Paul

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[0:00] When I read a Jim Packer book, I always start by looking carefully at the table of contents. You want to survey, in his case, the riches of what his books unfold.

So I want to start with a table of contents as well. I hope there's some riches. If there are riches in this talk, it's because Paul loves the riches which are in Christ Jesus, as he likes to say.
So, a table of contents. We'll start with an introduction, and then we'll have a prayer. And then, the body of this thing this morning, an attempt at seeing Paul in his living, we'll call it his living cultural and historical world.
Which is ridiculous, isn't it? So we'll say more precisely, a look at what would be involved in such a project. When you look at Paul in the whole, try to see him.
And finally, I'll close with really, this part is for me the most interesting. I'll call it a postscript. How might a Christian regard the theological mystery of scripture?
[1:12] I know in our fellowship, I may call Holy Scripture that. The theological mystery of scripture and historical critical inquiry.

Are these two projects, are they antagonistic? Are they necessarily antagonistic? Perhaps they're not antagonistic at all.
What sort of work about that kind of question might help the church and the Christian in our witness together? I find that kind of question very interesting.
That seems like a lot, but I think it will be manageable enough as we look through together at Paul.
So, there ends the table of contents. Here beginneth the introduction. As Anglicans talk that way.
I've got to get over that.
[2:11] I've got to get over that. As announced, this is a talk about Paul. Paul. A meditation on his, our recent ancestors would have called it his life and times.

I'm going to find that rather quaint, his life and times. Every life, of course, has a background, a big horizon which shapes every life, every culture.
Background, horizon, of course, are spatial metaphors, but they're not merely metaphors. They're very much real things. We simply do not live, do we, in a cultural, historical vacuum.
No one does. Things are in place when we enter this world. Language is in place. You grow up speaking a language.
Usually it's one language. In some families, in some communities, you might learn more than one language. But language is in place. There are forms of order in the world.
[3:12] Immediate, close-up forms to us. And there are large forms that are just there. Paul, for instance, like his Lord, our Lord Jesus, lived within the Roman Empire.

They also lived within Israel, pointing out the obvious. They lived within a history between them, didn't they? Other forms of order, sometimes you'd have to call it disorder, impacted their lives.
Literally, things east and west, north and south, had been, were at work in their lives. To what an extent cultural and historical consciousness, when we call it that, I think we can say modern people are very much aware of that.
To what an extent, this was at work, say, in Paul's thought life, is an interesting question. He'll say things like, won't he, in the fullness of time, he says.
In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son. In the fullness of time. Paul's Greek distinguishes ordinary time, chronos, from a time fraught with significance.
[4:30] That's another Greek word, kairos. That's about half of my Greek vocabulary. I've used it up. I'm not going to throw any more Greek words at you. Certainly, Paul lived within a time world, or more precisely, we could call it a story world.

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A narrative-driven structure of meaning. If you read New Testament criticism these days, you get used to that. It's a quite usual way to talk about the past, especially in New Testament studies.
And I find it very helpful, very convincing, very illuminating. It is not, of course, mere story, is it? Not just one thing after another, as a certain philosophical tradition would see history as.
No, these events and stories yield truth. Propositions are generated by narrative.
And these propositions are believed to be true within a certain community. How propositions believed to be true within a community relate to other communities is a big story in modern philosophy.
[5:39] Is truth just community-centric, or could there be universal truth? So I want to glance today at the shaping powers in Paul's life and see if it helps us understand this man a little better.

A project, I take it, all Christians have some interest in. When I wrote the above, I thought that, well, that's enough for an intro.
And maybe you think that's more than enough for an intro. But it dawned on me that it began, if you were awake when I began the introduction, it began by saying, did you notice, I said, this will be about Paul.
I did that on purpose. This will be about Paul. You see, I was counting on your recognition. And I think, I'm sure I could do that.
Paul is part of our story world. Very much so, isn't he? He's part of our symbol world. He's just there. When you say Paul, a lot of communities, people, I know, yeah.
[6:51] Paul. Paul is just out there. He's part of our culture. Very much a part of some parts of the, I might call it, the micro-Protestant Christian world.

The global Lutheran movement is based upon, historically, a particular reading of Paul. It's amazing. Paul's a very prominent person in the Christian world.
He means a lot for Christians. Paul, again, a presence, which I hope you'll agree it's good to know. I must say, as this intro ends, I love Paul.
I expect, by God's grace, to meet him someday. So I don't want to bear false witness about him. I want to be careful in thinking about him.
Do you expect to meet Paul someday? I hope you do. He's called, in 2 Peter, our beloved brother, Paul.
[7:50] Beloved brother. It's good to get to know him. If he was here, I'm sure he would say, perhaps especially after listening to this introduction, oh, let's start with prayer, Harvey.

So, indeed, end of introduction. Let's start with prayer. Our God and Father, as the Apostle to the Gentiles has taught us to say, may we all with unveiled face behold the glory of the Lord this morning, and may we be transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another. And we pray in the name of the Lord, who is the Spirit. Amen. So many different ways to start to look at Paul.
I could almost arbitrarily choose a way to start. So I've chosen this way. I have no authority for starting a look at Paul this way, but I hope it's appropriate.
Late in John's Gospel, you'll recall, the Lord says famously, I am the vine, you are the branches. A beautiful, famous, one of the great moving passages of Scripture, isn't it?
[9:17] I am the vine, you are the branches. Israel is a vine brought out of Egypt and planted in her new land.

So Jesus here is saying, I am, as Israel's Messiah, I am Israel. And I'm calling you to be part of me, saying to his disciples, Jesus is Israel.
Jesus is Israel's Messiah, bringing Israel, if you will, to her fulfillment. A famous passage from late in John, as I say, you know it well.
You'll also recall that late in Romans, Paul addresses specifically, Paul will do this in his letters, won't he? He addresses Gentiles. He says, I'm now talking to you Gentiles.
And he says, he tells them, that they are being grafted into Israel. They are being grafted into Israel.
[10:17] The same image, of course. They are in some sense, he tells them, oh, Paul could be unsubtle at times. You Gentiles are unnatural grafts, but Israel's God is now extending grace to Gentiles, Paul tells them.

Yes. This moment in Romans 11, I think, captures or very much focuses Paul for us. He writes to a church in Rome.

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Paul was a citizen of the Roman Empire, one of the big facts of his life, the big horizon behind his life. He's also, he was always a teacher in Israel.
He spoke of Israel all the time. He never forgot Israel, the mystery of. As a Pharisee, he was given to thinking and acting on behalf of the vine Israel, always.
And he has become, he became a man in Christ. He became a convert, announcing that Jesus is Lord, as you know.
[11:34] How would you possibly summarize Paul's core message? Something like that. He taught that Jesus is Lord. That Jesus had been raised up out of death.

That because Jesus is Lord, Caesar is not Lord. That Jesus is the second Adam. And that he, Jesus, has been appointed the judge of people everywhere.
That's a summarizing statement of what Paul announced. The man is, I hope you've come to realize this in your study of scripture over the years, the man is a wonder, really.
Paul, again, was a Roman member of the, he lived in the Roman Empire. He was, in fact, a Roman citizen, wasn't he? That's interesting.
He was born in Tarsus. Can you picture the Holy Land? Let your eye go up. It's a seaport town over to the left of the Holy Land. Perhaps his parents had obtained the honor of citizenship, some scholars wonder.
[12:39] But Paul seems to have just inherited Roman citizenship in some way. These facts are easy about Paul. We're all familiar with them. They're firmly rooted. He was educated in Jerusalem.

He was probably, in fact, raised there. His family probably sent him off, this gifted young fellow, to study in Jerusalem.
A noted teacher, Gamaliel by name, taught Paul. Paul was, of course, he was a Greek speaker. He spoke the Greek language. I take it he was fluent in Aramaic.
He learned Hebrew, apparently. And quite frankly, about Latin, I just don't know. If there's some scholar who has a strong opinion about Paul as a Latin speaker, I haven't come across it.
Paul certainly would have known Latin speakers. I take it if he wasn't fluent in Latin, he probably picked up a smidge of it. He would have run into it. The empire was multilingual.
[13:41] Paul obviously absorbed what's called Greco-Roman cultures. A mouthful, isn't it? But you know what that means. Paul absorbed the culture that was dominant in the Mediterranean world.

In antiquity, in that time, it is safe to say, identity was not so much, I got this phrase from Ben Witherington, New Testament scholar, I lean on a lot.
Identity was not so much, in this culture, who you were, but very much, to whom you belonged. That's how that culture worked.
Not who you were, but to whom you belonged. Identity was a work, in modern language, was a work of community formation.
Greco-Roman culture did not have much room, if room at all, for what we think of, as moderns, as the individual. The individual was just not really a living presence in this culture, this world.
[14:48] Who you belonged to was who you were. So, geographical place, gender, ethnicity, social position, very much defined who you were, much more intensely than it does in our culture.

Light is thrown on the Gospels when this is remembered, for sure. For instance, we take it for granted in the Gospels, but this again throws light on them.
You'll recall that Jesus often calls what we might call micro-groups to follow him. We're used to this. He called James and John, Peter and Andrew, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.
We remember that Paul baptized households of people. Paul baptized households. Your identity was formed by groups.
So, when Jesus called someone, he liked to call a little bit of a micro-group to him so that you wouldn't totally lose your identity as that group had given you your identity.
[16:02] When Jesus says that he would set family members against one another, he was saying something which was deeply shocking in that culture.

It's even a bit bothersome in our culture. In that culture, it was downright revolutionary. Jesus is advertising himself. He's stating, I'm a crisis. I may even separate people from one another.
Your elementary, elemental identity could be challenged. That was very hard for people in this culture to hear. household were deeply significant and much ethical instruction in the ancient world.

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Apparently, across many, many writers in the ancient world, ethical instruction was aimed at households and therefore roles within, of course.
That's why Paul's ethic is a recognizable Greco-Roman household codes genre.
[17:09] Excuse me for that. Mouthful. But that's what it was. I can't blame some scholar for that. It's my own little phrase. But the idea is theirs. Paul writes to the Ephesians or the Colossians.

Often he's talking to households and your role within it. Greco-Roman household codes genre. Paul writes them. Each unit in the structure is addressed.
You recall from Paul's writings. We should remember, of course, that in particular, it was in real houses, in particular real houses that Christians often met.
Probably, I would say, almost always. They lived in these household structures. The Christians met there. So Paul addresses, you recall, parents, fathers, mothers.
He addresses the children in the household structure. He addresses slaves. all of these moments in Paul addressing these people have given rise to much controversy, as we know.
[18:10] This was what we would call, of course, in modern terms, a structure of hierarchy. It's safe to say that, and it was, without getting into the prejudice and polemic that surrounds these words, it was patriarchal.

Men were privileged. Males were privileged in this culture, we can safely say. Some think, to come right to the point of dealing with Paul here, to try to get some insight into Paul, some think that Paul attempts to create, as he addresses households in his epistles, Gerd Thiessen is a great German scholar who argues this, that he sees Paul as attempting to create what he calls a loving patriarchy ethic for the Christian church and for the Christian household.
That's one view that's out there, but what Paul is attempting to do when he, it's usually in the second half of his epistles, he says, okay, I'm going to talk to all you folks in the household, parents, father, mother, children, slaves.
Again, Thiessen thinks Paul is attempting to create a loving, an ethos here of loving patriarchy. Maybe he's got it, I don't know. Ben Witherington, previously mentioned, he argues otherwise.
He thinks Paul is self-consciously attempting, in fact, to undermine both patriarchy and hierarchy within this culture.
[19:51] It's a very interesting argument. Witherington never just merely makes assertions, he actually backs it up with lots of hard scholarship. He's a learned man.

He's a believer, by the way. The church, in fact, Paul would see the church becoming a changing power, I don't know if you could say revolutionary, but certainly a changing power within the empire. Creating that change just by living out a new ethic. Here's one example. This is a bit of a controversial example, but I tend to think it's true.
One example, just for the sake of time. Paul says famously, you'll recall where it's from, so I won't tell you, but Paul says don't provoke fathers, don't provoke parents, is it?
Don't provoke your children to wrath. Just in passing, doesn't he? Wutherington stares long and hard at that. Don't provoke your children to wrath.
[21:03] Why is Paul saying that? Well, Paul admonishes, you see, here, a parent who is in Christ.

Now, here is a broad expanse of gloss on this little passing phrase from Paul as it's read, I'm not quoting him, I'm summarizing, as Ben Witherington sees Paul here.
What Paul is saying here is this, fathers, you have the power as head of the household to arrange, for instance, a daughter's future by choosing her husband.
and that would have been it in that culture. In Christ, in a servant's serving love, you must do this with your daughter, not subjecting her to a lifetime of wrath, to a lifetime of unhappiness.
You are, in effect, Paul is saying to this father, you are to grant your daughter full equality in this task of choosing a husband. So reads Ben Witherington regarding Paul's admonition to fathers not to provoke your children to wrath.
[22:33] Now, if that's true, that's quite an insight into what the mind and heart of Paul are like. Was he just in passing saying, yeah, don't be a father to your kids? I don't think so.

Must mean more than that. Who knows? And therefore, the same in principle, Paul is saying, for slaves. He is the same for women, for all.
In Christ, famously, when Paul gets around to doing a summarizing statement of this kind of thing, in Galatians, famously, you know, it's hard to precisely work this out with good exegesis, what Paul says, words like, in Christ, there aren't slaves or free, there aren't males or females.

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Christ revolutionizes relationships. Surely, that's what Paul means in Galatians, at least that, depending on how there is questions about how you would unfold that.
But in Christ, there are no slaves or free, no male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus. Paul was, of course, a realist. He knew that this would be worked out slowly.
[23:45] On this reading of Paul, if a man like Witherington has it right, this is almost a kind of counsel of perfection, to be patiently and even shrewdly realized.

Why shrewdly? I speak to people who know Paul. Think of his letter to Philemon and the complicated relationship that Paul reveals there about Philemon, you and I have a slave friend in common, let's incorporate him into the mystery of Christ together.
Remember that? How shrewd Paul deals with a slave issue, especially as it's revealed in his little letter to Philemon.
Paul seems to accept this group identity in the household and in the household of the church, but he addresses it radically, if you will, in Christ.
Must move on. Paul, the Roman citizen, and living in this strong cultural environment, the Greco-Roman world, was of course Paul, we move on, was Paul the Pharisee.
[25:00] He is a wonder. The man contains multitudes, doesn't he? This Roman citizen was also a Pharisee. There's so much that isn't known about the Pharisees that's remarkable.

So you have to really go carefully when you think through who the Pharisees were. Perhaps the best way to see a Pharisee in Paul's time in very broad outline, and yet it's a helpful outline, I believe, is to see them as Jews most resolute to resist Greco-Roman influence in Israel.
Intensify, this was their theme, it appears to be their theme, intensify public obedience, and that was the way, as they sought, to resist pagan poison.
So, as we all know, they emphasized to a remarkable degree, Sabbath obedience. They emphasized food laws, which helped give Jews a distance from Gentiles.
Think of the trouble that Peter had getting any kind of change in food law behavior into his mind. Eating with unwashed hands, a kind of ritual purity to wash your hands correctly, for them it was an offense not to hold on to that.
[26:26] It shows our difference from this culture which is literally invading us. So, it was especially offensive to them if a Jew extended friendship to a tax collector.

A tax collector was an especially disobedient Jew. So, they'd see Jesus as just simply letting down the side. He was a problem.
And if you were a faithful Jew, you often would have seen Jesus as a problem. It was not easy to see what Jesus was doing. Thinking about Pharisees without bearing false witness about them is very difficult.
I think as Christians we often don't really empathize with them. We see their faults easily, but we don't see what they're trying to do.
Paul, of course, belonged here. He was prepared to defend Israel, as we know, with extreme measures. Here's another insight into Paul, isn't it?
[27:32] One well known. He had advanced in his faith beyond most of his contemporaries by his own witness. He was prepared famously to arrest, to imprison, to see deviance within Israel even killed.

This man was a passionate fellow. C.K. Barrett, a very distinguished New Testament scholar of our time, he wonders about Paul's words that he wrote to the Corinthians just in passing.
You recall them. Paul says, in danger, he says, from my own countrymen. Paul lets that little word drop in the midst of rehearsing many of his sufferings.
In danger from my own countrymen. Barrett wonders, was there a contract out on Paul's life? There might have been. It was that kind of a culture, that kind of a time.
There might have been people out there who wanted Paul killed, would pay you if you did the deed. Who knows? It was that kind of a culture. There's Paul the Pharisee.
[28:47] So a Roman citizen, an intellectual sophisticate, is our dear, beloved brother Paul. A man of much learning. He's referred to just in passing in the book of Acts.

Much learning. Paul has made you mad. Many intellectuals need to hear that, I'm sure. He was a fierce Pharisee, a young, intensely passionate partisan.
And he became a man, in his own glorious rhetorical phrase, he became, didn't he, a man in Christ.

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The Roman citizen, the Pharisee, became a man in Christ. Progress in Paul's scholarship, I think I can safely say, has been driven in the last couple of decades, maybe, if that long, by a full recognition of just how central just how central is the fact of rhetoric in comprehending Paul and his letters.
Paul's letters are, first and foremost, they are rhetorical performances. This is now recognized more and more.
[30:08] They actually follow a rhetorical, a formal rhetorical form, Paul's letters. They were for reading out loud in the atrium of a Roman household.

If you stepped into a Roman household, Christians probably met whenever they could in the household of someone in the congregation who had a bit of means. You'd step into a Roman household, and the first place would be an open area, maybe a fountain in the middle, maybe in some nice houses, balconies.
We can picture Christians gathering in such a place. I like the picture of them gathering in the evening with torches maybe on the wall. A scribe has arrived.
He's in the guest room of the house, and the Christians gather, and the scribe comes out and says, I've got a letter from Paul, and it would be read to the 40, 50 people there.
It's wonderful to think of what it must have been like to hear Paul's letters read aloud. This world was oral. A-O-R-A-L and A-U-R-A-L.
[31:19] Speaking and listening was how information happened in that culture. We really find it easy to neglect that, but that's how people learned in that time.

Paul's letters were to be read aloud. Speaking was highly prized. This comes through in Paul's letters, as you recall. Paul's letters were read by one, of course, probably again a scribe, and heard by a gathering of people.
For instance, Paul's famous asides in his letters, his change of topic, is almost surely meant to respond to a listener's attention span.
You can read little libraries of books saying, oh, this passage doesn't fit in here, therefore, must be from another letter that Paul wrote and some idiot scribe put it in arbitrarily into the middle of a letter.
What it's really showing is that Paul is a rhetorician, he's a rhetor, and he knows how to, okay, I'm going to give them a break and talk about something else that's on their minds.
[32:25] And then he'll come back to his ongoing argument, if there is an ongoing argument to be continued. The rhetorical recognition puts a nice happy stamp on Pauline scholarship.

It's good to see that. That's, good speakers do that and Paul did that. Do you love, I just want to say, do you love Paul's gospel rhetoric?
When you see this point, it seems to me it really helps us to see how, what kind of a communicator Paul is. Just the other day, it struck me again, thinking again about this being heard.
To the Colossians, Paul writes them and in the middle of the letter he says, you have died. I just want to stop there. How often do you get a letter from someone who tells you that you've passed away?
It's news. But Paul is a rhetorician. He wants you to remember that. Do you remember it?
Somebody talks about baptism a lot. Do you remember the day you were baptized?
[33:24] You died that day. What a rhetorician Paul is. We take this for granted, it seems to me.
You have died. You are the temple, he'll tell people.

Who, what may separate us from the love of God? This man is a master of rhetoric. Hear Paul. Go on on that for a whole talk.
Hear Paul, don't just read him. The gifted rhetorician. What a gifted rhetorician Paul is. His speech, he's weighty.
His person was weak, but his letters are weighty. That meant that his rhetoric was weighty. It must have been wonderful to listen to Paul. Oh, I'd love to hear him preach.
You are the temple, you have died. What can separate us from the love of Christ? A gifted rhetorician, a Roman citizen, probably must have learned much in Jerusalem as a Roman citizen about how to use language which later served him in the service of the gospel.
[34:29] Roman citizen, a gifted rhetorician, this Pharisee, a mind simply saturated in scripture. It would be amazing how much Paul knew scripture.

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And he traveled, moving on, on the Damascus Road where today, I was thinking the other day with some friends, where today literally the Assad family rules in Syria.
Paul would have known the Assad families, people who ruled by terror. That world hasn't changed much, has it, in 2,000 years in some way.
And on the Damascus Road, famously, well, what do we say, something happened. Here's a fiery point of contest amongst professionals who look at the life of Paul.
It seems rather lame to say, doesn't it, well, Paul was converted. Well, that isn't enough. Ben Witherington again, being a bit of a troublemaker here, but maybe some people deserve to hear this.
[35:43] Maybe I just need to hear it. He says point blank, well, there's no decision for Christ here. No way. Though evangelicals make decisions for Christ, Paul never did.

The Damascus Road, there's no decision here. Paul is staggered. What words can we use? He was staggered into the kingdom.
He was knocked down by the divine. He didn't make a decision for Jesus. By the way, Tom Wright likes to point out always, and Tom Wright's another troublemaker in some ways, Paul was not knocked off a horse.
There's no horse in this story. As Tom Wright says, there isn't even a neigh in it. Paul could have been, however, the artists are right.
Paul, in his pride, in his competency, in his strength, down he went. Down he went. Conversion here seems to be divine transformation.
[36:52] This is grace irresistible. Boom. You're mine, Paul. You're mine. The Roman Empire was a patron client network.

This is the way this place worked. Here's how hierarchy really impacted people. It was everywhere. Honor and shame attached to how you performed in this network of relationship.
In your economic life, in your social relations, in offices held and offices not held, if you will, throughout everything, all the social interactions about everything in your life, you were defined by honor and shame.
There were patrons above you and you were a client. Or you were a patron and you had clients beneath you. Every aspect of life worked this way. Identity, again, is formed, was formed, by the one to whom you belonged, literally.
That's who you were. This little aside is all by way of saying, here is perhaps the way, in his first century terms, a good way to understand Paul's conversion.
[38:14] On the Damascus road, Paul is shamed, if you will. He has totally misread his patron completely.

That's what happened on the Damascus road, in Greco-Roman terms. I thought I knew the Lord God, and I was 100% wrong.
I'm shamed. Down he went, literally, down. conversion in the ancient world was seen as something which was just weird.
Conversion was not regarded as something to be proud of. It was a sign of instability. Your identity was formed by a community, by gender, by ethnicity, by economic standing, offices held or not held, which patrons you had, who you're a client of, etc.
To change that was regarded as strange and weird. Excuse my language. No. To be a convert was to raise suspicion in the ancient world.
[39:34] Paul's new patron is a Lord named Jesus, of course. And as Paul says, I am not ashamed of this patron. When Paul says, I am not ashamed, it comes right out of Greco-Roman culture.

We tend to think of it in human psychological terms, maybe. Well, that's maybe there, but it's more this honor-shame culture.
I'm not ashamed anymore of my patron Lord Jesus. No. On the Damascus Road, Paul was shamed. He was put down. He has misread his patron, but now things are said aright.
Paul's new patron is again named Jesus, and he's not ashamed of him. This is the key to understanding Paul's motivation.
At this level, I know Christians use to get this. We all get this. Paul's patron, you see, Paul finds out that his patron emptied himself and became a servant.

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[40:42] So will Paul. Paul, if his patron became a servant, well, then Paul will. The drama of Jesus Christ in Philippians 2 is recapitulated in Paul's life.

Paul wants to live out Philippians 2, if you will. And behind that, I had never seen this until I learned it from Ben Witherington.
I don't know if Witherington has this right. Paul would read the servant songs in Isaiah as ethical instruction for us. You are to become the suffering servant, because Jesus became that.
I thought it stopped, if you will, at Philippians 2 and passages like that. But it's fed by the suffering servant passages. Take that and I don't know what to do with that.
Paul simply wants to recapitulate the life of his new patron and not be ashamed of him. There is so much to study and profitably, I trust, in contemplating Paul.
[41:57] Paul was a sufferer in many ways. That can be looked at across all of his writings. Paul was an itinerant. Although he did stay put, it's interesting to remember for considerable stretches in different places where he taught and preached.

He was famously a tent maker. He worked in materials somehow. If you were traveling to Corinth, apparently people, to watch the games, people often would first off pop into town and get a tent to provide your accommodation.
tents were important in that culture. Imagine buying a tent from Paul in a marketplace somewhere. Here to watch the games, are you?
I'm Paul. Want to know why I'm here? You know, talking to a talkative preacher. there to watch. It's interesting to note that Paul does say, I learned this from Ben Witherjohn, he's already quoted him so often, that Paul does say, I well, I earned, he says to the Corinthians, isn't it, I earned my living with my own hands.
Witherjohn thinks there's a touch of self-consciousness there, and I think it's true. Paul was a somebody throughout most of his life, but he went down to serve his lowly Lord.
[43:32] And so he started to earn his living as a tent maker. Probably learned that when he was a young man. The Jews liked to have a skill. It's interesting that, forget that point, he was a man who could have accepted financial support from people, but that patron client thing compromised you.

You became obligated to a patron who gave you financial support. That's probably one of the reasons Paul said, no, I'll earn my own living so I can preach the gospel on my own terms.
He didn't want to become obligated to a patron. So that's another reason why Paul liked to earn his living by himself and not get involved in that.
I find all these things can be looked at in terms of Paul's life. I don't know what to make of this. Witherington ignores it.
I haven't come across any deep meditation on this. But you find Paul's intensity at times strange. I do. love to do.
[44:52] He was hyper-intensive as a Pharisee. I think we can say he was hyper-intensive as an apostle and an evangelist. There's something. Withering says, if you met Paul, you might not like him.

He could be disturbing. And I don't know what to do with Paul when he says, in a moment of strange passion, it seems to me, he says, well, if saving my fellow countrymen, the Jews, met my own damnation, I'd close with the deal.
Lord, damn me for eternity, please, so that my fellow countrymen, the Jews, can be saved. I don't know how to penetrate that.
There's an intensity that I don't understand. If it met my own damnation, I would take it, he says. He so wanted Israel to turn to Jesus.
I don't know what to make of that. Is that a rhetorical stance that maybe has precedent somewhere, some extremity, to make a point?
[46:06] I don't know. But that's a strange moment in Paul. Very strange. There's a kind of identification with Jesus that I don't know how to come to grips with.

The one who died and became sin for us. Paul wants to recapitulate that moment in his patron's life. This is a hard man to understand.
I don't think it's easy to understand Paul. He's very passionate. It seems to me one way to summarize that, and this is not emphasized enough in the scholarship.
Paul loves. That's his passion. Oh, does this man love. He's amazing.

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We'd feel maybe uncomfortable in his presence because of his love. Witherington gloriously emphasizes this.
[47:08] You rarely, if ever, in this whole story of Israel, come across something like this. From Luke's gospel, I say to you, says our Lord, you who hear, meaning this is really important, you who hear, love your enemies, says Jesus to us today and to his disciples.

Do good to those who hate you. Then he continues, bless those who curse you. In the tradition of Israel, it's more like God saying, if somebody curses you, I'll curse them.
But Jesus said, well, that may be true, but that's not a word for you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. Where, says Witherington, do we ever find anything like this in the tradition of Israel?
Well, he says, you find it in Romans. Chapter 12, verse 14, Paul says, bless those who persecute you.
Bless and do not curse them. Paul has absorbed Jesus' deepest moments into his psyche. Piles of scholarship out there.
[48:31] Just the other day in a bookstore in Keresdale, casually, I walk up to a section of it, and there's these two books, one by good old Bishop Spong. I always wait for his latest.

At last! And it's just filled with, you know, oh, Paul didn't know anything about Jesus. Poor Paul's an idiot. And another book by a Muslim scholar, probably a hundred times smarter than Bishop Spong, Reza Aslan, named after the Narnia character.
And he has a whole chapter saying Paul, of course, didn't have a clue about Jesus. It's out there all the time. For last month, I was going to give this talk, every time I met somebody, I wanted to bore them to tears, I'd say, what do you think about Paul?
And it was rare to get anything positive. Always it was, Paul was the guy who always said no. I've heard that from Christians, lots of them. Evangelicals who have trouble with Paul, lots of trouble. Paul's a negative. Paul's, Paul's just, I like Jesus that all. You hear it all the time. And it's wearisome, and it's not, it's really not based on much too careful a reasoning about these two.
[49:49] Paul absorbed the mystery of his patron deeply, and he knows him, he knows Jesus. It's just really hard to know how Paul met Jesus on the Damascus road.

No, mainly it's not penetrable by us. He revealed himself to me, in me. Jesus, the spirit of Jesus breathed near his soul, quoting Marilyn Robinson, another context.
Spirit breathed deeply, beyond words, and the spirit of Christ breathed near, right inside Paul. Paul, I think, tried to live out 1 Corinthians 13.
He didn't write that casually, did he? Finally, there's so much to talk about about Paul. It's just, my mind is burgeoning with it. A postscript.
The stuff that I think is most important here. How do we think about the Bible, about Holy Scripture? Paul beautifully speaks about the oracles of God.
[51:03] Remember what Israel, the treasure that Israel was given. One of the treasures given to Israel, the oracles of God to them was given. And all of this kind of thing, this glorious thing called Scripture, and how do we compare it or how do we relate it to this other kind of thing called historical critical inquiry about, you know, let's study the Roman Empire.

We can't understand, Paul, until we've mastered a classical scholar's knowledge of the Roman Empire and that Greco-Roman culture, and Second Temple Judaism will master that, will master the appropriate languages, the subgroups within Israel, the psychology of first century people, the nature of Paul's writings, how do we date them, how do they relate to the Gospels.
Withering lists some stuff like, okay, this is how we study Paul. No one can do that in a lifetime. Some people try, and the church benefits from their work, but are these two things, Holy Scripture and historical critical inquiry, are they in different worlds?
Should we keep them, in fact, separate from the life of the church? Sometimes critical issues, as we know, provoke anger and confusion. to focus this, at least it helps firstly, it seems to me, to remember that the Christian, in a very real sense, hear me charitably here, we never read just Paul, if you will.
Just Paul. I thought that was a pun that you get. Paul, it's very interesting. In justness, righteousness. Why? Because Paul, in the church, is part of the canon, you see.
[53:21] There are, it is said, canons within the canon. Some Christians, it's not too much of an exaggeration, pretty well lived by Romans and Galatians.

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That's the faith for them. But we never read Paul just that way. Paul is part of the canon of Holy Scripture. So we read Paul, but we have to read James, and we have to read the Gospels, and we read the letter to the Hebrews, and we read that mysterious apocalyptic book at the end, and we read them all in the context of the mystery of Holy Scripture that we're going to hear about the other testament.
John Webster, a theologian at St. Andrews, used to be at Oxford, throw around these titles, gives weight to what he's going to say, right?
He says very helpfully, I find this clarifying on this issue too, he says as a theologian, exegeting Scripture is listening to God.
Do you believe that? I hope you do. So when we read Paul, we're listening to God. The Christian believes. Exegeting Paul is listening to God.
[54:40] So believes the Christian, the Christian as a Christian. And after all, we have in Scripture things like Peter recognizing who Jesus is, but Jesus says to him flesh and blood, did not teach you that, Peter.

To recognize Jesus is an act of God's grace. grace, not of any kind of scholarship. Paul says likewise, spiritual things are spiritually discerned.
reason. It is, after all, a usual natural desire of reason to know more and more. Reason has an open-ended quality to it.
historical critical inquiry is, in principle, never-ending. So what do you do with it? There's no horizon to reason.
It seems limitless. So what do we do, again, with Holy Scripture and with critical reason? I'll give you the answer this morning, just since you've been so patient, as we draw to a close.
[55:51] We reason about reason as Christians. And here's how it goes. The great modern error, I'm leaving here heavily on John Webster, the great modern error is to believe that reason is a natural transcendent power.

It's just in us. Reason. No, the Christian knows that reason is creation. and it is fallen. Reason is fallen.
Reason is, in fact, in the gospel, called to holiness. Reason is called to holiness. Its chief end, the chief end of reason, is to know the Holy Trinity as set forth in Holy Scripture.
reason is dependent on the Holy Spirit. Reason is, this would be a hard one for evangelicals to take seriously.
Reason is an exercise in the fellowship of the saints. In other words, it's church centric reason.
reason is, it desires perfection, reason, in the fear of God.
[57:15] Christian reason. It desires, finally, the sanctifying of God's holy name. That's what reason is to a Christian.

You have to somehow come to grips with what reason is, finally, in the Christian worldview, and then very humbly use historical critical inquiry as a lowly, humble servant of Holy Scripture.
If you will, historical critical inquiry is a client with a patron over it. God, the Holy Spirit, will teach you how to reason.
A summarizing statement here, and with this I'm drawing to a close. I love John Webster's lovely assertion. He says, God is not summoned into the presence of reason.
Reason is summoned before the presence of God. There's a believing theologian speaking. That's in his book Holiness.
[58:31] Theology is holy reason, he says. The church needs to work out, it seems to me, it hasn't been done too clearly yet, the issue of holy reason and the forms of reason that modernity puts on our doorstep.

There are gifts from providence at one level, but think of the havoc that's been done in some churches by, I would say, a reckless, undisciplined historical critical inquiry.
We know the horror stories that are out there in church history in modernity. Somehow the church has to get this issue straight, finding a way to say it.
I don't know, as I conclude, I don't know, after touching down on how historical inquiry looks at a guy like Paul, how to bring all this into order in the gospel.
Hearing, it seems to me, a godly and true summarizing of these issues by hearing that God is not summoned, God is not summoned into the presence of my reason.

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[59:48] No, my reason is by the gospel summoned into the presence of God. You know, that's it. C.S. Lewis, I found out this weekend, I didn't know, you super well-informed people know these things, and we should keep you informed.

C.S. Lewis was inducted into Westminster Abbey this weekend, into Poet's Corner. I think the greatness of Lewis is that he took his mind to the cross, and he was crucified there.
You need your intellect crucified. with Christ, and then it will become a beautiful thing. If you don't do that with your intellect, it will become a reckless little arbitrary nothing, really.
As Lewis said about one of his friends once who had left the faith, if he'd ever been in it, he said to a friend of his, the poor man, he thought his mind was his own. That was his problem.
He thought his mind was his own. He didn't know that his mind belongs to God. And give your mind to God, and your mind will become what it should be.
[61:03] If you don't give your mind to God, it will just betray you. It will be a piece of garbage in the end, that God will have nothing to do with. Give your mind to God.

Then a thing like historical critical inquiry becomes a joy. I love reading about Paul. It's wonderful. And over and over and over again, it's quite fun to hear the scholars saying, maybe, probably, could be, we don't know, needs further work, you know, it's all kind of, oh, do we really ever get this? Well, God the Holy Spirit gave us the canon to teach us to hear God in it. So we, maybe everything I've said today about Paul's wrong.
When I meet him in heaven, as I said, he'll say, nice try, buster. I hope, I know he'll be patient with me and forgive me.
But there's a look at Paul, at the kind of, the kind of work that can be done on Paul. It's a, this weekend, or just the other day, Tom Wright's major, long-awaited, big book, on Paul is now out.
[62:19] In two volumes, highly praised, if you've got $95, you have nothing to do with, you can run out to Regent College, you can get it now. It'll be a joy to read that.

Tom Wright spent his life studying the New Testament, and guys like Paul. And it's great to know Paul, but he would say, think about me, but not for too long, think about my Lord.
So, let me say a word of prayer, then you can have some conversation. Lord, thank you for the witness of your mighty apostle to the Gentiles.
May we learn from him more about the glory of his Lord and ours, Jesus Christ, and in his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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