end all of my podcasts with "Be good and do good." Why is thinking about heaven a good thing?

WES: Well, to say it again, I think that we're supposed to be time travelers. We're supposed to -- or another way to put it is -- I knew a lady one time that, when the time change was coming -- she was a schoolteacher, and so when the time change was coming on Sunday morning, she would set her clocks ahead on Friday after school. So Friday afternoon she would go ahead and set her clock an hour ahead so that she could be acclimated to the new time before Sunday, so all day Saturday she was a person out of time. She was one hour off of everyone else.

That's exactly how, as Christians, we're supposed to live. That's what it looks like to live a good life, is to go ahead and set our clocks, not

according to Rome time or Washington, D.C. time or Hollywood time or American time, but to Heaven's time. And so our citizenship is in heaven, and so we've set our clocks ahead to what life will be like in the age to come, and so we treat each other with love and joy and peace and patience, and people can say, "Don't you know if you're kind like that, people are going to take advantage of you?" Even my own kids say to me sometimes, "That's not how life works in the real world." Well, I don't live in the real world. I live by faith and not by sight, and so that's how we live the good life, is by setting our minds and our hearts ahead to the age to come even while we live in this present age.

KENNY: Wes, this was a lot of fun, and I really appreciate your insights. You have done a lot of stuff. You have your own podcast, you have a blog, you've written several books. If somebody wanted to find out more about Wes McAdams, what should they read? What should they listen to? What should they do?

WES: Well, to that point, they can find everything at RadicallyChristian.com. That's kind of my hub. But yeah, that's where I would suggest somebody go.

KENNY: Yeah. I'm "Be good and do good." You are "Learn to love like Jesus." I'm not going to argue against that, either, so I think that's a very good idea. You're a good guy, Wes. Thank you so much for doing this.

WES: Thank you, Brother.

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.