

Exploring My Strange Bible

Introduction

(13:47)

Speaker in the audio file:

Tim Mackie

Tim: Hey everybody! I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, Exploring My Strange Bible. I am a card-carrying, Bible, history, and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have.

On this Podcast, I'm putting together the last ten years' worth of lectures, and sermons where I've been exploring this strange, and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can be helpful for you too.

I also helped start this thing called, The Bible Project. We make animated videos, and podcasts about all kinds of topics on Bible, and Theology. You can find those resources at thebibleproject.com.

With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

We thought we would start this first episode of Exploring My Strange Bible with a self-introduction, so you can know a little bit more about me, Tim Mackie, and why I'm doing a podcast like this. And a bit about my story that explains my obsessions. So real time, right now, in April 2017, as we're getting things ready for this podcast, I have too many jobs. I'm a Professor of Biblical Studies at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. Over the last seven years I served as a pastor in two different local churches. First, at a Church in Madison, Wisconsin called Black Hawk Church. And then for five years, at a church here in Portland called, Door of Hope. And then the other thing was a few years ago, I started, with a good friend of mine, Jon Collins, this thing called The Bible Project, and it's a non-profit animation studio that makes short, animated films about the books of the Bible, and the themes, and ideas that unite the whole Bible. So those are my jobs. And the common denominator underneath all of that is Jesus of Nazareth. I am one of his followers. I can't say I'm the most stellar or best one, but I'm trying as are many of you. And by His Grace, just one day at a time. But Jesus of Nazareth is the one who's at the center of all my jobs. That's such an incredible privilege. And also, these texts that Jesus said bore witness to Him, what we've come to call the Scriptures, both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, the Old and New Testament. And so why do I have these jobs that are all about Jesus and the Scriptures, how did that happen? And it's (not) certainly not something that I planned like most of you. Life just kind of unfolds, and you find yourself on this amazing ride. And so here's a short version of mine.

I grew up in Portland, Oregon which is not known as an epicenter of anything religious, (and/or) related to Christianity. My parents became followers of Jesus in

the 70s. The part of the Hippie Christian Movement that kind of started in Southern California and made its way up here. And my first awareness of anything called Church or to do with Jesus had to do with all of these people who would gather in our living room on Sundays, that was Church. And then it got too big for our living room, and so they bought a common house together in the neighborhood that became what was called, Open Door Fellowship. But it was kind of super chill, house church, Hippie Christian kind of that thing, but our family eventually transitioned to another Church Community which I didn't know it at the time, but it was a part of the Pentecostal Charismatic tradition. I just thought that's what Christianity was. And for lots of different reasons, some of them, the particular church, some of them my own selfishness, I just really became jaded towards everything related to Jesus and was not interested, and kind of actively opposing. And this is also closely connected to the fact my parents, maybe against their better judgment, but they gave me a skateboard when I turned eleven, and game over at that point. We lived right in the heart of Portland, Oregon, the urban playground was just right outside my front door, and I just fell in love with everything skateboarding. And it wasn't just a sport. I have never have been good at sports. But skateboarding wasn't just about, you know, an activity. It was an identity, and a subculture. And so I was all in for the clothing that, you know, the styles changed every couple of years, and the music, it was my community. It was everything. And that pretty much dominated my life and world view, my rejection of Christianity which my parents, they really respected that I was not into the Jesus thing for most of my teens, and they'd ask me to go to church now and then or holidays but they gave me space to work out my—the axe I had to grind against Jesus.

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But there's something interesting happening in my late teens. There was this church in North East Portland that built this large, covered skateboard park in the back parking lot. And the park was open multiple nights a week, and you could go. Catch was that someone would shut down the park midway through the evening and give a short talk about Jesus. And if you wanted to skate the second half of the night, you had to sit through the talk. And if you skipped out on the talk, then you had to come back next week and sit through the talk before you could skate again. And that was the arrangement everybody respected it, and

deal. And so over the years, I started going when I was 16, but over the years, Jesus became unavoidable to me. The stories about Him, the wisdom, and power of His teachings, the way that He treated people... I was just like, I don't remember anything about Jesus like this from growing up. This guy's incredible. And so I was nineteen, about to turn twenty, living in parents' basement, working a couple of manual labor jobs, and had no aspirations to do anything except skateboard. And a number of things came together all of a sudden, I was forced with a decision about whether or not I was actually going to follow Jesus. And so I made the decision to make Him the True North that I was going to aim my life at, and accept who He was, and what He did for me, and allow Him to take responsibility for me. So I made that decision, I was almost twenty, and man, that's half my life ago. An unbelievable ride since then.

There was a small Christian College across the street from the skateboard park. And I started to teach, give the Jesus talk at skate Church. And I didn't know what I was talking about, I have never read the Bible at any length at all. And so you could sign up for Bible courses across the street, and I was like, deal. I got to have something to tell these junior high skaters at Skate Church. And so, I signed up for classes, and I was introduced to these professors of Biblical Studies at Multnomah Bible College. It's now called Multnomah University. And dude, my whole mind, my world view, my sense of self, and others, and God, just totally blown apart and rebuilt. There were a couple of professors particularly, just ignited my imagination as I was learning through the Scriptures. And in particular, it was my professors who showed me that the Jesus Movement in Christianity is not a modern, western thing. It's a very ancient Jewish thing. And I was taught from the very beginning how to read the Bible as part of ancient Israelite culture, that the biblical text all came out of the story of ancient Israel, and the Jewish people, that Jesus fit into the context, and history conversations happening within the rabbis and Judaism, and so on. And so I started reading the Bible, and it was incredible. But dude, what on Earth? The Bible was like a strange new world to me. You guys, there's a talking snake on page 3. Not to mention, all of the sex scandals that follow in the book of Genesis alone. Animal sacrifices, these ancient laws, what does all this have to do with Jesus? But I was convinced that it did. And so that began twenty years ago. Just this obsession with the Scriptures and how it is that they bore witness to Jesus. And so I was graced with amazing professors, and teachers along the way. I ended up doing a Bachelor's Degree in Biblical Languages and Theology at Multnomah, and I was finished now, I was like, what? I have so many questions, I'm just getting started.

So I signed up for classes at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. I met and got married to my incredible wife, Jessica. She's one of the most amazing human beings in the world, and she helped me work my way through a master's degree there, and continued on in Greek and Hebrew. And I really became interested in the questions about the History and the origins of the Bible itself. And I got obsessed with the Dead Sea Scrolls, and how they illuminated the kind of Jewish culture that Jesus grew up in, and shaped the Bible in His day. So I made the big decision, I shipped off to do PhD studies at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department there. I got to study in Jerusalem, Hebrew University for a year, Dead Sea scrolls. Dude, I just nerded out.

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As I was finishing my PhD there, I ended up in Pastoral Ministry at the church we were attending called, Black Hawk Church, and I eventually, as I finished my degree came on staff there as a teaching pastor, and I got to teach the Bible to people in this church that was full of universities didn't. I did that for a number of years. Moved back to Portland to both teach as a professor at Western Seminary, and then be a teaching pastor of Door of Hope Church here in Portland.

So here's the deal, you guys, and this introduction's almost over. It's maybe been too long already. I think Jesus of Nazareth is the best thing that's ever happened to the human race. I think that He's alive, I believe and trust that He's still at work in the world, and inside of me. So I identify, and embrace the historical Orthodox Christian tradition. I believe that there is a God, and that God is Knowable, that that God's revealed Himself through the story of the Scriptures of Israel. That that God is the creator of all things. But then ultimately that God is uniquely revealed in Jesus, and His life, and teachings as Kingdom of God Movement in His death and resurrection. It's become my conviction that much of Orthodox Christianity has totally forgotten its Jewish roots. And I think that's really messed up. Christianity is a Jewish Messianic movement, and we should just never, never forget that.

I'm also have a growing conviction and most modern Christians have no idea how much their faith in Jesus is anchored in that Jewish tradition, but also that they struggle to even know how these ancient texts, and ancient man, Jesus, relate to the hardest, most difficult questions that we face living as modern westerners in the 21st century. Also, a conviction of mine that grew through years of pastoral ministry, is that most of the people I know that have walked away from faith in Jesus, have walked away from a caricature or a distortion of Jesus or Christianity that's not actually the real thing. And so here's what this podcast is going to be all about. Mostly it's going to start by gathering together and curating about last seven years' worth of lectures and sermons that I've given in all kinds of different settings. So some are going to be exploring books of the Bible, some will be series that trace through themes of the Bible. Others will be more history and language oriented, exploring, and diving into the complicated, and wonderful history of the Bible. But at the end of the day, when I turned twenty and became a follower of Jesus. It's like Jesus turned on my brain, and who He was, and how He illuminated the Scriptures for me, it was like my mind was opened, that I could finally begin to understand and make sense of the world. And so I just want to pass on the gift of everything I've learned over the last twenty years, to you all. And so I hope that the podcast can be stimulating, and thought-provoking, and fun. Learning should be fun. It might be disorienting at times. I've certainly been disoriented almost everyday since I said yes to following Jesus. But we should constantly be reinforced to rethink everything that we know in the light of Jesus. And so, there you go. As with all podcasts, you can help Exploring My Strange Bible as we get out of the gate here by spreading the word. We're going to iTunes and leaving a review on the first series that we're going to do is a five-part series exploring strange, and wonderful book of Jonah, but I'm really looking forward to what's ahead.

Thanks for listening, and we'll keep going onward and upward.

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