

The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript
Episode 24
Questions and Answers 2
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Episode Summary:

In this episode, Matt address two listener questions about eschatology: (1) what does it mean to "watch" and "wait" for Jesus' future return in the current day? And (2) when the Bible says God will save Christians from "wrath," how does this square with the view that says there will be no rapture?

Both questions are fantastic, and the various biblical texts explored in this episode make for intriguing conversations and further discussion as we think about eschatology.

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Transcript:

0:00 Hey everybody! Welcome back to another episode of the Bible Unmuted! My name is Matt Halsted and it is a delight to be with you once again. We are going to do a Q & A, questions and answer part 2 or round 2, whatever it is today because we have some questions from folks. I want to get these questions answered to the best of my ability, at least. To help me out, we've got somebody here who was with us last time. My beautiful, lovely, amazing, wife Tosha. How are you doing Tosh?

TH I'm good, thank you. How are you?

MH I'm splendid, thanks! So I just have to tell you that the last time, which was the first time, you were on the show and you helped with Q&A, everybody loved it.

TH Oh good!

MH Everybody loved it!

TH I hope so.

MH You really need to do your own podcast and I can...I think they will like you better than me. That's for sure.

TH Whatever, oh my goodness.

MH So, I'm really excited about this because we have some really good questions. And I think they're important questions, too. So I want to get some of those answered. By the way, just real quick, if you have questions, please feel free to email me. I would love to hear what you are thinking about scripture and the things that you are wrestling with – some texts in scripture. If you would like, just send it in, email me. You can use the contact form on my website. I would love to get a library of questions we can put them on the show and hash them out like that. I don't have all the answers but I will give it a stab.

And also, before we get to the questions today I just want to remind everybody if you like this podcast, do me a favor if you would. Go and give it a rating on your favorite podcast platform. You can share it with you friends. That helps out a lot. And if you find this podcast to be a great resource then share it with your friends and spread it around. I would really, really appreciate that.

Okay, well let's get to the questions for today.

2:05 TH Okay, question number one. Ryan says, "When Jesus tells us to watch for the end times and be ready for his return, what does this tangibly mean for someone living in the current day?"

MH That's a really great question and it's a question more people need to ask. When it comes to eschatology, I think one mistake that we often make is that we have our eyes strictly on the future. We get so obsessed with the future that we forget that, low and behold, we are living in the present. I think that's an important thing to keep in mind. Here's the thing. There is an assumption about eschatology that, namely, it is all about the future. Let me just say that is absolutely not true. Biblical eschatology is not like Nostradamus – crystal ball, looking into the future. Biblical eschatology is actually about the future, a future hope that fleshes itself in the present and yet still connects with the past. With biblical eschatology you have this beautiful dance between past, present and future. They all have to be maintained in tension with one another but also closely linked up to one another.

So this is why I love this question. It's because it immediately assumes what should be assumed, namely, that there is a present aspect to biblical eschatology. So bravo to you Ryan, I really appreciate that. Now to the question specifically. Now what did he say exactly? How do we live....?

TH What does this tangibly mean for someone living in the current day?

MH The thing is, that it's going to look differently for each individual. Everybody has a different calling in their life. Dependent upon what that calling actually is, will determine what exactly that person is going to be doing. But with that said, there is some general rules that we can take from scripture to answer that question.

For starters, when I was thinking about this question earlier, some texts that came to mind were John 21 and there is a passage in Matthew that I will get to in a minute. In John 21 there is this fun little exchange between Jesus and his disciples where in a sense, they talking about the future. They are talking about the return of Christ. And I'm thinking of John 21:20-23. I just want to read these because I think it's really helpful. It says,

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved (MH: that would be John), following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

I like this text for a number of reasons. Apparently speculation about the future is not a 21st century phenomenon. The earliest Christians, at least some of the disciples were speculating about who was

going to be around, and who was going to be a part of the final generation? So that's going on here and all Jesus said is, "what is that to you Peter? If John is here when I come back, what does that have to do with you? You follow me." And immediately the rumor spreads – that means John is going to be around, and John is part of the final generation. And no, that's not what it was. Jesus has a really good point here, go figure. To say, "Look, you follow me. You live your life faithfully, you go about your calling and you fulfill the mission that I've given you. Don't worry about who is going to be around for the final generation." Jesus is not saying, do not think about the end or don't think about eschatology in that sense. No, I think there are many passages in scripture where Jesus clearly wants us to think about those things. The point here is, "be faithful in the present time with what I've given you to do. Don't mind yourself with other people's business." So, this text has always stuck out to me in that regard. And I think it's helpful here.

The Matthew text is super helpful as well. It's the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. If you go to Matthew 25 we will start with verse 14 all the way down to verse 30. You kind of get the same idea. You know the story. This master had given talents to three of his servants and the master goes off and expects his servants to be busy, working, doing their stuff and applying their talents and so forth. It's really cool here because in verse 15 it says that he gave five talents to one, two talents to another, and one talent to another, but he does it each according to his ability. So it's a very specific thing that they are each called to do which I think is a beautiful way. And then it says after he dispersed those talents, he went away. And in some respects this has bearing on the question here about the return of Jesus..

Jesus has left the church, he has left us with certain things to do. He has gone away and when he returns what kind of faith will he have found among his people? Now, you know the story. One was kind of slothful and just stuck his talent in ground and did nothing and he gets in trouble for that. The others applied their talents and invested their talents and they get a reward for that. When the master returns, they are richly rewarded. I think, that's a beautiful picture, or at least a principal of sorts that we can apply to this question. Namely, what are we supposed to be doing? Notice that these two guys who are rewarded for being faithful didn't go build a big tower and stand in it with binoculars looking for the master's return, plotting out the days and building an eschatological calendar. They weren't doing that. What were they doing?

TH They were working. Going about their life. Doing what they were supposed to be doing.

MH That's exactly right. And I think that what Jesus would have us do today. So, my answer directly, that's a very long answer to a very short question, but if I could just sum it up, I would say, just be faithful with what you were called to do. And I guess I should make an asterisk here. When I say be faithful to do your calling. Don't think that calling in life has to be huge, or this grand, flashy, showy thing. It's as simple as loving our families, loving our neighbors, and committing ourselves to the ways of Jesus in the world that we live in.

TH And whatever work yourself doing, do it well. Work is working for the Lord, as scripture says. And that's your calling. If that's where you find yourself, then that is your calling today.

MH That's a really good point.

TH There was a time in my life where I had to remember that changing a diaper could be done for the glory of God (laughs). But that was my calling for the moment. That was completely what my day was made up of.

MH That's a really good point. And I think sometimes when we think of calling, don't you think it's a struggle a lot of Christians have, "Well, what I'm doing every day, the ordinary things..."

TH The mundane

MH yeah...the mundane. "Those can't be callings."

TH I think sometimes in those moments, it's where God reveals himself the most. Or teaches us the most.

MH That's right. I think you are right. If we only had eyes to look around to see and notice the presence and the work of God, I think we would be amazed at what we would actually see if we had those spiritual eyes.

10:50 TH The next question has to do with end times as well. Jill says, "If one comes from a no-rapture standpoint, what does the bible mean when it speaks about us being saved from the day of wrath?"

MH That's a terrific question as well. So I don't believe in the rapture in the sense of what is popularly taught in popular evangelicalism. I used to believe in that, but over time I came to a different conclusion. I have a whole chapter over that topic in my new book. And the question that Jill asks is actually a very common question that I've encountered from folks in the question is simply that, "okay Matt, if you don't have a rapture that takes Christians out of the world, then what about the passage where it says we are saved from wrath? So are you leaving Christians in the tribulation to experience the wrath of God?" So let me just back up here. I think what Jill may be referring to is the passage in 1 Thes 5:9. I have it pulled up here. It says, "*For God has destined us not for wrath but for attaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" That passage is significant for many folks who do subscribe to rapture theology. That's a very important passage. The reason is because the rapture text that a lot of people point to is in 1 Thes. 4:13-18, so the next passage above the one I just read. So they are closely linked together. So the idea goes, this idea of wrath must have something to do with what God rescues his church from when he returns, namely the rapture.

So what I would say here is a couple of things. First, the verse I just read, I don't think that has to do with rescuing from a coming time of tribulation. And the reason I say this – there are a couple of reasons. Let me read it again and I will make a point of it. It says, "*For God has destined us not for wrath but for attaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" You have to see this as a verse that has two panels to it. The first panel is that God has not destined us for wrath. Well, what has he destined us for? He has destined for the attaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, those two are mutually interpreting. There are two panels and they mutually interpret each other. I think what the reference to wrath here is a reference to the final judgement. This would make sense of why he answers that question by saying we have been destined for salvation, not wrath or final judgement. That's how you would make sense of that. To me, wrath here has to refer to the final judgement simply because the answer to that is salvation. He doesn't say God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining the rapture. He says for obtaining salvation. So that would be one thing I would point to. The other thing is...

TH If I could interject. That coupling of wrath versus salvation is also what you see in Romans 5:9 where it talks about if we have justified by his blood, even more so we will be saved from the wrath of God. So is that kind of the same thing? Is that kind of the same concept?

MH Yeah, I think so.

TH He says if we've been justified, how much more shall we be saved from the wrath...

MH Do you have that verse...read that verse from Romans 5.

TH Okay. Romans 5:9, it says, "*Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*"

MH Yeah, yeah. I think that's a good.

TH So, I think it's that concept of wrath versus salvation.

MH That's exactly right.

TH So back in Thessalonians it seems like its talking more of a salvation in the final judgement, like you said. As opposed to the earth continuing on while Christians are saved out of it, kind of thing.

MH Yeah, exactly. The Romans you just read would be a parallel passage to the one here. It's kind of interesting when you do that because Paul wrote Romans and he wrote 1 Thessalonians so he seems to use similar language and similar motifs and ideas to get there. I didn't think of that verse. That's a really good verse. And that just sheds some more light on the idea. So these passages that talk about wrath in these contexts, are most likely about the final judgement.

Let me say one more thing about this. I feel like I need to say something about 1 Thes 4:13-18. This is one of the top three passage where people go to promote rapture theology. So for example, if you read Tim LaHaye, he wrote a book and I can't remember what book it is...The End... I think it's called something like *The End of the World*, or *The End Times*...I can't remember. But in that text he identifies three passages that are the most important passages for rapture theology. And one of those is as I recall, this 1 Thes 4 passage. So, in my book, the one that's coming out this February. I have a whole chapter dedicated to evaluating rapture theology and popular conceptions of rapture theology. And this is one of those passages that I spend quite a bit of time on. And I let the rapture proponents set the tones of the debate, really. I took what they say are the three most important texts which taught rapture theology. And I say, let's go back and look at them. So I did and this is one of them.

One reason why I don't subscribe any longer to rapture theology is because of this passage actually. It's so funny. Some people point to a passage where they get rapture theology and others can point to the same passage and say, "well that's actually why I don't." (TH laughs) And I think this is where humility really does need to come into play. We are all interpreters. We are all trying to figure stuff out. We all work with the same data, but we all don't work with the same pre-judgements or pre-understandings, or presuppositions. Presuppositions are by definition are just very personal. We get our presuppositions from our heritage, from our traditions, from our churches, from our denominations, our families, our countries. They are deeply personal things. I totally get that. I really do.

So when I read this text, I have a question I need to ask myself. What kind of presuppositions and I going to have? The best I can, I want ancient presuppositions. I want the pre-understandings of Paul and the Thessalonians and so forth. So, the thing here is, when you read this text, Paul employs very important and very technical language that was very well known in the ancient world. So for example, whenever Paul talks about the coming of the Lord, and whenever the words "the appearing of the Lord", I think that's in verse 15 here. "*For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the (MH: **parousía** (**παρουσία**)) the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air.*"

So this is an important passage because there are a couple of terms there that in the ancient world were very important and very technical, I guess you could say. And the first was the idea of coming. The idea of *parousía*. Coming here doesn't capture the word. It's more like the "presencing" of Jesus, the showing up. And the other word here is in verse 17 where it says, that we will meet the Lord. This idea of meeting is *apantésis* (**ἀπάντησις**), and both of these *parousía* and *apantésis* are going to be very technical terms that in the ancient world would've been used to refer to a dignitary coming into a city. Before they entered the city, whether it was a king or any sort of royal dignitary, it was customary for the citizens of the city to go out and meet them and parade them back into the city.

TH Hmm...where have we seen that picture? Like when Jesus and palm branches. Things like that.

MH Yeah, meeting and escorting him in. I think that is a very similar idea. Absolutely. Very similar idea. And that was just a custom to do back then. Because if you are a dignitary of any sort, religious or political, and back then the religious was the political and vice versa. And whenever they would come back in, that was to signify that this was their city. Their rightful place. So the idea was never to go out and meet your dignitary or to meet your Lord outside the city and then stay with him outside the city to be taken somewhere else. No, the idea was that you were to escort them back and parade them back. And here, since Paul is employing these technical ideas, these technical terms, I think the same thing is going on here as well. So the idea for me, I am just trying to think the thoughts of an ancient person living in this part of the world. And I think when they would hear these terms, they would think "oh Paul is saying that when the returns we go out and meet him with the expectation of bringing him back to receive his inheritance and to receive the earth which he is the Lord of." So I think that's the idea that's going on here. Yeah, go ahead...

TH I had a thought come to mind. I think what you understand what you ultimately think will happen at the end really influences what you think about rapture theology. More specifically, if you understand that – because I think traditionally within the last couple hundred years anyway, there has been this thought that when we die, we go to heaven and we go somewhere else and that's our final destination. But it's really not. It says that God will create a new heavens and a new earth. Our little five year old was actually asking God the other night when he was going to make the earth new again (chuckles).

MH One of his prayers....

TH Laughs. Yes, "when is this going to happen? I want to know. I want to be in the know." So, I think you have to understand that you don't see a king snatching some of his citizens and going and setting up his kingdom elsewhere. No, if its kingdom that is rightfully his...I was thinking, I can't remember which the name of his son, you know when David's son took over his kingdom, David was kind of running scared from his own son...do you remember the name?....

MH Absalom.

TH Yes, Absalom. Thank you, thank you. It wasn't that David said "Well, I'm going to go and start a kingdom over here." It was his kingdom. He was in kind of this limbo, of "what do I do right now?" because this is not the way it's supposed to be going. But he had a kingdom and it was rightfully his to go back to. Do you know what I'm saying? So if you look at the earth is going to be...that heaven and earth are going to meet again. That's the kingdom of God. Then he will rightfully come back. It's not that he's going to come and snatch you out and have this plan B for my kingdom kind of thing. Is that making sense? It's just a thought.

MH Right, No it totally does. I get what you're saying. I think the idea is that we are in a state in an "already but not yet." Jesus is Lord already, he is the rightful king. We have not yet experienced the consummation of that kingdom. We are living in that tension that theologians call the "already but not yet" tension. And part of living in that tension is learning to navigate all of those sorts of things. Which kind of goes back to the last question we answered which was, "What do you do in the meantime?" So your point though, in being snatched away and going off to heaven is a very popular conception in today's world where we have this idea that heaven is our home for eternity. And that heaven, of course, is a disembodied, spiritual existence. And people often get freaked out by that. "Am I going to be floating on a cloud and playing a harp for the rest of eternity?" Well, yeah, no....but people are forced to think like that because we have given them categories which require them to think like that. And, in heaven though, let me just say, that idea of escaping your body to live in an eternity in heaven, that has more to do with ancient Greek philosophy than it does with ancient Christianity. Ancient Christianity, early Christians and the Jews believed in a reconstitution or renewal of all things. A renewal of heaven and earth. And that is why Jesus's resurrection is so important. Because Jesus, by his resurrection, inaugurated the new heavens and the new earth in the middle of history. Not at the end of history, but right, smack dab in the

middle of history which gives us a model of how we ought to live in the present. We should be a resurrection people, but we are a people who are awaiting a physical resurrection. So this really gets to that idea that when Jesus does come, he will come back, and when he comes back, one thing he will do, the most important thing he will do is to renew everything. Is to give, I think it was N.T. Wright who said, he is going to give all of creation its own Easter morning. And it's a beautiful idea. But when you go to most modern evangelical churches, say at a funeral. I can't tell you how many times I've heard things like this where your loved one who has passed says something like, he or she has entered their eternal home in heaven. And I say, no, no, no. Technically that's what the bible and theologians would describe as the intermediate state. It's not the final state. The final state is the new heavens and the new earth. And the final state is not a split between heaven and earth, rather the final state is the marriage between heaven and earth. That's the final vision you have in Revelation where earth is the bride and heaven is the bridegroom and the two come together in an act of consummation. This is a beautiful picture of marriage because everything is new because everything is one. And that's why I say, I've said this multiple times, it's so important to me. I say, "One day, heaven will be the happiest place on earth." And I think that captures the idea. So this is admittedly part of my calculus in understanding these passages that a lot of evangelicals will take as rapture passages. And I say, no, no. Rapture theology feels to me very escapist. And, well, it is. Where you escape this coming time of trial upon the earth. And of course we get into this tribulation text and my view of tribulation is not going to be similar to the *Left Behind* or those sort of ways of telling that story. But that's another conversation.

27:50 TH Okay, well that's our Q & A for today. Some other questions that we will be tackling here pretty soon.

MH Yeah, it's going to be good because we have some great questions here down the pike. We have a question on predestination, and we have a question on the bible and LGBTQ, and some other questions as well. And I just want to remind everybody, if you have a question you would like to see answered, or addressed on the show, please email me. Go to my website, matthewhalsted.com and at the top there is a contact form you can click. Submit your questions that way, it goes straight to my email and I will get those. I look forward to getting your question and we look forward to being back with you once again for another round of Q & A. Lovely wife, Tosha, thank you so very much for joining us today.

TH Thank you for letting me join you today.

MH Alright everybody, thanks again and have a wonderful rest of the week.

28:45 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.