

Paul and the Faithfulness of God II

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[0 : 0 0] thanks Joe for focusing in on from last week's hour on Tom Wright Paul and the Faithfulness of God on the book itself the book itself is something at least to wonder at especially if you're plowing through it it is precisely 1,509 words I made a note of pages what's in the coffee this morning 1,509 pages on Paul it's interesting his last few pages are very eloquent he weaves his closing remarks on Paul around George Herbert's famous poem called Prayer which you're probably familiar with angels banquets lovely glorious George Herbert poem and the last two words of the poem are the exact last two words of the book the last two words being something understood which I thought again very eloquent way and I the learned scholar and the bishop and the pastor wants his reader to simply enter into an experience of something understood sort of a soft landing after such a big scholarly book and I was reminded of the size of this book just this past week

Robert Fulford and the National Post I forget the context that I met as I get older my memory's going people have to be patient with me but there's some dialogue in Dorothy Sayre's famous detective novel gaudy nights two people talking is what dialogue is one person says obviously two literary types you can see them over Sherry maybe at an Anglican duo are you often you love words don't you are you often drunk on words and the dialogue partner answers yes so frequently that I'm rarely sober now words words words you know that you sometimes all of these words that a scholar like Tom Wright will use to get at Paul's meaning but they're worthwhile words it's a worthwhile big work as I mentioned last week

Wright believes that we tend to take Paul for granted but he sees him as up there with Plato or with Shakespeare for the breadth of his mind the depth of his mind the subtlety of his arguments Tom Wright is in love with the apostle both as a scholar and as a believer our beloved brother Paul the best thing about Paul getting right down so we have again some bit of context for our discussion the best thing about this book Paul and the faithfulness of God is its method the only Paul we desire to know is the Paul that rises up out of exegesis that's the only way to know Paul is to read him to read him with all the care that scholarly method and prayer and belief and struggle can give us what is Paul saying there are rich deep traditions in the church about Paul and what he taught and Tom Wright honors them but he's every inch the Protestant he says okay we know these traditions let's measure them against exegesis no matter how much we treasure a tradition and we go on holding on to them they will be says this bishop pastor scholar measured against holy scripture Protestants are the last people to put tradition above holy scripture so that's Tom Wright's mandate is challenge yes exegesis this the believer in the church shares with the historian the traditional historian the traditional historian that's the we there we desire to know Paul through exegesis so Tom Wright the historian working with the tools of historical critical inquiry for instance and this really I think is one avenue into the heart of the book although it's a big book maybe it has many hearts he's convinced that for instance the word Christ and you'll recall from last week if you were here in our English Bibles has become a problem Wright thinks it deeply obscures what Paul means now that's a big claim and a bit of a bit of a jolt because we're so used to the word Christ it's in the prayer book it's in our hymnody it's hundreds of uses uses of it in the New Testament but Tom Wright wants to argue and he argues over many many pages the word Christ means a connotation rich Israel's Messiah it's funny if you have the experience of saying okay Mr. Wright I'll try this out try it sometime yourself just take any passage of Paul and sooner or later you'll come into the word Christ will be there he uses it so often try just immediately saying Israel's Messiah it changes the feel of it Paul a servant of Jesus Israel's Messiah to the church at Rome servant of Israel's Messiah Israel's

[6 : 20] Messiah Jesus who loved me and gave himself for me Israel's Messiah loved me there's a different feel there but there again that's something that you may want to question talk about the gospel Mr. Wright wants to tell us rises up out of Israel entering into her covenant fulfillment this is Paul the deeply Jewish thinker being emphasized by Mr. Wright Israel entering into her covenant fulfillment is the big story of Jesus and the New Testament this right likes to say in this book more in other books but it's the right mindset Jesus on the cross is Israel gone into her final exile it is also Adam exiled from the garden and Jesus totally identifies with Israel excluded from the garden

Israel exiled from her holy land and when Jesus rises up out of death he is the new Adam he is Israel now in her covenant fulfillment that's not new Tom Wright's not inventing a new Paul he says this is what Paul teaches the language maybe is a bit different we don't often talk about it this way maybe we should talk about it that way more often Mr. Wright would think it's a good thing he would have thought it was a good thing for the Christians in Rome as we talked about last week who were tempted to look down on Jews Paul was very concerned about that don't don't think that you have become a privileged people and the branches cut off from the true olive tree are no longer of concern to our God that attitude Paul really hated and that is not an esoteric passing thing in one of Paul's letters as Mr.

Wright would like to emphasize a hundred years within a hundred years of Paul's demise a fellow named Marcion I think he was in Rome itself but he was teaching the church just to forget about the Old Testament we don't need it anymore there's always been a temptation in the church towards a kind of Marcionism a looking down on the Old Testament looking down on the mystery of Israel Paul didn't have a moment sympathy with that always say no to that again we talked about that last week might want to have more conversation about that Mr.

Wright gets somewhat controversial I think it's an overrated controversy that when Israel enters into covenant fulfillment what happens is God is now creating a worldwide family why?

because he said to Abraham through you I'll bless the nations through you I'm going to bless the nations that's the fundamental promise of God to his people about how he's going to save the world so now that Israel is in covenant fulfillment the worldwide family is now forming God's first family if we may put it that way had markers of membership famously circumcision food law Sabbath regulation this kept Israel distinct gave her an identity kept her separate from the nations this was God's will for Israel now that the covenant has been fulfilled here's the shocker the worldwide family no longer has the same markers of membership the new markers of membership are known as right would say justification by faith is the big one justification by faith in fact means that you have faith in the faithful

[10 : 38] Messiah and faith in the faithful Jesus and that marks you out as a member now of the new family that's what justification by faith means that gets Mr.

right into some trouble in some circles but I think it needs to be unfolded the markers of the family are always non-exclusive in the new family so for Paul it's utterly important no male or female no slave or free no rich or poor which ones have I learned no Jew and Greek exactly no ethnic no ethnic marker Jew or Gentile this isn't because as Paul would say to the Roman Christians ah we Christians have got a bigger more liberal friendly attitude towards the world and those benighted Jews my fellow Jews were a bunch of small minded people that's to retroject into Paul's time and our Lord's time issues from our liberal western culture has nothing to do with that Israel was obedient to practice exclusion now the church is obedient the new family in practicing inclusion ah for instance and where this is really brought out clearly is in

Paul to the Galatians when he confronts Peter remember Peter was having fellowship with Gentiles eating with them then some people came from James some representatives of a very Jewish form of Christianity there's identifying these fellows precisely as a piece of work probably will never know but whatever they stood for they intimidated Peter into going back to separating himself from Gentiles he wouldn't eat with them anymore and Paul came down on Peter like a ton of bricks and virtually said to him on Wright's reading of Paul what Paul was saying to Peter was if you go back to the identification markers of Israel under the old covenant the old first family of God you're denying the gospel itself because the gospel itself is the creation of a new worldwide family which no longer has separation between Jew and Gentile no longer does it have the separation brought about by food laws which meant who you could and couldn't eat with that was very important that's justification by faith issues in fact so there's

Wright really touching on some controversial areas in the Protestant tradition at least faith is always faith in the faithful Jesus that's what Mr.

Wright believes faith means in the mind of Paul from another one of Mr. Wright's essays I need light on this I'd love to have conversation about this with theologians and learned folks like you Mr.

[13:51] Wright believes that what I did this morning with a number of you in this room what some of you are going to do later today I went up and received the Lord's body and his blood the church's most wondrous moment Mr.

Wright says the bread and the wine embody justification by faith today I put my faith in the faithful Jesus who gave himself for me I love the thought that the bread and the wine embody justification by faith I hope I hope that's affirmed by theologians I love the idea I love to get my mind around the bread and the wine because I do it with God's people every Sabbath I'd like to grow in my understanding of that and there's a bridge I think that Mr.

Wright one of his deep agendas is he wants to build bridges I can't quote him on this you feel it in the book a bridge between the Catholic sensibility and the evangelical sensibility if we could make progress on understanding the Lord's table the pathetic divisions that afflict the church might another avenue to overcoming them so justification by faith does not replace as Mr.

Wright understands it a kind works regime that Jews unfortunately believed in Mr. Wright denies this altogether Jews were trying to save themselves by being good and that didn't work so God came along and said okay from now on I saved by grace no that's the Jews were not trying to save themselves by works in that sense a lot of the tradition tells us that in fact that is how Jews prevailingly perhaps in our Lord's time and in Paul's time were trying to save themselves Mr.

Wright with some controversy says no that's not true Jews weren't trying to save themselves that way they were proud of their identity markers their prevailing sin was ethnic pride election means that God will save the world through our action rather than saving the world by having them bear the world's sin deep waters there from Mr.

[16:25] Wright covenant membership is in the Messiah Jesus it is not in again the other markers Paul is a Jewish thinker through and through we talked about last week so after the Damascus road experience everything is and these are constant words in Mr.

Wright's thinking his writing everything is rethought and reimagined the entire Old Testament rethought and reimagined through the prism if you will of the Messiah crucified and risen because the Messiah crucified and risen is in fact Israel crucified and risen and so in this sense all of Hebrew scripture all of the Old Testament again is crucified and risen in the Messiah and we talked about the food laws issue really highlights that food laws were once a gift from God to keep Israel holy and separate from Gentiles now food is shared jointly by Jews and Gentiles in the new worldwide fellowship that God is creating going to all the world and preach the good news the Lord is saying there I am now creating the worldwide fellowship that God promised that he would do to Abraham through you

I will bless the nations the fulfillment of that promise in fact means I'm going to create a worldwide family God's intention was always to save the creation to bring it all back to himself after it had disobeyed and been excluded from the garden Paul thinks like this all the time so right to the point and I want to end here one of my favorite prayers is Monia Edgerton put this in front of me one day at a quiet service we have a couple times a month here at the church Luther prays dear Lord Jesus you are my righteousness I am your sin what a prayer what a pungent prayer I find that it's beautiful that's famously Luther's great exchange well is this true

I asked Mr. right as I read this book I kept remembering that prayer and saying Mr. right can I still pray this prayer has there been a great exchange am I justified by faith as the tradition tells me I am with a certain understanding of such words well Mr.

right as lowly his lowly reader your humble servant me I think Mr. right would say yes go on praying that prayer but Mr.

[19:19] right would say that is part of the life of ongoing regeneration salvation that God is working in us the spirit of the son is given to us to groan in us to bring us back to the father and that's what salvation is that's how God gives you on an ongoing basis an assured salvation in his son Jesus work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for God is at work in you to bring you to fullness he says to the Philippians justification by faith is a kind of great truth that even in a sense precedes faith God has raised up his son Jesus up out of death and that's the one he looks to I had the privilege last night of being at a going away party for a dear person who's leaving us and going

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Siberia and Jim Houston was there and he said some glorious words and he just talked so lovely about I heard it to me not just to the star of the show of the part your own faith will falter it will your faith is a contested thing but God looks at the faith of his faithful son Jesus and in him you're saved we have faith in the faithful one there's a great Tom Wright moment from Dr.

Houston last night Dr. Houston gets a lovely passing mention in this book it's a great Christian leader but I won't tell you the context there's an overview of Tom Wright very careful title to his book Paul and the faithfulness of God was God faithful in his promises to the patriarchs was he faithful to Israel and Paul thinks through the mystery of Jesus and concludes yes God has been faithful to Israel as he'll be faithful to us in the mystery of Jesus Israel's Messiah there's an overview of last week's overview I keep thinking if Mr.

Wright was here he'd go which book did you read I hope I hope I read him faithfully Mr. Wright he sets an example of intense hyper careful reading nothing else it's good to have that experience he just loves exegesis he sees it as an adventure I think he loves to start he says let's see what's trouble here and sometimes he'll start well let's look at the beginning of this passage let's look at the end of the passage if we get that clear then we can figure out how the middle part flows together and if there's some part in the middle that seems to stand out and doesn't contribute to the flow of the passage he I think rightfully concludes well something's wrong in our reading of this little middle bit goes back and tortures the reader again to get it let's get what are we hearing Paul or are we hearing our traditions about

Paul that's his big question but I found it a delightful read the man is the man is a wonder and he's I'm glad he's on the side he's on the side of the angels I'm sure but Tom Wright of course writes lots of wonderful I think potent clever insightful popular books that are a blessing to the church lots of popular commentaries he's a prolific writer and so I hope you enjoy him at some point I hope he's back in Vancouver sometime soon he used to be through Regent College all the time doing courses I'm sure he's much in demand I think he makes many appearances on the BBC I'll close with that I'll close with that I delighted in talking you know sometimes at Easter the TV networks will decide to do okay we've got to do some religion stuff it's

[23 : 55] Easter so they'll have an hour special what really happened the first Easter and they'll get Bishop Spong on and he'll tell you not much if anything and the whole spectrum of Catholic Orthodox Protestant and I remember how delightful it was to your and they stuck the camera and put the microphone camera on to Mr.

Wright and he just said well as an historian I can tell you I believe that the only way to account for the rise of the Christian movement in the first century is the physical historical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead he believes the man believes he believes he believes and there's joy and peace in believing so I hope there's some joy and peace in believing and listening to this so there it is and now we've got at least half an hour or a bit more if need be and if we want a break in between we can run through some of these funny words up here and see if they spark questions too for anybody so amen