00:00:02 **Michael Horton:** We talk about Jesus in terms of suffering almost to the point of making him sound like a passive child taking it from an angry father when in fact, he is God absorbing God's wrath.

00:00:13 **N. T. Wright:** Yeah. And because at the same time, you have Isaiah 53 where he really does seem to be a passive victim, but Isaiah 53 begins by saying who would have believed that this was the arm of the Lord? What does it look like when God himself rolls up his sleeves to do this job? It looks like an innocent victim, a lamb led to the slaughter.

00:00:37 **Narrator:** Five centuries ago in taverns and public houses across Europe, the masses would gather for discussion and debate over the latest ideas sweeping the land. From one such meeting place, a small Cambridge inn called The White Horse, the Reformation came to the English-speaking world. Carrying on the tradition, welcome to the *White Horse Inn.*

00:01:03 **Michael Horton:** We're delighted to have former Bishop of Durham, N.T. Wright, who is one of the world's leading Bible scholars. He's Chair of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland and has taught at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Among his gazillion books are his series *The New Testament of the People of God, Jesus and the Victory of God,* and *The Resurrection of the Son of God.* He's also written a number of popular books including *Surprised by Hope* and that one in many ways is a prelude to his recent book that we're going to be discussing in program, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus' Crucifixion.* Tom, it's great to have you with us on the *White Horse Inn.*

00:01:08 **N. T. Wright:** Thank you very much. I'm delighted to be with you and thanks for the chance to discuss the book.

00:01:50 **Michael Horton:** Back in 1931, Gustaf Aulen's *Christus Victor* argued that the East understood Christ's death as the defeat of the powers of evil in a way that the West didn't, but he even singled out Luther as the greatest exponent of that view. As I'm reading the book, I'm wondering, are you setting *Christus Victor,* Christ's victory over the powers, are you setting that over against Christ's death in the place of sinners, substitutionary atonement? That's what some people are --

00:02:23 **N. T. Wright:** Of course. I can see the people say that and one of the reasons they say that is because Aulen wanted them to say that. I have to say when I started working up towards the project which I'm now talking about, I took a week and went off to a private space with my wife and we just had a quiet week. One of the first of the first books I read was Aulen and I haven't read Aulen for about 35 years. I had sort of known about it from student days, but I thought need to get back into this. I was shocked because Aulen sets up this rather rigid either or and then he does this amazing tour de force of saying that actually the *Christus Victor* thing which is so strong in the Fathers was the main light motif for Luther and Calvin as well. Now,
obviously, Aulen as a Lutheran bishop, needed to say that because if he said, yeah, let's go back to the Fathers and let's forget Luther, they would say to him, well, quit being a Lutheran bishop and go and grow your beard and be Orthodox instead sort of thing. And so, he was calling a Lutheran tradition back to the Fathers, which is a risky thing to do. I don’t know, but I suspect that in his tradition, there was quite a lot of easy low-grade versions of penal substitution going around which he was reacting against, just like in the Methodist tradition in Britain in the 50s, very firmly reacting against substitutionary atonement because I think they had heard so much of the parody that they just didn’t want to have any of it at all. So people then assume that if one says Christus Victor, one is saying therefore not penal substitution and I've tried to be careful to say, as I think the Fathers were saying, no, penal substitution is there but it nests within the Christus Victor model, not as an either/or and it nests particularly for me and this is where I think -- I hope my book is really making something of an impact. It nests within the Jewish scriptural tradition. One of the straplines of the book is Paul's strapline when he said to the Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, which does not mean that there are three or four group texts like Isaiah 53 or whatever or Psalm 22. It means that the entire scriptural narrative is now fulfilled and this is not a narrative about a hateful God determined to have somebody's blood and it happens to be his own Son.

00:04:42 Michael Horton: I'll never forget the lecture of my Systematics Professor, Robert Strimple, pleading with tears that we never preach the cross in a way that people get the impression of an angry father beating up his loving son. So evidently, you’ve also heard some of those sermons that he warned us against.

00:05:01 N. T. Wright: Yes. And of course, most preachers, if they feel themselves sounding like that, will very quickly say, of course, this is because God loves us. But the real nasty, dark side to this, and this has come out in much recent literature and some of that too has been caricatures but the real nasty side to it is that we are now alerted to the way in which child abuse has happened in families and in churches and in other contexts and often the abuser will say to the child, "I love you," even while abusing them or beating them up or whatever. And so, when young people, particularly if they know about that or have experienced it, when they then hear a story about God being so angry that he has to kill us all and then fortunately somebody stepped in the way and took the rap and then, oh, by the way, it's because he loved us, then there's this sort of sickening sense of, I know that story and I absolutely hate it. I have known people in tears saying, yes, that is how I heard the gospel and that’s why I rejected it, because of what my father did, my uncle did, my priest did, my whatever did. And so, somehow, we have to say accidentally much in the Western tradition, not only evangelicals, many others, have allowed ourselves to talk in such a way that that’s what people have heard.

00:06:27 Michael Horton: You refer to the line in the song “In Christ Alone” that says “God's wrath was satisfied” and you suggest that when we come to that line we should instead sing, "The love of God was satisfied." But I wonder as I read that, is that a false choice? In other words, wasn’t it the love of God that moved God to satisfy his just wrath by bearing it himself? That’s one of the pieces I didn’t see in the book where you clearly affirmed that God's wrath was satisfied at the cross?
N. T. Wright: Actually, what I used to say in Durham, when I was Bishop of Durham, there are many churches that used to sing that song and in all sorts of ways, it's a brilliant song. I mean, there's a lot of rubbish among the contemporary worship songs to be frank, but that one actually is a well put together song and what I used to say was not that you should never sing that, but that every other time you should sing, "The love of God was satisfied." In other words, yes, this week we'll sing “the wrath of God” and next week we'll sing “the love of God” because they are twin halves of the thing but I think it's Charles Cranfield in his commentary on Romans, even though I actually disagree with Cranfield's interpretations in various ways, he says it very, very carefully when he's expounding substitutionary atonement, that God being perfectly loving and perfectly holy, et cetera, determined to direct against his own very self in the person of his Son, that warth which our sins so richly deserved, something like that. Now, you can say that carefully. The trouble is there's an awful lot of preachers and theologians who, despite their best intentions often, just haven't quite said it carefully enough and because the pagan temptation is -- like, what started me on this line was when, again, in preparation for the lectures that I did before the book, I reread Martin Hengel on the crucifixion and on the atonement and Hengel goes through all these ancient pagan authors, all saying that or that or the other God was angry with the Greeks or the Romans or somebody. And so, an innocent victim was satisfied. And so, the god was appeased and then the wind blew in the right direction or the project went ahead or whatever it was. Martin Hengel then says, so this was God's way through the pagan world or preparing for the gospel. And I'm thinking, hang on, no, it wasn't. This is a pagan distortion of the truth, that the ancient pagans had seen there's something there but it's a distortion because these are capricious, malevolent, wrathful gods. And so, I started to mull that over.

And then at the same time, you’ve got Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 53 doesn’t stand alone. It's the climax of the whole poem that we call Isaiah 40 to 55 which is about the powerful love and sovereignty and kingdom of God. So, that’s where my wrestling of this really came from. And so, for me, one of the climactic moments of my book, *The Day the Revolution Began*, is my exposition of Romans 8:1 to 4 where it's absolutely crystal clear, there is no condemnation for those who are in the Messiah, Jesus, because on the cross, God condemned sin in the flesh. The condemnation which happened at Calvary means there is no condemnation for me if I'm in him. That is penal substitution. But it doesn’t work within the normal platonic, moralistic pagan narrative. It works within the biblical narrative with which Paul is trekking. So, I hoped I had made that clear. I am aware that some people have said, oh, there we are, N. T. Wright is giving up penal substitution. Absolutely not. I have tried to set the biblical doctrine of penal substitution within its proper biblical context.

Michael Horton: Don’t you think it's important too, not only are the pagan gods capricious, but I'm not aware of a story, maybe you are, of the god substituting himself, himself taking the rap. And so here, you have Jesus not as a victim, a helpless victim. We talk about Jesus in terms of suffering almost to the point of making him sound like a, you know, a passive child taking it from an angry father, when in fact, he is God, absorbing God's wrath.

N. T. Wright: Yeah. And because the mystery of the Trinity is a mystery, and if we manage to get our heads around it, it just shows you wouldn't have understood it. It is difficult to say all that in a way that again, people can fully grasp. And because at the same time, you have Isaiah 53 where he's led like a lamb to the slaughter, where he really does seem to be just a pas-
sive, lonely, sad victim, but Isaiah 53 begins by saying, who would have believed that this was the arm of the Lord? In other words, it's already a mystery in Isaiah. But when it says in 52, the Lord has laid bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, then the prophet turns the corners, so, what does it look like when God himself rolls up his sleeve to do this job? It looks like an innocent victim, a lamb led to the slaughter, which is, of course, also a part of a motif. And part of the problem is that the whole thing is over the sermons. There are so many strands of biblical thought which come rushing together at this point, and people have often said -- somebody said to me at the conference I was at just last week, "Well, wouldn't you say, it's just that there are four or five different metaphors and it just depends which one you want to pick." And I said, "They're not just metaphors. They may look to us like metaphors, but what they are is glittering fragments of the biblical narrative. And when we tell the biblical story in all its full dimensions, we realize that each one of those metaphors has also metonym about it. It's actually not just an illustration of something. It's part of the richness of the truth.

0:12:22 Michael Horton: Isn't that a problem with talking about theories of the atonement or models of the atonement?

0:12:26 N. T. Wright: Yeah. It really is. I totally agree. You can build a model of a ship, fine. You may do a nice job, may look nice on the shelf, but don't try and get in it and sail across the sea. You need the real thing. And what we need is the full biblical story. And one thing we haven't mentioned yet, Mike, is, which impinges on me more and more the older I get, is that so much of the narrative in the New Testament is drawing on the temple imagery. And it's not just imagery, it's the idea of the temple as the microcosmos, the small working model of new creation and then Jesus himself as the true temple. And then, astonishingly, the Holy Spirit enabling the church to be the new temple, the beginning of new creation. And this can only happen because of the purification, because heaven and earth can come together because of what Jesus did on the cross, so that what we still think -- we Western Protestants think of as the cultic imagery is more than just that. It's to do with how heaven and earth get together. And I suspect there's a lot more to be said about that than certainly I have said. And you'll notice that the letter to the Hebrews hardly feature in the book. I was going to have a whole section on it and there just wasn't space for it, and I'm not an expert on it anyway. But there's an entire -- a further dimension to the story to be told there.

0:13:51 Michael Horton: You anticipated my next question. I know that this could take an hour in itself, but you're used to answering gigantic questions briefly and succinctly. When you talk about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ according to the Scriptures, Paul's way of putting it, what is that according to the Bible; according to the Scriptures? What is the grand story within which the cross and the resurrection have their purchase?

0:14:22 N. T. Wright: Yeah. It's primarily creation and new creation. And the creation is of a heaven and earth temple. That is to say Genesis 1 is about God making a temple called heaven and earth for himself and his human creatures to dwell in, for his human creatures to be the image in this temple so that the rest of the creation can see who God is, and so that the love and power and sovereign stewardship of God can flow out into his world. That is what it was supposed to be. Human idolatry, rebellion, sin, says, "No, I don't want to be image bearers. Not going to do this." So then the heaven-earth relationship is fractured, so then the tabernacle in the
wilderness and in Solomon's temple are the small working models of a heaven and earth reality with priests and kings as the image bearers in that heaven and earth reality, and Israel called to be a nation of a royal priesthood, a holy nation. In other words, Israel called to be the people who dangerously stand up the intersection of heaven and earth, and to make that point, the Passover story, the Exodus story is the grand story of liberating them from slavery in order that they can be the image bearing royal priesthood. And then they know that this is temporary, that the tabernacle is an advanced model, Solomon's temple is an advanced model. And we wait through the long years of exile to say, just what are we talking about here? And the temple has been re-built but Yahweh hasn't returned. And then the New Testament writers say, "Now at last, Yahweh has returned in the person of God's Son, Jesus." The new temple has happened in him. The slavery has been dealt with. Passover is central to the whole story. Heaven and earth have been brought together at last, Ephesians 1, God's purpose to sum up all things in heaven and earth in the Messiah. That's happened, and now we are both the beneficiaries and the agents, against the day when finally, heaven and earth become one. And at every stage of that new creation, new covenant, the cross has to be central because it says, this is how God has done that despite all the dark forces that were arranged against him. So that's really the thing; the coming together of heaven and earth as a result of God on the cross defeating the powers that had tried to force them apart, and defeating it particularly in the human sin, through which the powers had gained their sovereignty, usurped sovereignty, human sin itself being dealt with. So the dealing with sin, penal substitution included, as the means by which the Christus Victor thing can be achieved so that heaven and earth can be one at last. There. I think that was about two minutes, is that alright?

0:17:11 Michael Horton: Wow, that was phenomenal. I need to take lessons from you on how to answer succinctly. So what you're saying really is, victory over the powers needs to be more emphasized but it's because God nailed the list of our sins to the cross, Colossians 2 and --

0:17:26 N. T. Wright: Exactly. This, I think, is actually -- if there's anything original in the book, this may be it, that the victory over the powers is won by God dealing with sin because the reason the powers have power is because human idolatry and consequent sin is the abdication of human power and responsibility and the handing of that power over to the powers. So if our sins have been dealt with, the powers have been robbed off their power as well as of their prey.

0:18:00 Michael Horton: And the condemnation of those sins as well, what you're saying.

0:18:03 N. T. Wright: Exactly. Here, this is Romans 8:1, 2, 3 with the result of Romans 8:4, that when it says God condemned sin in the flesh, the word sin there, is almost doing duty for Satan. It's an interesting bit of the way Paul writes Romans 7 and 8, that by the time we get to Romans 7 and 8, sin is itself a dark power. It's more than the mere accumulation of human wrongdoing. So the condemnation of sin means then, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God and the Messiah, Jesus, our Lord.

0:18:38 Michael Horton: As part of that victory, you write movingly about Christ's lordship, ironically, in what looks like the triumph of Satan and his purposes over Jesus in relation to Ceasar. Can you talk about that a little? And what's the relevance of that for us?
0:18:56 N. T. Wright: Yeah. I mean, this is such an interesting thing for us, modern westerners to grapple with because we tend to lurch from either saying that human power is just wicked and we all ought to be liberal democrats who nobody has any real power because we all just vote, and stuff happens. Although then, of course, we know that we need powerful leaders for various purposes. And then we swing to the other extreme, and the 20th century has been a swinging between extremes to forms of totalitarianism. And so we're not very good at reading the New Testament much more nuanced theology of power. I go back to John's gospel again; chapter 12, chapters 18 and 19; chapter 12 where Jesus says that now is the judgment of this world, now the ruler of this world is cast out. And then in the farewell discourses, he said, "The ruler of this world is coming. He's got no power over me but I'm doing what the Father commanded." And then what does it mean that the ruler of the world is coming for me clearly means that Satan, in a sense, is coming for him. But what actually comes for him is soldiers. And ultimately, Jesus is standing before Pilate as the representative of the Kingdom of God, confronting the representative of the kingdom of Caesar. And then, Jesus says to Pilate, "You could have no authority over me unless it was given you from above, so that the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin." Now, most modern Western thinkers about Christian views of politics haven't begun to grapple with, this is Jesus saying that Pilate has a God-given authority over him because God wants his world to be wisely governed by humans even if they don't acknowledge him like Cyrus in Isaiah. But the humans who abused that, will be judged for it. They will be held accountable for it. And actually, I think that's going on in Romans 13 as well. So then we need a whole fresh run around the question of how, granted the death and resurrection of Jesus, human powers and authorities are summoned to worship, to obedience, the whole Colossians 1 and 2 thing, that the powers are defeated, and then the powers are reconciled. And there is Paul in prison saying this; this is highly paradoxical. In the middle of all of that, the cross is what Caesar's kingdom does to show that Caesar is lord. But then, as we read the story in John, and actually very much in Mark, and then certainly in Paul, we discover that the cross is what God does to say that Jesus Christ is Lord. I think Paul relishes that paradox. I think, you know, when he writes that amazing poem in Philippians 2, I think this is one of the creative moments not just in atonement and in incarnation theology, but in political theology because he is saying that the symbol which says to the world, "We Romans run this place and if we don't like you, we'll rob you out and here's how," this very symbol now says, there is a God who made the world and loves the world passionately and has given himself in his own life and death. Yeah, this is an astonishing -- it's no surprise that some of the greatest artworks in the history of the world has been crucifixion paintings because the cross carries all of those meanings and so much more within it.

0:22:25 Michael Horton: So he has all authority in heaven and on earth.


0:22:29 Michael Horton: Of course, Caesar has of course have granted him or any of the other gods authority over heaven, but to say over heaven and earth, and yet he allows Caesar to have a leash is just astounding.

0:22:43 N. T. Wright: It is astounding. I mean, because of course, as with things like the abolition of slavery where we want to say -- to Paul as he writes first to Philemon, come on, Paul, just
tell him that slavery is wicked and it ought to be abolished. And Paul doesn't, and we wrestle with that. Then in the same way, we want Jesus as it were to send in the tanks and say, "Okay Caesar, quite enough of that, we're setting up, God's kingdom. It's going to look like this, bang, bang, bang." No, sorry. Right from the start, from the Sermon on the Mount, we ought to know that's not what Jesus' shaped power looks like. Jesus' shaped power looks like the meek, the brokenhearted, the mourners, the hungry for justice people, the peacemakers, weeping and mourning the state of the world but building hospitals and schools and looking after the poor and all the rest of it. And by the time Caesar has noticed something is going on, it's too late. This community has got going, and people love it, and it's taking over the world. But not with force and power of the normal sort. And I think this revolution in power, which, afterwards, you get it in Mark 10, the famous passage, which, one of the first verses about the atonement I ever learned; the Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many, Mark 10:45; echoes of Isaiah 53 and Daniel 7. But nobody ever told me when I was young that that comes as the climax and end of a whole paragraph about the redefinition of power. The rulers of the Gentiles do it one way by bullying people. We're going to do it the other way. Let the one who thinks he is the greatest become the servant. And you think, oh my goodness, we in the west have got some bits and we've not got the other bits and we need to put the bible back together again.

0:24:26 Michael Horton: Absolutely. You talk about how many Jews of Jesus' day expected a time of intense peril and suffering, leaving only a small but faithful remnant. But then Jesus believed that this intent suffering would be focused on one person, namely on him. Can you unpack that point a little?

0:24:46 N. T. Wright: Yes. It is fascinating that as far as we know -- and okay, they might dig up another scroll in the sands of Palestine or Egypt somewhere tomorrow that would say different. But as far as we know, nobody in Jesus' day is expecting Isaiah 53, as we now read it, to be fulfilled by one person. And maybe John the Baptist have glimpsed that, but I don't think so because when he sends a message to Jesus to say, "Are you the one who's to come or shall we look for another?" he's clearly not caught up with the agenda which Jesus is following. Anyway, in the interpretations of Isaiah 53, what we have is some people saying, this must be the Messiah. But then they turn it around so that the Messiah, like Psalm 110, of course, is inflicting suffering on God's enemies, or as already at the end of the book of Daniel, they are reading Isaiah 53 not about the Messiah, but about the martyrs, and as in the Maccabees. 2 Maccabees 7, the martyrs say we are suffering because of our nations sins, but God is going to bring this to an end and bring about a new time of liberation. And we turn over the page from 2 Maccabees 7 and blow me 7 Maccabees 8, things start to go well because these martyrs have born in themselves the pain and suffering of the nation. And that's a kind of a foretaste. But by the time of Jesus, of course, they looked back 200 years to the Maccabees and they said, well, that was all very well but it wasn't permanent. Things went horribly wrong again afterwards. Does that have to happen in every generation? And Jesus picks up from the Psalms and Isaiah and Daniel and so on, these sins, that actually, this is a unique individual vocation. And of course, it is a vocation which ultimately, only God himself can take upon himself. And that is, as we've already said, that is the mystery, the heart of it. And then, of course, the disciples only pick this up in the light of the resurrection. That's what Luke 24 is all about. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel, but we had not expected that this would evolve across. We thought he was going to charge
through and get rid of the Romans and all the rest of it. And Jesus says, let me just tell you this scriptural story one more time. This is how it works. And their hearts burn within them, yeah.

0:27:07 Michael Horton: Yeah. It still burns within us. Tom, we've had conversations about this. I want to throw this out to you and just get your take once more on this.

0:27:15 N. T. Wright: Yeah.

0:27:16 Michael Horton: According to classic, Reformed theology, what you have in the beginning with the covenant of creation, or sometimes it's called the covenant of works, covenant of law, you have an original vocation given to humanity in Adam to be priests, to multiply, be fruitful, to guard and to keep the sanctuary, to drive out all idolatry, but instead, we know what happens. Not only did they let the serpent beguile each other, but they themselves transgress the covenant. Now, you get to Israel and tragically, in Hosea 6:7, like Adam, Israel broke the covenant and you say so many times very clearly, the tragedy of the story is that Israel too is in Adam. And then Jesus comes, and he is God himself saying, "Okay, I'll do this myself." And he fulfills the vocation as incarnate God, as the last Adam, and then dispenses that to us as a free gift and inheritance. I just wondered, as I read the book, there is a pretty large overlap between what you were saying and what I think of as classic covenant theology, but you sort of put that up as your major target.

0:28:35 N. T. Wright: Yeah. And obviously, Mike, as you and I know, and we have had this conversation before in various forms and places, and it's always been a delight. You know, far more of that classic form theology than I do. I studied Luther and Calvin in college and I've been back to them various times since. I haven't read much 17th century reformed theology, still less 18th and 19th century. So I don't know my way through all the highways and byways of that. What I have seen in some of the biblical scholarship that's come out of that Ridderbos and so on, I find very, very congenial. There's lots of stuff there that I like. I have my critiques, et cetera. What I'm reacting against is something which I learned very carefully from people who taught me when I was in my teens and in my early 20s, which was to do with a reading of Christ and the law that God said, "Here is the law. If you keep this law, you will live," and that I couldn't do that and didn't do that, but Christ has kept this on my behalf; in other words, Jesus is the one successful moralist. He has actually done the good works which have earned something called righteousness. As a result of which, if I acquire some of that, borrow some of that, have it imputed, reckoned, whatever, to me, then I'll be all right because he's earned really quite a lot of it and I can have some of it. I mean, I'm saying it in the crude ways that I've heard it said in preaching and teaching. And I've often said to people, "I'd rather people believe that." There's an awful lot of other things they might believe that's not far from what I think the bible is teaching. But it does mean that the basic contracts is a moralistic contract about, can you keep these good works? Oh dear, no, you can't. Well, never mind because here is somebody coming along who can and does. And I think as soon as you turn that around from saying that these are the moral good works which you're supposed to do, which Genesis never says, through to saying, "Here is the vocational task which you are to undertake, which is to bring God's love and God's life into God's world," then the whole thing looks different. And it seems to me that the best of the reformed tradition, the people that you're, I think referring to, that's what they are trying to say only because of the heavy duty moralisms, both of the medieval period and then of some as-
pects of the Reformers and their heritage. It's the moral thing that wins out. And I would not be
heard to be saying that morals don't matter because they do. You've heard me say this before.
So is this making sense, Mike? Am I coming through on this?

0:31:28 **Michael Horton:** Yeah. It is. I just wonder if there's too much of a false choice be-
tween moral good works versus the vocational task. It seems to me you're putting a finer point
on what those moral good works are that the law does, in fact, require us to fulfill it. We haven't
in the fullness of time, Christ, you know.

0:31:52 **N. T. Wright:** Well, yes and no. I mean, of course, yes, the law says all sorts of things
and my heart says, and you've broken them. And yes, and that matters. But it matters because
that is the symptom of the failed vocation and the vocation is not to be a perfect human being,
but to worship the God in whose image I am made, and therefore, to be somebody through
whose every life and breath, including his almost accidental en route, keeping of the moral law,
please God; God's light and life flows out into the world. In other words, this isn't about me, it's
about in -- and we have plenty of sermons on this, the channel being cleansed, that the point is
not, "Oh look, here's a clean channel." The point is, now God's life can flow through this chan-
nel to the world in a way that wouldn't be possible if it was blocked and clogged by my usual
half sinning and half idolatry, et cetera. So we all start where we start, and I start with ordinary
Anglicanism in England with a strong dose of fairly Lutheran style evangelicalism through my
teens, modulated into Banner of Truth style Calvinism in my late teens, early 20s, then scratch-
ing its head through my 20s as I was reading Paul and thinking, "Hmm, this doesn't quite make
sense." And so, I have read the things I've read, and now I look back from where I am and say,
"Well yeah, there was a point to that, but it was actually pulling against some significant bits of
scripture." Now, as I say, you Mike have studied this whole larger Reformed tradition much
more thoroughly than I have, and you will see all the nuances which are, in fact, pointing for-
wards to what I take to be the biblical solution. And one of these days, who knows, I may even
catch up with some of that.

0:33:52 **Michael Horton:** You say we have Platonized our eschatology, substituting souls going
to heaven for the promised new creation and have therefore moralized our anthropology, substi-
tuting a qualifying exam of moral performance for the biblical notion of human vocation, where
the result that we have paganized, our soteriology, our understanding of salvation. That's quite a
charge. Can you unpack that a little bit?

0:34:17 **N. T. Wright:** Yes, I can. I'm sorry about all the “-ologies”. I know that probably two
ologies, too many in a sentence and having three is quite a mouthful. But this was a shorthand
way of saying something which I do think is really, really important, that -- and curiously, just
this last few days, I've been to a conference of evangelical theologians discussing key matters
with Eastern Orthodox theologians, trying to find points of reconciliation and mutual apprecia-
tion and learning how to work together and so on, which was really interesting. And for me as
an Anglican sitting in the middle of that conversation, it was fascinating. But I think there was a
general sense that this is something that the Eastern Orthodox, broadly speaking, have got right,
or at least, more right than the Western tradition, that the Western tradition, from about a thou-
sand years go onwards, through the high middle ages and on into Protestantism just as much as
Catholicism, has seen the idea of going to heaven when you die, and of a soul, a platonic type
soul as an immortal part of a human being which is going to go on existing one way or another and the only question is what's its destiny. And because it's a soul a la Plato, it's not really interested in a body. So it really wants to get to heaven and into a timeless and spaceless or whatever sphere. That's where it's going. And the Eastern Orthodox, though they sometimes use language like that, have always been much more concerned, I think, with the biblical vision of new heavens and new earth, of a renewal of the whole creation. In other words, that God made this wonderful, extraordinary, powerful world as space, time and matter and he didn't intend it to be just a temporary aberration. That's actually something that the early Gnostics thought, not that the early Christians thought, and that the present world is full of sorrow and pain and darkness as well as glory and power and life, but God is going to deal with the sorrow and pain and darkness and is going to make a whole new world and will raise us from the dead to share in it. So that is the biblical answer to the platonic view of eschatology, of just dying and going to heaven, or in some circles, Jesus coming back and scooping us up and taking us to heaven and whatever.

And that, I think, drives so many other things. And as you will know, Mike, I've had a lot of good feedback from people who read my book, Surprised by Hope, and have said that this has revolutionized the way they think about life after death and what I call life after life after death; the ultimate resurrection hope. And I think it's taken me quite a while to realize that when you get that biblical vision of new heavens and new earth and bodily resurrection within it, then it works, it isn't just that you've adjusted some nuts and bolts at the end of the story, it plays all the way back into the middle of the story, and indeed the beginning of the story, doctrine of creation itself, and that what's gone wrong is not just that we, humans, have failed to obey the rules and so deserve to be punished severely, but that we have failed to be faithful to God's vocation to us as humans, which is to be his image bearers in working in the present world for the sake of the new world that God wants to make, so that those sin matters, it matters particularly because it's the outflowing of the idolatry, which means we're saying, I don't want to be reflecting God into the world or reflecting the world to God in worship either. I want to do my own thing. I want to worship other gods, I want to worship part of the created order. And so let us be quite clear about this because some people will say, "Oh, this is Tom Wright going soft on sin," not a bit of it. It's contextualizing sin in a biblical way and saying sin truly matters and God's wrath against sin matters. But the problem is not just, I'm going to be punished, or possibly, God is going to get me off somehow, but God intended me to be part of his human project for his transformation and healing of the world, and by sin, I've gone away from that.

0:38:21 Michael Horton: Yeah. You talk about handing the keys over to Satan. It makes the fall all the more mysteriously evil.

0:38:30 N. T. Wright: It really does. It really does. It seems to me the diabolical bit, if you like, is that when humans worship forces in the world other than the one true God, we say to those forces, whether it's money or sex or power or whatever it is, I'm going to abdicate my responsibility in this sphere and I'm going to let you run this bit of the world. And it doesn't take much observation of the modern Western world to see that we've done this in spades with money and sex and power. We said, yeah, these things rule us. So you know, if somebody offers you a job similar to what you're doing but at twice the salary, then people will say, "It's a no-brainer. Of course, you go for it because there's more money." And there might be a hundred other factors which might say, "Yeah, but look where it is, or look what that's going to do to your family," or
whatever. But because we have allowed money to rule us, likewise, obviously in our world with sex, that the demands made by the goddess, Aphrodite, people just keel over and say, "Oh well, this is what I most deeply want. Therefore, obviously, I've got to do it, otherwise I'm being dehumanized," instead of saying, "No, I have to take responsibility. I have to be a grown up human being." Likewise with power and with war and dropping bombs on people and so on. We just assume this is the way -- so anyway, this is the recovery of the human vocation which you only get when idolatry is renounced. When Paul said this to the Thessalonians, "You turn from idols to serve a living God," this is a way of saying, you guys are rediscovering what it means to be human. So then, because we've Platonized our eschatology, disembodied souls going to heaven, because we've turned the human vocation simply into a moral exam which we all flunked, then that diminishing of those two stories plays back into the way we look at the cross.

0:40:21 Michael Horton: A lot of us in the States, in conservative evangelical backgrounds, were raised with the late great planet earth and that sort of Gnostic view of the creation not being restored and redeemed but thrown in the bin and God's going to start over with a new one. But I have to say, one of the revolutionary things for me, Tom, coming into Reformation theology, was actually, it's world affirming, creation affirming, Creator affirming view of things. So is this more -- you know, my grandmother's hymn, "I'll Fly Away", the more popular thing that a lot of us grew up with, or are you saying, no, this is sort of the traditional teaching of the Western church.

0:41:05 N. T. Wright: Well, I've often said, just to make the point rather sharply, if you go to the first century, reading first century text, looking for somebody who will teach you that you have an immortal soul, which is at present in your body but one day you'll get rid of this body, which is your place of exile at the moment, and your exile will end and you'll go to your true home which is in heaven. Now, there's many, many evangelical Christians in America and Britain who thinks that's the gospel. If you want to find somebody in the first century who teaches exactly that, your man is Plutoc, a middle Platonist. He says exactly that. He has a treatise on exile making that point. It is not Paul. It's not Jesus. It's not the Apostle John. So when we then read, whether it's my beloved William Tyndale, one of my lifetime heroes, or whether it's John Calvin or Bucer or whoever, yes, in some ways, they are much more world affirming than some of the medieval Catholics, although there was a world-affirming strand in some of that as well, but there is an awful lot of Platonism still there, especially with Calvin himself. And I think the more recent Dutch theologians, Ridderbos, Gerhardus Vos and so on, are rightfully rebelling against that, and I honor them for that. And I've often said, if the Dutch New Testament scholars have been leading the way rather than the Germans in the Lutheran tradition in the 19th, 20th century, then the New Perspective on Paul and this Surprised by Hope agenda wouldn't have been necessary. That would have been what we'd have all believed.

0:42:36 Michael Horton: How do you see Easter Sunday, especially as the beginning of a new creation?

0:42:43 N. T. Wright: Well, it's one of my favorite themes. You better be careful, I could speak for an hour on this. I mean, I start off with John 20, one of the all-time great chapters. It begins on the first day of the week. And John does nothing by accident. John 20:1 and then John 20:18 isn't it, is when we get the evening of that day. And again, John says it's the first day of the
week. John insists, this is the beginning of the New Creation. And John has got this scheme as you know, running through his gospel, because he starts off with Genesis, "In the beginning was the word," and he has the signs which are pointing forward, the seven signs. And then on the Friday, the sixth day of the week, Pilate says of Jesus, "Behold the man. Here is the man." On the sixth day in Genesis, that's when humans get created. And then on the seventh day is the Sabbath when Jesus rests in the tomb, and having said, "It has finished," it's accomplished, just like God says at the end of creation at the beginning of Genesis 2. So you have this amazing Genesis sense going forward, and now John says, "On the first day of the week." And though many translations don't bring this out, that is actually the first dose of the first words in the Greek, the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. So right from there -- then you have the light at the beginning of the new day and the spirit is breathed on the disciples to be missioners of the New Creation and so on. And it's as though you could feel the freshness of the garden. This is the beginning of God's new world. And then when in the light of that, I reread John's gospel and I discover that this is only possible because the prince of the power of the world has been defeated, as in John chapter 12. Then we look back at the cross and say, this New Creation can only happen because the dark lord who has ruled in horrible power over the world has been defeated. And John wants us to think back to the cross as a victory, that that's how it happens. Now, having started there, I could go on to Revelation, I could go on to Paul, I could go on in all sorts of directions, but that would be where I'd begin.

0:45:00 Michael Horton: So not redemption from creation, but the redemption of creation, and we along with it.

0:45:06 N. T. Wright: Exactly. Absolutely. And then you can see the early Christians struggling to figure out what that means. 1 Thessalonians. So excuse me, Paul, why have some of our number died in that case? Or 1 Peter, excuse me Peter, why are we still suffering if we're living in the new creation? And all the moral commands that just because you're living in the New Creation doesn't mean you can put your feet up and say, "Well, now, I'm sinlessly perfect. It's all right, isn't it?" No. Because you're a new creation people, you've now got to be overlap of the ages people. The old age is still rumbling on and the new age has broken in and you've got to be a place where that's jolly well happening. And that's tough. It's painful, demanding.

0:45:46 Michael Horton: Yeah. To be placed in that precarious intersection between the two ages is about the toughest thing we could imagine.

0:45:55 N. T. Wright: Exactly. Exactly. And this is why Paul, strangely to us, rejoices in his sufferings because the suffering, though obviously, there are many reasons why you could be suffering in the ancient world, but he interprets the suffering as the sign that you are actually standing where the tectonic plates of God's purposes are grinding together.


0:46:24 N. T. Wright: Thank you, Mike. Very good to talk to you. See you again soon I hope.
0:46:27 **Michael Horton**: All right. Take care.

0:46:27 **N. T. Wright**: All the best.

0:46:28 **Michael Horton**: Folks, be sure to join us next week as we air a conversation I had with New Testament scholar, Simon Gathercole. Please also remember that the *White Horse Inn* is a listener supported broadcast, so visit our website, whitehorseinn.org where you can make a one-time gift or even become a regular partner. Again, the address is whitehorseinn.org. Thanks for being with us and we'll see you again next time on the *White Horse Inn*.

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