

Resurrection as a Way of Life: Part Four

Speaker: Tim Mackie

[EMSB theme fades in]

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 twenty years' worth of lectures and sermons, where I've been exploring the 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 all be helpful for you, too. I also helped start this thing called BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at bibleproject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[EMSB theme fades out]

So in this episode—part four of a five-part series we're doing on the podcast, called "Resurrection as a Way of Life." This is a group of five teachings that I did when I was a teaching pastor at Door of Hope Church—and all of these messages were exploring the ideas of "resurrection" and "new creation," and what that hope means for daily life and following Jesus. These are such crucial features of a worldview of a follower of Jesus.

And so in this teaching, we're going to explore one of the most important chapters and treatments of the resurrection in the New Testament. It's in 1 Corinthians 15. He both explores how important the hope of the resurrection is, and he also talks about the kind of body that the resurrection existence is and is not. And he uses a number of powerful metaphors that we're going to explore. I'm going to use the metaphors of "acorns," and also explore the significance of the metaphor of "fire," as a way that our old humanity gets transformed into our new humanity.

So there you go. It's a powerful text, and I hope it sparks many profound and new ideas in your own mind and heart. So let's dive in.

[Musical break (02:17–02:21)]

We are letting ourselves sit in the fullness of the Christian hope—what Christians, what followers of Jesus, have to hope for in the world. And what we're looking at is how all of the different authors—the Apostles and the authors of the New Testament books, the earliest followers of Jesus and the leaders of the early church—when they talked about what it means to follow Jesus, they talk a lot about Jesus's death, which makes sense [Tim laughs]. That was a really significant event. But they never talk about it separated from what happened after, with the empty tomb and the resurrection.

And so what we're exploring is what it means to “live”—how following Jesus has to have, at its center, living from the reality of the cross, but also living from the reality of the empty tomb and of the resurrection. And that means lots of things, as we've been exploring this summer.

And today we're looking at a really significant passage. If there's anywhere in the New Testament where you should think of first, when you think of the risen Jesus—you should think of the stories about him—there's four of them, in the four different accounts of his life, in the Gospels—and then the next thing that should come to your mind should be this chapter, right here, that we heard the first and the last paragraph from: 1 Corinthians 15.

[Tim grins] It's actually the only chapter in the entire Bible whose topic from beginning to end is the resurrection from the dead. It's all summarized and put together right here. And actually, most of the ideas in this chapter we've been looking at in different parts. But there's one specific thing I want to focus on here today.

But before we do that, I'd like to show you a picture of my son. And it's not just because he's my son—you'll see what I mean. But any chance a parent gets to show a picture of their kids, I mean, come on. It's convenient that my son happens to be holding the illustration right now [Tim laughs]. [Tim gestures to visual] There he is. And he's adorable, and he's filthy. And that's because it's summer and our entire backyard—which is not big at all—but we've just given it over to them to become their dig pit. [Tim laughs] And that's great—they're having a great time.

But this August, my three-year-old son. And he has this fascination with two things this summer, especially—I don't know why. One of them, he's holding right there. What's he holding? Acorns. The other thing he's obsessed with right now is bottle caps—[Tim laughs] specifically bottle caps he finds on the sidewalk.

And he just—I don't know how to explain the deep, deep draw he has towards acorns and bottle caps this summer—was it in the children's book we read—I have no idea. But you know—and the thing with the bottle caps is: he loves to store them in his mouth, a lot like acorns. Anyway—so that's gross, and we're working on that—but acorns—acorns are really cool.

So one of the gifts of raising kiddos, especially at this age, is, you know, they're discovering the world. And you, as a parent, get to discover—*rediscover*—the world through their eyes. And I have to be honest with you guys, acorns—which are amazing—but I haven't sat down to think about an acorn—like, really ponder the acorn. It's been decades since I've cared about acorns, but he's really into them. And so he's got me a lot of acorns—you find them in little corners in his room, and this kind of thing.

You guys: acorns. They're really incredible. Acorns are really remarkable for lots of reasons. You know, they're iconic in many—lots of different logos and brands, or whatever, in American advertising. But they're really—what they represent, like, all kinds of things come to your mind—don't they?—when you see an acorn.

[Tim grins] What is an acorn—what is it? It has a little “hat”—the little thing there—it has a little “hat,” where, upside down, it's a little bowl—right?—that it's sitting in. So the “hat” piece—this comes from trees, obviously—oak trees. And so the “hat” is this holding container that grows out of the tree branch, and then it cups over the nut.

It's a seed. An acorn's a seed. And so the things—[Tim laughs] I'm just going to state the perfectly obvious right now—so the acorn falls from the tree, and then it gets—what? Either it gets dug up in the dirt by my son, and it will never become anything. But it might get trampled in the dirt, and then when the rains come in the fall, something really amazing happens. And—I think you're not learning anything right now—but we forget how remarkable this is.

So at first he thought that squirrels—he's seen squirrels collect them and [read] books about squirrels eating them—so at first he thought he could eat them. And then he discovered his teeth aren't hard enough, right [Tim laughs], to really—they're hard. Have you guys ever tried to crush an acorn? You need pliers, because it's so—I tried recently. It's very difficult to crack these things open. They're very, very hard.

But something happens when it goes into the dirt. It starts to deteriorate. And then once water gets in the dirt—if it's under the dirt even just a little bit—it softens, doesn't it? And then something remarkable happens. The water softens that shell, and it activates [Tim

grins] something, and its DNA “clicks” on. You should know about this—nobody’s learning anything right now [Tim laughs], right?

So you know about this—water activates something in these little acorn seeds, and that hard shell becomes soft, and then it splits open. And then these little tendrils shoot out of the acorn. [Tim grins] We live in a land much stranger than Oz—I hope you know this, right? So Oz is the way we—this is so crazy—this is, like, alien world.

So these tendrils go down into the dirt, and then other tendrils go up, and they’re looking for sunlight—[Tim gestures to visual] it’s the green thing. And so then they shoot up—and if they have competition, they’re not going to make it. But maybe that green tendril, with the leaves, is going to catch the sunlight, and then give the thing a few decades and it becomes that [Tim gestures to visual]—which is, like, bigger than any house or apartment building right there. How you guys doing?

Acorns. [Tim laughs] This is remarkable—are you with me?—this is remarkable. No wonder my son’s fascinated with these, because we’re showing this to him in books and it blows his mind, and he wants to collect as many of the cute little things as he can. But it’s really—it’s remarkable. Stop and think about this: what an acorn is, and its relationship to that *gigantic* oak tree. Is an acorn and a tree—are an acorn and a tree the same? Are they the same? Well, from one point of view, *no*. An acorn is an acorn [Tim laughs]—a tree is a tree. But did the acorn become the tree? Does the acorn have the same DNA sequence as the tree? Yes, right?

Did the roots—right?—the tendrils that go down into the dirt, if you could cut into the roots—right?—of the tree underground, you would eventually—after you get through enough layers—come to the very cell structures that were that first, little tendril, right there, at the center. It’s grown bigger, but it’s the same—are you with me?

So is the acorn the tree? Well, no . . . but also, yes. So we have—“acorn” gives us this category. And actually all seeds, most of—*bios*, *biological* life—has this principle within it. The thing which most living, existing things are in their first stage is not at all the form they are in their latter stages. They’re different, *and* they’re the same. We have this category here.

And what’s interesting is that when the earliest Christians tried to find language to describe the resurrected Jesus and their encounters with him—and as we saw from 1 Corinthians 15, it wasn’t just a select crew—we’re talking about hundreds and hundreds of people who had encounters with the resurrected Jesus. In fact, Paul will just say, like, “Look, go talk to them. Most of them are still alive if you have questions.” Hundreds of people encountered the resurrected Jesus. And there were lots of eyewitnesses to the empty tomb.

When the early Christians and the Apostles tried to describe what Jesus was like, what they use is language and ideas that are very similar to the “acorn.” Was it the same Jesus that they ate with—the resurrected Jesus—was this the same Jesus that they walked the hills of Galilee with? Yes. Was it the same face that they recognized back in Galilee? Yes. Did Jesus eat fish, resurrected, just like he ate fish with them—yes. It’s Jesus. He had the nail marks in his hands.

He’s the same, but he’s different. He is the same, and he’s different. The most significant thing is that he exists in the form of a body that doesn’t die—like, it won’t die again. And this body’s physical—that the resurrected Jesus has—but it also has different properties. Like it relates to the dimensions we call “space and time,” and so on, in a different way—because Jesus can be there, and then Jesus is not there. That’s odd. I can’t do that, and neither can you. But the resurrected Jesus, apparently, is able to experience space and time in a way that’s very different from us.

Is it Jesus? Is it the same Jesus? Is it a different Jesus? Exactly. And is this difficult to understand? [Tim grins] You don’t have to put on any pretense right now—are there things about a Christian view of the world that are hard to understand? Yes. Is this one of them? Yes, yes it is—[Tim laughs] yeah, it is.

In probably the same way—if an acorn could talk and you could have a conversation and try and tell the acorn what it’s going to become—the acorn’s framework of reference is dirt and the corner of my son’s room, you know, right? It doesn’t even have categories in its experience, so far, to be able to envision what its destiny is. We’re in something of a similar situation.

So here’s where—what’s happened to resurrection throughout the history of Christianity. For the most part, cultures—Christianity goes, you know, like Marinda [referring to community member], goes to a different part of the world—and different cultures have different ideas about life after death. And for the most part, what has tended to happen is this idea of resurrection—Jesus’s resurrection, and of his followers—gets adapted and molded into whatever ideas about “life after death” the culture has when Christianity goes there.

And so the challenge—in every culture that Christianity has spread to, ours included—is to come back to the original, eyewitness testimony of the people that encountered the risen Jesus, and to actually say: let’s not try and impose on them what we think this idea is. Let’s let the experience—the category-shattering experience—of the risen Jesus shape *our* view of the world. And it’s going to seem bizarre to us, but how could it be otherwise? [Tim grins] He rose from the dead. This is remarkable.

And this is actually the foundation of the whole thing—of the Jesus movement. The cross doesn’t even mean what it means if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead. The cross is

just another tragic, “righteous person dying because of evil powers,” if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead. But if he did rise from the dead, *oh my gosh*—like, what kind of world are we living in, and what does that mean?

And 1 Corinthians 15 is deeply placed to unpack this. So here’s what we’re going to explore with just the time that we have here today. There’s something about this acorn image that’s extremely significant for how we understand our future as followers of Jesus, but also for how we understand the future of the universe. I didn’t come up with this acorn illustration, by the way. Somebody much more brilliant came up with it before me. It’s the person who wrote this chapter [Tim laughs] that we’re reading.

Because here’s what he goes on to say, later on, in 1 Corinthians 15. He says, “Maybe somebody’s going to ask in the church of Corinth, ‘You know, how are the dead raised?’”—there were a lot of people in the church who couldn’t buy it—they didn’t believe in the resurrection from the dead because it seems so ridiculous—“and so they say, ‘How are the dead raised? Okay, let’s say I believe in resurrection. What kind of body are we talking about, here, that rises from the dead?’”

And Paul says, “Oh, foolish. Listen, what you plant doesn’t come to life unless it dies. And when you plant something, you don’t plant the body it will become, but just a seed”—an acorn—“perhaps of wheat or something else.” I could have used wheat, but my son’s not into wheat this summer, [Tim laughs] so I showed you acorns instead. “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is planted is perishable, but it is raised imperishable.”

What Paul wants us to envision is: the human body is like an acorn that has been planted, and it decays—it gets sick, and it dies. But that’s not the end of a human. But the future of humans, from a biblical perspective, isn’t to float away as, then, a spirit to some other place. It’s the hope of experiencing a new form of physical, bodily existence.

Well, what kind of experience is that? And Paul just—I mean, essentially this is kind of him doing a “Hail Mary,” here—of saying, “I don’t know. But I’ve met one—the risen Jesus.” He has one encounter to go off of here, of what this future is like. And as his mind searches for images and illustrations, where he goes is: “seeds.” The acorn that falls into the ground is not what’s going to come out of the ground. The acorn is going to die. But is it the same thing? Is the acorn the tree? *No*—but also, *yes*.

This is really profound. I don’t know what ideas you have, or have thought Christians believe, about life after death, or what happens for the future—but this is it. Like, right from the very beginning. Christianity, as a Jewish-Messianic “resurrection movement,” began with this bold hope that what happened in the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus is the future for humanity and for the whole universe—that God’s

going to do for you and for me what he did for Jesus. And God's going to do for the world, as you and I know it, what he's done to Jesus.

And so this leads us all up here, to the final paragraph of this chapter, right here. And there's just one image—and really, there's just one thing I want to camp out on, here—and it's an area in this whole set of ideas that I think, for some reason, most of modern, Western Christianity, I think, just, we've skewed what it is the Bible's saying, and it's led us to some dead ends in the way most Christians view the world, I think. And we need to come back to the Scriptures—let them critique us—let them reform us—let them give us a new imagination.

Look at what he says in verse 50—the last paragraph. This is where Liz read, from the first paragraph and the last paragraph. Go down to verse 50 with me. And Paul says, “So I declare to you, brothers, and all of you in the church of Corinth, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood can't inherit the Kingdom of God, nor can what is perishable inherit what is imperishable.”

So his points are pretty clear. He says it twice, actually. He says: there is a future that God has in store for you and me, as followers of Jesus—for the world—the universe. And we currently exist in this form—he has two things to describe how we currently exist. What are the two phrases? What's the first one? “Flesh and blood.” And what's the second? “Perishable.”

So I trust I don't need to make an argument there. It hurts a lot more for me when I fall on my skateboard now than ten years ago. My body is perishable [Tim laughs], right? And so whatever you love to do—gosh, even *sleeping* hurts me now. I wake up some mornings like, that didn't happen a decade ago—what's that about? *Sleeping* hurts me—screwed up. [Tim laughs] There you go. Sign of the times.

So “flesh and blood”: perishable, decaying, dying. That's our present state. The future God has in store is: “the Kingdom of God” and “imperishable.” Do you see that? Flesh and blood: perishable. The Kingdom of God—a world over which God's justice and love and presence reign and rule—where his presence permeates every square inch of creation—and in such a world, things are *imperishable*, eternal, right? Because they're in proximity—in close, intimate proximity—to the very author and source of all life and *bios* and creative power.

And so we have our current existence, and then where the world's going. “Eternal life” is how the apostle John talks about it, in the Gospel of John and in the letters of John. Paul calls it “imperishable”—immortality—life. So—and essentially what he's saying is: how the form in which you and I currently exist isn't capable of inhabiting that universe, inhabiting that existence.

Is an acorn able to support a whole ecosystem of hummingbirds? Can it do it? No—could it one day? Oh, you 'betcha. Or maybe to use a different metaphor—I was just thinking this because we got an upgrade. Our internet in our neighborhood, over the last two years, just went to, like, zero miles an hour. And so I started researching this, and I discovered it's because [Tim grins] everybody in our neighborhood is now on that same exact network.

So I had this wire going to my house that is not capable, in its current form, of carrying high-speed internet into my house. So I had to get a new deal. And I did. And I'm just—[Tim laughs] the best thing that ever happened to us—it's great. It's called "fiber optics"—and it's a direct line, right? Are you guys—anybody?

So remember, or even think backwards like a decade or two decades. Do you remember these telephone lines that used to come into our houses, [Tim laughs] right? They were called "landlines." [Tim grins] Remember when people had actual phones hooked up to a wall in their house—do you remember that? And we had these things called "modems," that sounded like a dying bird when you would dial into—[Tim laughs] right? So yeah, like, that's within living memory of all of us here. So we have that.

"Flesh and blood," landlines and modems, cannot inherit high-speed internet. [Audience laughs] They can't do it. Are you with me? So it's not a perfect analogy, because you actually have to take out the old line and put in a brand new one—and that's not Paul's point, so. But I'm trying to, you know—different—it's like "a shotgun approach"—a lot of illustrations [Tim laughs], one of them will land—right?—with one of us. So whether it's the internet lines, whether it's the acorn—but the point is: our current form of existence isn't capable of inheriting the world that God has in store.

So here's what I think most of us do in our minds. We create this division, and we say, "Oh, exactly—so the *physical*, bodily existence is corrupted by sin or decay—it's bad. So that's going away. And what God has in store is a completely non-physical future of some kind. Or, if it is some kind of physical world that exists in the future, and it has no relationship to this one. This one's getting scrapped and incinerated and gone forever and ever, and it's going to be *presto, bango*—new thing, right?" Are you guys with me?

If you don't believe that yourself [Tim grins], that's certainly what your coworkers, who aren't Christians, think you believe—is that this world is going to "hell in a handbasket." It's going to be incinerated—it's bad and evil and corrupt because it's physical. And God's going to create something that's either a brand-new physicality, or not physical at all.

That is too simple. It's actually not faithful to what Paul's trying to say to us right here. Is the Jesus who was raised from the dead and ate fish with the disciples the same Jesus who ate fish with the disciples before he was raised from the dead—is it the same

Jesus? Yes. Is it a different Jesus? Yes. The thing that you plant that is perishable isn't the same thing as what it's going to become, but there's a connection. There's continuity between the two.

Paul doesn't have, in his imagination, this idea of God "scrapping" everything that's come before and just, *presto*, a new—there's a connection between them. That's why he uses this image of "the seed." That's why I'm using the image of "the acorn."

Now, why can't "flesh and blood" inherit the Kingdom of God? Why can't what is "perishable" inherit the "imperishable?" So "flesh and blood," here, for Paul—you can geek out. Go to blueletterbible.org, or Bible Gateway, and type in the phrase "flesh and blood," and it'll give you all the times it occurs in Paul's letters and elsewhere in the Bible—wonderful, wonderful, free online tool.

And so what does Paul mean when he uses this phrase, "flesh and blood"? What's fascinating is that he doesn't use this phrase and idea only to mean just the mere physical existence—the fact that I take up space in the universe, with molecules or whatever. He means something *more* than just physical. He's referring to the *way of life* that you and I know and are embedded in, here on earth, that is both *physically* decaying, but also *morally* decaying. It's this idea of the "flesh," a mode of human existence that's compromised by sin.

So you and I, we're not "brains on sticks"—right?—floating around. Like you and I, we are our bodies. And our bodies are really incredible—they're really remarkable, aren't they? But they're also shot through with all these impulses that make us do crazy stuff. And a lot of it's really destructive. [Tim grins] Do I need to give examples? What was your day like yesterday? And just supply your own example of the way that you and your body do things.

And you choose to do them—but also some of them are things that are even brought to your brain to think about them, because you got these things called "hormones" raging through your body, and you have a whole bunch of complex things happening in your body. We're not just "brains on a stick," and we're not "spirits in a prison house." We're glorious images of God, who—in our mind and our spirit and our physical existence—are meant to image God. And we are shot through with moral compromise and physical brokenness.

And what Paul is inviting us to see is that our current form of existence isn't capable of inhabiting the universe that God has in store. *Something has to change*. So what is that change—in Paul's mind—and what is that change? How is that change talked about elsewhere in Scripture?

The best place to go when you're studying any book of the Bible is to look elsewhere within that same author's writing for when they talk about similar ideas, to shed light on

it. And lo and behold, Paul has a passage earlier, in the same letter, where he talks about this idea: about why our current ways of living—we do things to other people, and they do things to us that aren't appropriate—they're full of decay and ruin, and they won't last into the world that God has in store for us.

It's in chapter 3, and I'm just going to put it up here on the screen. And we'll just let it unfold before us. So he says, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, their work will be shown for what it is because the day will bring it to light. It'll be revealed with fire, and the fire will prove the quality of each person's work. And if what's been built survives, the builder receives a reward. And if it's burned up, the builder suffers loss. Yet they will be saved, but as one passing through the flames of fire."

So my hunch is that in whatever vision—if you're a Christian, when you think about the future and what's going to happen to the world—my hunch is that "fire" is somewhere in the mix there. And why is that? Well, because of passages like this, and a few others that I'm going to show you.

"Flesh and blood can't inherit the kingdom of God—what's perishable can't inherit the imperishable." Why or how? Well, because the ways that we live in the world—we fill the world with all kinds of things, and our lives with things that are not going to last. And what Paul's using here: it's a metaphor. It's a "house-building" metaphor—do you see it?

So there's one true human who unlocks the future for all of us. And he's the foundation of what it means to exist as a Christian. Who is the foundation? *Jesus*—I think he might have said something about following him, like "building a foundation on the rock" once—go look it up.

So Paul takes that image from Jesus's teaching, and he says, "Yeah, exactly—Jesus, he's the foundation." Now, if you're a follower of Jesus, you can go about building your life with all kinds of materials. And the whole point isn't just that you go *stand* on a foundation—you *build* on it. You *build* a life that's based on Jesus.

So, but here's the thing is: that even as a follower of Jesus, I could go and build a life that is faithful to Jesus—I love God—I love other people—I allow his presence and his spirit and the Scriptures and the community that I'm in to shape me, so that the things that I do in the world are things that are faithful to Jesus—gold, silver, precious stones, right? This is the metaphor here.

But then there are also all kinds of things that I could—ways that I can treat people, things that I could go and do—that are done in a way that's unfaithful to Jesus, that dishonors other people. Here, we're talking about "wood and hay and straw." And Paul—all the Apostles—have this very clear hope and idea that there's coming a day—do

you see it there?—he calls it: “the day,” when all human lives will be evaluated and weighed.

And the metaphor he uses to describe it is: *a house fire*—do you see it? You got a foundation—we’re all building houses—and a fire is coming. So what’s the purpose of the fire? What does the fire do—do you see it here? What does the fire do? It consumes what is perishable, and it leaves behind what is . . .

On my bike ride home from work—I noticed this about two months ago—I pass by, regularly, a house that—it’s being fixed right now—but it underwent a house fire. Like the whole top half of it burnt—one of these old Portland homes. I can see it up on the second floor, right? Most of the wood exterior stuff is gone, but you can see the plumbing pipes that were exposed. And why are they there? Because fire doesn’t—that fire, at least—didn’t burn hot enough to consume the metal. That’s the idea here.

There are things that you can build with a life that will endure *through* the day of justice and into God’s new world—there’s all kinds of ways that we live and things. Do you guys get it here? Do I need to explain it anymore? You get it, don’t you? It’s a house fire. It’s like the three little pigs. [Tim laughs] Right? So don’t build your house out of straw. Don’t build your house out of sticks. Build it out of brick, because the thing will last the wolf’s powerful breath. It’s the same idea here.

But fire—so “flesh and blood can’t inherit the kingdom of God,” and what is “imperishable.” There’s coming a day when our lives will be “weighed and evaluated.” And things that we’ve done out of our corrupt, morally compromised “flesh and blood,” that’s going to be removed—it doesn’t get to go in and endure into God’s new world. And “fire” is the key image that Paul uses right here.

Why does he use this image? This is predictable for some of you right now—[Tim grins] where would Paul get an idea such as “fire” to talk about the future day of God’s justice? Well, he was raised on the Scriptures. He was raised reading his Bible. And the Old Testament prophets also talk about “the day,” when God will “weigh”—the Day of Reckoning, the Day of Judgment, or whatever. And “fire” is one of the most common poetic images that the prophets use to talk about this day.

Literally picked at random—but this is one of my favorites, because it makes the point so well—is Zephaniah 3. Very powerful poem: “‘Therefore wait for me,’ declares the Lord, ‘for *the day* that I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms, and to pour out my wrath on them, all my fierce anger. The whole earth will be consumed by the fire of my passionate anger.’”

Okay, let’s pause. Pretend you can’t read the last sentence, but—sneak ahead, but then don’t let it enter your thoughts. Okay, anyway, look at the first part that we’ve read, right there: There’s “a day” coming”—same “day” Paul talked about. God’s going to “stand

up” and do what? He’s going to make a case against humanity: “Here’s how humans have ruined my world. Here’s how humans ruined each other. Exhibit A—Exhibit B—Exhibit seven-billion-and-whatever”—[Tim laughs] however many humans are on the planet right now, right?

So this is law-court language. God has a case against humanity for what we’ve done with the place and to each other, and he’s ticked—and you should be too. It’s a double standard, of course, because I would love for God to be ticked at everyone else, but not me. [Tim laughs] Right?

But if the summer has gone by, and the headlines—and all these horrific, horrific massacres happen—and when you learn about them and read them, if something doesn’t ignite inside of you—that’s frustrated and grieved and angry—if that’s not what happens inside of you, you need to see a therapist. Something’s wrong with you if the massacre of other human beings at the hands of others doesn’t make you angry and grieved and brokenhearted.

We have a difficult time with God’s anger in the Bible until we realize it’s an absolute double standard that we’re holding God to. Are there things—is a God good and loving who doesn’t get angry at how humans treat each other? He has every right to be angry and frustrated—and he is. And so what’s he going to do? He’s going to—look at the image here. This is, like—it’s like the end of the world: “gather humanity together—pour out a raging fire on it.”

Okay, let’s just stop right there. So if we just ended, looking at this passage right there—if the sentence or the book ended right there—any more humans left on the world after that day? No. Any more world after that day? No. So is it possible that that’s what Zephaniah means? Well, like any good Bible interpretation, the first question I ask: is it the final sentence? [Tim laughs] Right? Is there another sentence? What kind of literature is this author writing? *Poetry*. It’s poetry, and he’s not done with his thought.

“Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder.” [Tim grins] Next slide. “On that day, you, Jerusalem, won’t be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me because I will remove the arrogant from you. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill, but I will leave within you the meek and the humble, the remnant of Israel who will trust in the name of the Lord.”

So this “fire” language, in the prophets and in the New Testament—it’s language of purification. It’s language of God consuming “flesh and blood,” not so that there’s no more physical world, but so that the ways that you and I corrupt our existence—the ways that you and I destroy each other—the way that we give in to evil and perpetuate

it, consciously and unconsciously, just by existing, right? And spending money and paying taxes—and just, like we—we participate in the evil of this world.

And there's coming a day when God will hold all of us accountable, individually and collectively. And the most common image or metaphor that the prophets and the apostles use is "fire"—and it makes all the sense in the world. Like there are things in the world, and in my life—things in my character—that I want removed, that I want "burned away." There are genuine character traits and habits that I have in my life that, if they were to continue on into eternity, it would truly be "hell on earth" in my life.

If what God has in store for us is "imperishability," and a renewed, transformed creation that's like the risen Jesus—then you and I have a whole lot of things in our lives and in our world that need to be burned away. And that's good news. That's the paradox of this image, isn't it? I need to be "consumed" with the fire of God's justice, and that's the *best* possible thing I could hear.

And this is where we come back to the meaning of the cross, and why the cross and the resurrection—you always have to hold them together. Because the whole point of the cross is that: the cross is the moment in which God takes into himself, in the person of Jesus, his "burning justice." And so the cross is where God's love and justice meet together.

Even this is so difficult for us to conceive—we usually distort it. And some of this thing: like, we have the "angry God," and then "Jesus saves us from God"—*yay, Jesus. I don't know about God, but Jesus, we like him.* And it's not—we've done the same—we've introduced this contradiction into something that, the paradox of who Jesus is, it just breaks all of our categories and forces us to make new ones.

The cross is the moment where God's love *and* wrath meet together perfectly. It's God confronting what is evil, and it's of Jesus absorbing into himself the consequences of our evil. And it consumes him. And his offer of grace to us is: "Listen, if you would prefer to be accountable and responsible for your own corrupt flesh-and-blood existence, and you want to bear those consequences on your own, feel free. You can choose that route."

Or we can accept that there is one who has gone before us and he's taken into himself "flesh and blood." He became "flesh and blood"—subject to decay—and he allowed our evil to consume him, so that he could rescue us from it. He became what we are so that we could become what he is.

And so when we look at the resurrected Jesus, we're looking at our own future. We're looking at the future of the universe. And is it the same universe or is it a different universe? [Tim grins] Well . . . you know? Try and describe to an acorn what it's going to be like to have a hummingbird lay eggs in your branches. [Tim laughs] You know? I

mean, there's no frame of reference for it. This is Paul trying to help us see that God has in store for humanity and for our world *so much more* than we currently experience.

How you guys doing? Let's come back. We'll land the plane here—verse 51. So he says, "Listen, listen, you guys. I'm going to try and explain to you a mystery [Tim laughs], right? It's going to break all your categories, but hang with me. We are not all going to sleep"—he's using "sleep" as yet another metaphor, and metaphor, right? Fire—sleep. "Sleep" is the image of death, because he's convinced that if a follower of Jesus dies, their current flesh and blood has given out, but are they erased from existence? No, no. They're just "sleeping." They're waiting to "wake up" in the resurrection.

"We're not all going to sleep, but we will all be"—what does he say?—"changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." The "trumpets" he's getting from the prophets too—Isaiah 25 and Exodus 19. "For the trumpet will sound. It'll be like the summoning of a great host, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

"For this perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable"—it's *you*; it's *me*; but it's different than you and me. "This mortal must clothe itself with immortality. And when that happens, what the prophets were trying to tell us all along will come true: that death has been swallowed up in victory."

And then Paul turns this thing into a musical—[Tim laughs] right? He just starts singing prophetic poetry, right? He's quoting from Hosea here, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin"—*flesh and blood*—it's both our physical decay and our moral decay—"and the power of sin is the law. But thank God that he hasn't left us to our own devices. He's given us victory through the Lord Jesus Christ."

And so here's his conclusion. I think for many of us, questions about the new heavens and the new Earth, the resurrection—they're interesting to us, but they're interesting to us the same way these new photos of Pluto [are]. Have you guys seen the photos of Pluto from the New Horizons? Do you guys know that a satellite flew around Pluto for the first time in human history? You guys need to know this. Just Google it. It's unbelievable—these photos.

So, that's interesting—does it have anything to do with my daily life? No—nope, it doesn't. It's amazing, but it doesn't affect how [or] what I'm going to do tomorrow. So I think for many of us, questions about heaven are like that. Right? [Tim grins] You know, "It's interesting, I don't know, whatever."

But for Paul, if that's my idea of heaven, or the new creation or whatever—it's, like, just "interesting to speculate," then I haven't grasped what this is really about. Because in

Paul's mind, if I get what this is really about—if I understand that I'm an "acorn," and that I'm going to become an "oak tree," then every decision I make has to be filtered through that reality.

He says, "Therefore, brothers"—it's the last sentence—"stand firm. Don't let anything move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor's not in vain." The meaning of life, according to Jesus, is to love God and to love neighbor. What that means is: seeking someone else's well-being, regardless of their response to me, even if it costs me.

And that's going to motivate all kinds of choices and behavior that make no sense whatsoever to your natural inclinations, which are to maximize pleasure and minimize pain—right—and to do what it takes to survive. And following Jesus is going to mean choices where I'm going to lose out so that I can benefit somebody else—where I'm going to be disappointed, or not get to do something, or sacrifice something that I might like, so that somebody else can benefit—for the work of the Lord.

And it's really hard to convince yourself to behave that way if all you think your future is *the grave*. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then, as Paul says earlier in the chapter, let's have a good meal, have a good drink, because tomorrow we die. Like, that makes sense to us. It could be a good motto of Portland [Tim laughs]: "Let's eat, let's drink, because tomorrow, who knows?"

And for a follower of Jesus, it's exactly the opposite story that we see ourselves inhabiting. It's a story that says: I'm going to lose out. I'm not going to have all my wildest dreams fulfilled. I'm an *acorn*, for goodness sakes. I'm an *acorn*. And what God has in store for us, and for our world, is so much more profound. It's so much more grand. It re-shifts everything to a new key.

And this is the story that Paul asks us to live in, and to make our decisions in. You and I live in a world that is full of so much beauty, and is good, and God loves it. But it has severe limitations. And you and I, as images of God, are remarkable, incredible creatures, capable of so much good. But if you're honest with yourself, you know, just like me, there are things about your character that have to go. There are ways—habits and choices that I keep making—and ways that I treat people, that if I were to keep on treating people that way forever, it would be hell for them, and hell for me.

There are things in me that need to die. There are things to which I'm enslaved, and need to be liberated—Romans 8. There are things in me that are dead that need to be brought to new life—Ephesians 2. There are ways that you and I exist that are "subhuman," and need to be graduated into a new, more grand form of existence.

I don't know what that is for you, you know? I don't know that trigger of what happens in your mind—you get into this situation, and your body kicks in, and you behave in a way

that's destructive. This issue, this temptation, this thing comes onto your radar, and it's like you're just weak at the knees. You just crumble. This way of treating people, this way of relating to our money and our resources, to hoard instead of to give—whatever this is. But it's "acorn," and it has to go. It's because God loves you. It's because God wants to burn away, inside of you and inside of me, what will not last and flourish in his new world.

And so as we come to the bread and the cup here today, what are those things that we need to bring, that need to die? And we eat the bread, and we drink the cup—this broken body and the shed blood of the one who has died on our behalf so that we do not have to—and we allow these things to die with him. We give over the "cracks" in our character, and the failures, and the brokenness, and we give it to him, and we ask him to heal us and make us like him. And this is what it means to be a follower of Jesus, gathering together in a community of Jesus, in the hope of the resurrection.

[EMSB theme fades in]

You guys, thanks for listening to [the] "Exploring My Strange Bible" podcast. I hope it's helpful for you. And in this next episode, we'll turn to the final pages of the Bible and see what it has to say about the hope of new creation for the universe.

Again, thanks for listening. And if this is helpful for you, and you want to help the podcast, just feel free to share it with other people, or go to iTunes and leave a review. That's really helpful too. And so there you go—cheers. See you guys next time.

[EMSB theme fades out]