

The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript

Episode 7

Revelation for the Rest of Us - Interview with Scot McKnight

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Teacher: Matthew Halsted

Episode Summary:

In this episode, we dive back into Revelation, only this time with a special guest: Dr. Scot McKnight. Scot is a Professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary. He's a well-known biblical scholar and is the author of a number of books. Our conversation centers around his latest book, *Revelation for the Rest of Us: A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple*. We talk about a host of topics that revolve around all things Revelation, such as understanding concepts like divine wrath and judgment and how that relates to Jesus being depicted as "Lamb." We also chat about the importance of knowing Revelation's ancient context, as well as applying Revelation's theo-political message in our 21st century world.

Link to Scot's book: <https://www.amazon.com/Revelation-Rest-Us-Prophetic-Dissident/dp/0310135788>

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Transcript:

- 0:45 Hey everybody! Welcome to the podcast! My name is Matthew Halsted. Thank you for tuning in. This podcast is all about engaging the bible. While every episode is different, the goal is always the same: learn more about scripture and how to interpret it. So sit back, grab your favorite beverage, and enjoy the show.
- 1:20 This episode I talk with the one and the only Dr Scott McKnight Scott is a professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary he's a well-known scholar and prolific author of many books such as *The King Jesus Gospel*, *The Blue Parakeet*, *Reading Romans Backwards* as well as many others. In this conversation we talk about his latest book which he co-authored with Cody Matchett. It's called *Revelation for the Rest of Us: A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple*. We talk about a range of issues associated with Revelation such as its background cultural context. We chat also about the way it employs concepts like Divine wrath. And we look at the way it compares to say Paul's letter to Romans, another book of the New Testament. Importantly, we discuss how the church can apply the message of Revelation in today's world. As always, I pray this episode is a blessing to you I hope it offers a lot of food for thought. I pray that it challenges you and gives you something to prayerfully reflect on and to consider as you seek to be a follower of the Lamb.
- 2:28 **MH** Well Scott thanks so much for hanging out with us today. I appreciate your time and I'm excited to chat about your new book *Revelation for the Rest of Us*.

**SM** Well thanks Matt. It's good to be with you and to meet you. And maybe we can join hands on how eschatology in the Bible needs to work better.

**MH** Absolutely. I think I think we're Kindred Spirits on most if not all of these things, so I look forward to the conversation. I recently finished your book here it is, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*. I highly recommend everybody go pick it up. Actually, I think it's the last line of the whole book... well I know you have a liking for starting at the end and reading things backwards, so (laughing)... At the very end, the Afterwards, I think it's the last sentence I'm pretty sure, I love it. It says, "This is not a commentary on Revelation. It is rather a Theology of political discipleship rooted in Revelation and how best to read it." And I love that. I think that sums up your book. I think it sums up the last book of the New Testament.

3:35 **MH** I'd like to just jump right in if we could. A theology of political discipleship. If there are two words that seldom come together and that two things that we are supposed to never talk about in public - politics and religion. Let's talk about politics and religion. So political discipleship, how does revelation teach us that?

**SM** Well let's start with the reality that the 70% (let's just say that is an accurate number) of evangelicals in the United States have aligned themselves with the Republican Party. Which has put them in positions in churches where they cannot speak against a republican candidate even if he is Donald Trump. And speaking against Joe Biden or Barack Obama is completely legitimate it doesn't matter what they say they can't be wrong. How did we get ourselves in a position where the evangelical church is so aligned with one political party, that if you make a positive statement about a Democrat president you are suddenly...the people are wondering if you're true to the faith? And I've had this happen to me. And I make it really clear on my public posts (and I've been blogging for 20 years), that I do not align with any political party. I think that it is because we have not developed a prophetic capacity to speak into the political spheres. And I believe that that is caused by failures to read prophetic literature in the Bible accurately. I'm talking about the Old Testament prophets who never stopped critiquing the powers in Jerusalem. Not just Moab and Edom, Egypt, and Babylon etc. They were constantly critiquing the powers. Jesus critiqued the powers of Jerusalem. And the Book of Revelation is, I would be willing to call it, a discipleship manual; teaching Christians how to evaluate Rome, which is called Babylon in the Book of Revelation according to moral, and let's say, spiritual and ethical and prophetic categories, to make Christians dissidents in Rome, in the Roman Empire and to be able to be people who resist the ways of Babylon in the ways of Rome. Because we have failed to read that prophetic literature as anything other than predictions of what's going to happen and who in the modern world, (Putin), fulfills what category - the beast of the earth, or the beast from the sea. That's how people read prophetic literature as predictions of what's going to happen in the near future. So, Netanyahu seizing control with a with a coalition right now becomes for them fodder for predicting whether something is occurring from The Book of Revelation, or Ezekiel and Gog and Magog and all this stuff. Instead of discerning how the powers of this world use their powers to exploit, rather than to do good, we have failed to become the kinds of theo-political disciples that we need to be in the world. That's a long answer but we're professors.

**MH** Yeah, (laughing) Absolutely. You mentioned that Revelation as a prophetic book. I think that's where things go south real quick for a lot of people, especially evangelicals who want to see Revelation as sort of a cosmic calendar, a play-by-play of the future and that sort of thing. But let's talk about prophecy a little bit. Why do evangelicals and many Christians in our context, see prophecy as strictly prediction? You know, when you think prophet, we think Nostradamus,

crystal ball, future... And yeah, Revelation calls itself a prophecy, but you're saying that it is not, strictly speaking, future prediction, right?

**SM** Yeah. Why do they do this? I'm not quite sure I can answer that question. That's a big one. I would say they have a habit of reading prophetic literature as prediction, in part, because so many cool things happen in the life of Jesus to fulfill prophetic dimensions that they've sort of developed this mentality that a prophet is someone who predicts. In the Old Testament a prophet is someone who is inspired by God, who given a vision by God, is able to communicate to the people of God, the significance of what's going on in their country at that time in a moral, spiritual, covenantal way. And when they don't stack up they become critical of the government so they become political columnists, as it were, and then they render judgment on the basis of what God is like, of what God is going to do to that country, Israel-Judah, if they do not live according to the Covenant. And so they tend to be evaluators of the current situation and predict coming judgment or coming Redemption if the people will turn from their sinful ways and then turn back to God. That's the general drift of prophetic literature. It is not simply to predict what's going to happen, it is to discern a current situation and then say this is how God looks at it. And if you repent, the judgment is not going to come. If you don't repent, judgment is going to come. And Jesus fits right into that category.

10:20 **MH** Yeah, that's good. I tell my students all the time, if you if you want to know how to read prophetic literature, pay attention to how the New Testament authors read prophetic literature. They're interacting with the Old Testament all the time. I always go back to that text in Matthew 2:15 where Matthew is providing a little commentary of sorts on why Jesus and the Holy family leave Egypt and come back home, and he says, "this is to fulfill what the prophet said". And he's quoting Hosea chapter 11. And you go back and you look at that context and nowhere in that section is Hosea predicting anything. In fact, he's reflecting on the past, on the Exodus. And he's saying, "out of Egypt I called my son". Matthew takes that and says this fulfills Jesus's story, in a sense, because Jesus is the new Israel. So strictly speaking, prophecy is not just prediction fulfillment. There's something more present about it in reality, and with respect to using it. I guess and you know Revelation, what do they say, Revelation alludes to the Old Testament hundreds of times over 400 times or something like that.

**SM** I think Greg Beale said like 600 at times.

**MH** Yeah, it's quite a bit. I'm just curious what do you think... John reports to have visions. And all of these visions are written down. How do you navigate that? I know you I know you talk a little bit about this in the book, but how do you navigate that? Does John see things? Or is he drawing from the Old Testament? Is that a false dilemma? Is it both? In terms of the text, what would you say?

**SM** Well you know, I wrote to Richard Bauckham and I wrote to John Goldengaye on the same day and asked these questions.

**MH** Oh good! what'd they say?

**SM** Especially Bauckham, I think, has done amazing work on the Book of Revelation. But so has Goldengaye because he works with the prophets. John had a vision. He had visions. I totally believed that he got lost in some kind of ecstatic world of some level. But when you see things in those worlds, you have to choose language to define, or to describe it. And then when you sit down later to write this out...John saw things, and what he saw, he interpreted in light of what he knew. And what he knew was Old Testament prophetic language. When he sat down to write it, he wrote it up in ways that sounded like Old Testament prophetic literature. And yet, how many

times does John actually quote the Old Testament? It's rare. But his language is like the Book of James, which sounds like Jesus in every paragraph. But he only quotes Jesus once at the end. It's a rather innocuous quotation about vows. It's odd because he sounds so much like Jesus, but doesn't quote him. John sounds like all the prophets. I think John's visions are connected to imagination in in the biggest sense of the word. And John, when he wrote it out, had no language to describe what he saw other than prophetic literature. He didn't see these things as fulfillments of that language, but this is the way to talk about what he saw. So that's how I would say it. I would say it just like Matthew. He knows the Bible so well, he's so soaked in Scripture, that when he starts describing things he sounds like the Bible.

**MH** And I suspect that this is probably what part of the problem is today; is that people just run to Revelation without any of the background of the Old Testament roaming around in their minds. That it's almost like Revelation gets interpreted within a vacuum. Because most people don't know the Old Testament. They certainly don't know the prophets. They don't know the message of the of any of the prophets, really, it seems these days. And yet they want to interpret Revelation. I don't know - Eugene Peterson, didn't he make a rule or come up with something to that effect in his Reverse Thunder book? He said you're not allowed to read Revelation until you've read the whole Bible (laughing). And I think that's helpful. Don't you think?

15:02 **SM** Well oh, that book of his, there are some chapters in there that are just stunning. Because I think of his sensitivity to language, and his sensitivity to imagination and poetry made him a particularly skilled interpreter of the Book of Revelation. Now not every chapter is really good, but you know most of them. I think his early parts are really good in that book. And I think that that's exactly right, is that you can't read Revelation without knowing the prophets to see what they're doing.

But I get really nervous even with people like Greg Beale, who when they think when they see an Old Testament text, at least pretty clear, they think it's an echo of, say, this in Ezekiel. That they think that if they study the context, they'll see it as a prediction. And I think it's a man whose mind is so, (John, that is), so swamped and so soaked in the prophetic literature that he cannot write in any way that doesn't bring up that language.

**MH** In your book, I can't quite remember where, but you really you want to take us back to the original kind of situation. I mean, you point your reader back at times to that. And of course your book is also very applicable to today, and we'll talk about that in a moment. But the world of the first century in Asia Minor is much different than the world today in some respects, and yet there's a lot of similarities as well. But just the contexts are completely different. We live in a technological, scientific age. How do you bridge the gap? What principles would you offer to listeners in helping them to bridge the gap between the first century context and the modern context?

**SM** I have a principle that I learned when I was a sophomore in college and reading a German by the name of Johann von Goethe. And he said in German, "Wer einen Dichter verstehen will, muss in das Land eines Dichters gehen." And that could be translated pretty simplistically as, "if you want to understand a poet you have to go to a poet's land." So I believe that we have to read the book of Revelation in a way that makes us feel like we're in the first century, and limited to first century information that we have appropriated in our minds, or that we have access to. And a lot of people don't have that ability, or that time, or that expertise. And they are the ones who are particularly, in my opinion, dangerous in reading the book of Revelation. And you know there's some pretty well-known pastors who don't believe in doing background studies.

**MH** yeah, um yeah.

**SM** To quote Roger Olson, one of my friends, there's a certain Pastor in Minnesota with a large Ministry outside of Minnesota. So to me, I think we have to try to get back in that first century as much as we can and I don't know if you've been to Ephesus... Have you've been to Ephesus?

**MH** I have not. I want to go. I need to go.

**SM** Yes. Well when I was your age I was coaching my son's baseball teams and I didn't have time to do this in the summer, and I will never give up the baseball days I had with my son.

**MH** Absolutely.

**SM** But, you cannot walk down the main cardo or the main street in Ephesus and see what's called The Terrace Houses at the bottom; that library, that is so cool and it was not there in the first century; and look out on the Forum, and out on the sea, and look over the hills, and realize the massive size of Ephesus; and see the temple of Artemis. You know there's not much of Artemis left, but at least we can read about it and reconstruct it. And then all of a sudden say this is one of the churches. And then you go to Pergamon and you realize the profundity of the cities at that time. In Sardis there's stuff there that's not all first century. Laodicea is...and Hierapolis there's pretty cool stuff there, Colossae is nothing but a hill. And you get into that world and try to read about it, and study it, and then ask yourself the questions all the time when you're reading these texts: how would the people of the first century have heard this and seen this? That's what we have to do by way of imagination. And sort of um adductive reasoning. We've got to try to figure out what this would have meant in that world as much as possible. And you know this as well, there's so much scholarship on this stuff. Richard Bauckham, David Aune, they have massive studies on this on the background. And it's irresponsible today not to know some of this stuff. If we're actually making a big deal. Now Cody Matchett and I, my co-author, we did choose to stay out of the weeds as much as possible so that the big simpler message could come through. Every one of these passages in the Book of Revelation deserve careful explanation. And all of it is connected to the first century, and to the Jewish world, and to the Western Asia Minor, and to the Roman Empire. And we need to explore these sorts of things.

20:51 And this is the principle that I've used in teaching for many years which is: John spoke in John's way in John's day, as Jesus spoke in Jesus' way in Jesus' day, as Isaiah spoke... And we realize this that God speaks his word through agents, human agents, in the world for their day, we have to see how they operate and then see if we can be continuous with that and carry that on in our world. And I believe that's the secret to taking and reading a text in the first century and bringing it into our world. And I'm sure of you do the same thing. And if you don't, I'd say you should (laughing)!

**MH** Oh I do. In fact, I tell people I mean this is Revelation 101. Revelation is not a book it's a letter. It's an epistle. And as soon as you start saying that it's a letter, is the minute you have to start digging into the historical background because letters imply situations, right? And this is a first century letter so you have to dig into the first century situation.

**SM** Jeff Weima. Do you know Jeff Weima?

**MH** I don't. No.

**SM** He's a Pauline scholar. He writes on letters. He has a brand-new book it's really worth reading.

**MH** What kind of...what's it called?

**SM** I don't know what it's called. I don't remember titles.

**MH** It's okay. I'll look it up

**SM** It's on the seven churches, (*The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation: A Commentary and Guide*), and he doesn't think they're actually letters. And he's one of the world's best people, but it's a he calls them messages it doesn't quite fit a letter format, BUT...it is! It is what the... I mean I would say they are messages, they're letters. But at the same time they are like...to the Church of Ephesus; that is about that situation right then.

**MH** Sure, yeah.

**SM** And that context clarifies it. And they would have heard this book read aloud in their house churches in Ephesus, however many there were. And I often wonder if maybe they just didn't read the letter to the other churches, they just read the letter to Ephesus, and then read the whole letter. So the whole letter applied to them.

**MH** Right.

**SM** They weren't worried about Smyrna and Pergamum. They were worried about Ephesus, so I don't know if that makes sense.

**MH** That's an interesting Rabbit Hole to go down. I mean I think the point is... well look, I grew up thinking, like I said earlier that Revelation is like this timetable. It's a play-by-play, what's going to happen. I never once knew that it was a situational message, or letter, or whatever you want to call it. I never knew that. And so as soon as you... if you don't know that then it makes no sense to dive into this, do the historical background work. There's like zero reason to do that because it's a prophecy - hence Nostradamus, hence future, and has no relevance to the first century, right? And of course you're familiar with this. There are many folks out there who have promoted, gosh, that horrible idea that each Church represents an era of the church...

**SM** You know, I grew up with that. My dad taught me this.

**MH** It's been everywhere.

**SM** Man, yeah, yeah, right!

**MH** That's literally how I understood Revelation for many years growing up. And yeah, there's so many problems with that of course.

**SM** ...and we're in the Church of Laodicea. Yeah it was very convenient that we're the ones who perceive it, everybody else is going to hell.

**MH** yeah.

**SM** That was what I kind of grew up with. Yeah that's um... I mean how long did it take you, in let's say more careful study of the New Testament to realize that's just not right?

**MH** You know, that's a good question. I started following Christ very seriously as a teenager and it was just one of those times in my life where I was just so hungry for anything, so I soaked up everything. And the filter doesn't set in until you begin, and I don't remember when it happened, but I just remember thinking; okay you talk about the Rapture and you say it's all over Revelation. But I just began asking questions. Like okay where is that at? I mean that's a simple question. And I don't know what got me to asking those questions, but when I began asking the questions

I found out that some of my teachers could not answer the questions. And that just set me on a different sort of journey.

25:27 **SM** Well I probably was the same age. I was in college. And when I was in college, a long time before you were in college, Tim LaHaye... no, I mean um *Late Great Planet Earth*, Hal Lindsay's book. He was on every corner in the Zondervan bookstore in Grand Rapids. It was on the floor. They had thousands of copies hanging around.

Tim LaHaye wrote A Commentary on Revelation with these weird pictures in it. I don't know if you've heard of those.

**MH** Oh yeah.

**SM** I don't think it's in print much. But I was completely stripped of my understanding of Revelation because of Robert Gundry's book *The Church and the Tribulation*. He wrote this book arguing carefully, and I really appreciated that because I was at an age where exegesis really mattered to me. And he proved a post-trib Rapture in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, and that set me on a critical Journey of subjecting my understanding of the future, of eschatology, of rapture, millennium etc., on the basis of responsible exegesis in the context of the first century world. And the more I grew in my studies I became more and more fascinated with Jewish studies, Judaism, and that just completely wrecked my reading.

And when my kids were in high school... it's really funny my daughter read every volume in the *Left Behind* series and she would say, "I don't believe any of it but these are good, good stories." My son read some of them - I don't think he read them all. But I gave them Bruce Metzger's, I think it's called *Breaking the Code*. It's a little book on Revelation in which he pretty much argues for a preterist view - that the book is about the first century. And both of my children were both stunned by the book, and totally convinced.

**MH** Oh, okay. I'll have to check that book out. I've not read it.

**SM** Yes, it's a little 90-page book, Bruce Metzger one of the greatest New Testament scholars of the 20th century.

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29:05 **MH** So, as you were talking I was thinking. I think one person who wrecked my reading of not just Revelation, or eschatology, but the Bible, was probably N.T. Wright. I remember reading his *The New Testament and the People of God*, it was one of those books back there in 1992. I didn't read it in '92 but that's when it's published. And I remember thinking this has wrecked my hermeneutics forever. And it's just set me on a different trajectory, so yeah. And of course his emphasis on "new creation", this embodied kind of Christianity that yeah, that really wrecked my escapist Christianity.

**SM** I was teaching at Trinity at the time Tom Wright's book came out. 1992, I think.

**MH** Yeah that's right.

**SM** In the fall of '92 or the fall of '93, somewhere in there, I gave lectures in my synoptic gospels class. I think the first day I gave a lecture on the story at work in Jesus. And it was kind of a summary of N.T. Wright's book. I'm not kidding you; it was *the* most dynamic class session I've ever had in my life because the students were totally captured and I was just sort of channeling Tom Wright's vision, or his view. And I realized that Tom was doing something in that book that really mattered to a lot of people. And it was something fresh and new and I've never looked back. I mean Tom taught me a lot. I remember when I wanted to have coffee with him I was so intimidated that I hid, and he didn't he didn't know who he was looking for. And I was able to escape having - I was so intimidated by him. But yeah, that, Matt, was an amazing book to read. And his Jesus book was like that for me too in 96. The resurrection book was good, and the Paul book, of course, is his life's work. I see that.

**MH** Yeah I did a book on Romans as my PhD. It was published after I finished. And going through Romans just very patiently and bit by bit was quite the exercise. But people like Tom Wright and others of course really helped me kind of navigate some of that.

Yeah one of these days we need to talk about Romans 5 because I've also read your, what is it, the Adam genome book. That was fun. That was a lot of fun. I love it yeah. (**SM – inaudible**) Yeah, that was a good book too. I want to talk to you about every book of the Bible but let's make our way back to Revelation because you mentioned something about repentance, and I think you might have even said the Judgment word.

So growing up, I know a lot of folks, many folks listening to this, maybe you, certainly me, I think I was afraid of God, right? And Revelation provided the texts for the fear. And I'm constantly, whether I'm preaching or teaching or whatever, I always for some reason - maybe it's a calling on my life or something - but I want to help people rethink God. And I want them to think of a christological view of God. How does revelation give us a Jesus picture of God? I'm thinking of like Romans 4 and 5 the lamb the lion bit. But could you comment on that and kind of link it to the judgment? Because Revelation, there's blood in Revelation, right? It seems heavy. So I got a lot of questions on that and maybe we can chat about Greg Boyd's thesis about wrath at some point too, but anyway. That's a lot there...

**SM** I can never put together what Greg Boyd's doing. (Both laughing). Okay, um.... let me say it this way to begin with Matt, and I don't think this is a complete answer so this isn't some kind of theory of explanation. I don't think that God as judge in the Book of Revelation is quite as important as people being able to be the judges of Rome and Babylon. In other words, the Judgment of God is a message to the people of God that that place is going down. Because of their sinfulness. And in a sense it makes the people of God discerning dissidents of the way of Rome so that they can become it, let's just use the word discernment, which is going to be connected to the word judge in the New Testament; but we'll use two different English words. It makes us capable of



judging situations in the world, in the United States, in our state, in our village; as to how the powers are using their powers and whether they're using them for justice and peace, or are using them for power and exploitation. And I think the Book of Revelation does a lot about this, but the... I like to look at the judgment scenes in the Book of Revelation and I don't know if you agree with me on this, but I'm stuck now because it's in print and that is um...(MH laughing).

**MH** You can always publish retractions by the way (laughing).

**SM** Yeah that's right, but nobody pays attention to them. They say, you change your mind all the time like Clark Pinnock. So to me the... I'd like to look at it in terms of fiction like reading Tolkien, like reading C.S Lewis. I have not read, what's it called Harry Potter? I have not read a word of Harry Potter.

**MH** My wife is trying to get me to read Harry Potter. I just don't have the time. She says I'd love it, so...

35:18 **SM** So maybe all of that is in there as well. But it's like Maurice Sendak and *Where the Wild Things Are* that I that we read to our children when they were little. These are scary images of divine judgment so that you and I will realize this is what happens to corrupted sinful powers when they seize control and use them for murder, and death, and all this. But at the same time the flip image is instead of the Roman Empire, instead of the Goddess Roma, and in Babylon, we have the woman of Revelation 12 which sort of like Mary, and sort of like Israel, and sort of like the church, and we have a lamb, rather than a lion. And I don't know the issue my graduate assistant at the time Cody Matchett, when we wrote the book. I said I think the lion morphs into the lamb and he didn't like that idea of morphing. And I never did quite figure it out. It's like two things rather than one becoming the other. But the lamb becomes the dominant image here, of having being worthy to open up the scroll and the seals, etc., and to disperse these disciplines and judgments against the people in this world. And it becomes the lamb who is the image of Jesus in the book. And the lamb, yes, slaughters the enemies. In a fictional world, this is not a realistic world, but the lamb slaughters them with the word that comes out of its mouth. And all of a sudden you realize this is not a king with a sword in his fist, this is not Rome again, just a more powerful Rome. It's a completely different form of warfare. And the believers amazingly conquer by the word of their testimony, by their faithfulness in life, not by weapons.

So yeah. Here we have I think an amazing image of Jesus who conquers in some of the most graphic images of defeat in the in the Bible. And yet it's not because of the slaughtering weapons of Rome, but by the testimony and the faithfulness of Christ as the lamb. I'm a pacifist. So this book this book sort of haunts me at times. I don't like the images and what they can have as an effective history - you know what I mean by this in New Testament scholarship. So it produces countries that think they can use weapons because they've got the Book of Revelation.

**MH** I feel like... and I I've I wrote this in the little eschatology book that I finished up and then in another place. If you look at the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls, one thing that I (and I'm not the only one who says this of course), but one thing I notice is that a lot of the cosmological language, the references to like the sun, the stars, and everything like that; if you compare that with Genesis the sun and the stars were put in the sky for the benefit of earth and the people on the earth. But in Revelation the sun at one time scorches the earth and it's almost like it's *uncreation*.

And I'm curious of what you think about this: is God's wrath more along the lines of just letting sin be sin and unfolding in on itself as opposed to him actually doing anything? So for example, I cut my theological teeth in the Reformed Baptist world and it was all *wrath was everywhere*, right?

And it's honestly frightening in some. But I think actually Greg Boyd's book helped me on this a little bit to kind of to conceive of God's wrath as not as the extrinsic view; where God finds something wrathful on a shelf to pelt you with over a sin that you committed over here. But actually that wrath is inherent or intrinsic to the sin you commit. Rather, wrath is just sin fully developed. And so does that capture Revelation's image of divine wrath? That it's just God removing his grace and creation is folding in on itself? What do you think about that?

**SM** I didn't grow up Reformed Baptist. My dad was Puritan in many ways. And we were Baptist, but Calvinism wasn't that big of an issue. But when I came of age in atonement theory when I was in college, I read Leon Morris's dissertation, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*. And he was really big on wrath, and he was fighting against C.H. Dodd, a professor, a (inaudible) professor. And Dodd had argued that wrath was unworthy of the God of the Bible; that it was Greco-Roman nonsense imposed on the New Testament. So Leon Morris did an apologetic defense of wrath. And Leon was such a kind person and when I met him and we became friends; I guess I was able to tolerate wrath at the hands of Leon Morris. And then I read John Stott, but when I was working on atonement theory I was very unsatisfied with propitiation as a model for the atonement. Penal substitution is sometimes called, but I don't like to call it that. Propitiation is different than penal substitution, or it's a modification, a narrow. And I read A.T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (I don't think people read this book anymore), but he goes through the wrath passages in the Old Testament to prove exactly what you just asked. And his contention is that wrath is the unraveling of human nature, of society because of the presence of sin. So it's sort of an internal rather than an external thing.

But Tom Wright in his Romans commentary makes it pretty clear that he thinks that if you take God out of wrath, you don't you don't have it anymore. You want a God who will erase evil. And I think that happens in The Book of Revelation very clearly. But wrath is something that God has built, let's say, has built into the system of creation. And that is therefore, God is an agent in wrath. Well we've got to get it away from God being pissed off, you know and just angry, and just taking out his anger. You know like Bobby Knight coaching basketball, just mad all the time about something, and just blowing up. That's not what wrath is. Wrath is a grievous mourning event for God. Because he has seen his creation so distorted that it destroys itself, sort of, a C.S Lewis idea as well. That sin eventually turns us into a race of diminished capacity to be what we were designed to be.

42:55 **MH** Yeah, I like the language of God as an agent of wrath because I don't want a God who doesn't get angry about things. This world is crazy and we need it. We need a God who gets angry, right? Yeah, like you, I don't want a God... and I don't think that... it doesn't matter what I want, but I just don't think the Bible teaches that God is someone with thunderbolts looking for someone to strike at any given moment.

**SM** That was what God was fighting against, right?

**MH** Yeah and I think I mean one way to conceive of it is like you said, I like how you put it: God built it into the system that maybe just given the metaphysics of it all, or the ontology of it all, of just the way goodness and evil, evil as a privation of the good that all God has to do to is just remove his grace and then the floods start. If he withholds... so he's an agent and he's doing something to bring wrath, but you know it's in a sense... you know anyway there's a lot we could say about that of course.

But yeah I like the way you put it - I *do* like the way you put it. I think you and I are definitely kindred spirits on that that point. Because I think what your view of God is will obviously impact your view of yourself. And it could be very damaging.

**SM** Adolf Slaughter: auf Deutsch. *Der erste Gedanke an Jesus war der Gedanke an Gott. The first thought of Jesus was thought about God.* And I think that's right and this was a big thing of A.W Tozer that what we think of God, shapes all of our theology. But theology is not just thought, theology is life. So I think we have to connect the two.

**MH** So that brings me to a good point here, and to get a couple more, a few more, two, three more questions. Let's see - in your book I love this book because it's not theory only, it's not just exegesis in the traditional sense of you know, you take us to the first century, but you don't leave us there. You dedicated the book to Beth Allison Barr and Kristin Du Mez and those are names of course I'm sure everybody's familiar with. So let's kind of dive into the 21st century just a bit. What's going on now? And why is what is going on now important? Why do people need Revelation today given these sorts of debates that we find ourselves in, especially with women in ministry? And I mean there's so many things going on - abuse you know, we've seen that a lot... So anyway yeah go ahead.

45:37 **SM** Well you brought up that I like to read things backwards. Well we did that with Romans. Revelation gets pretty close, but we weren't going to call this Reading Revelation Backwards. But Mark has to be read from the middle, so not the end. Right there in chapter eight. But I think it is the theo-political awareness of Babylon that provides Christians with let's say categories; hermeneutic, an awareness, a consciousness that the responsibility of a Christian who follows Jesus, who is the Lamb, is discernment of political corruption and sicknesses and systemic sins in the world. So to me what we have to have, what we should come away from The Book of Revelation is we are charged to do for our world what John did for his world. And that is to provide our audiences with a vision of the Lamb that is so piercing that we recognize the dragons when they appear on the scene. So that our awareness of what goodness is, is so clear that when we see evil we recognize it immediately. And one of the things that has happened in the church today is we're dull. When it comes to discernment, we're dull. We're not perceiving exploitation. We're not perceiving racism.

When I hear white Christians say that the United States does not have systemic racism, I just think that's willful blindness. Because I grew up in a town that was split. On the other side of the river is where African Americans lived. And when a family, a wonderful family, moved across and lived in the white neighborhood and they had a lot of money; they experienced all kinds of racism. My father was an athletic coach and I grew up with African-American young men as my heroes. One of whom played for the Dallas Cowboys, Preston Pearson, he was a great football player. I something is seriously wrong and we need to have eyes that discern racism, that discern capitalism gone awry, that discerns sexism, that discerns churches that have no capacity to reach people in other communities.

And I remember one time I was paid to be an advisor, a consultant for a church on the gospel and why they couldn't attract the Latin American Community, the Mexican-Americans in the community. And I said because the gospel that you preach has no interest to the Mexican-Americans in the United States now. And they look like, "no we got the gospel right, you know it's the four spiritual laws." and I said, "You know, that is not what they're looking for. They're not looking for that sort of solution." And I think it was a naive blindness that needed to be made - they need to be aware of it, but they needed to repent and lament and spend all kinds of time listening. So that they would realize that what they were offering was actually a white gospel, for white people, who grew up in the suburbs and who were living a very comfortable life. And they didn't see the color of water that they were swimming in.

And I think Revelation is the book that does this for us. And that's why I dedicated it, or we dedicated it to Beth and to Kristin because they do fight against sexism in our culture, and all kinds of *isms*. And they do so fearlessly and courageously, fiercely at times. And I think that's what John did. They're like John in our world today.

50:05 **MH** Yeah. Oh that's good. That's good. Yeah I think you mentioned gospel, there. I think one reason we get Revelation wrong is because we just don't know the gospel. Because we think gospel is justification by faith. And there's the kingdom element - I know you've written on that. Back in the day I remember, *The King Jesus Gospel*. That was great and um yeah, everybody go read *The King Jesus Gospel* too. That's a really good book because you confront the misunderstanding about what gospel even is. You know, I think that we've become so comfortable with just reducing the gospel down to going to heaven when you die, justification by faith alone, that kind of stuff. And we forgot the kingdom element. And when we forget the kingdom element, we forget - we don't even have a capacity at that point to critique rival empires, and rival systems, and rival institutions.

Yeah um okay so let me, let me... I can hear somebody I bet uh pushing back just a little bit. Where you quote Revelation 13, someone's going to quote Romans 13. So how do you... does John present a different vision with respect to the Christian's relationship to empire, then say Paul does? Again for those who are listening, you know, there is some chatter about John and Paul, Revelation 13 and Romans 13; where Paul seems to be more oh I don't know how you would put it, on appearance on the surface seems to be more comfortable with empire than say John does in Revelation 13. What would you say to that?

**SM** Do you have people talking to you right now?

**MH** No I really don't..

**SM** Okay, okay, so that's imagined. All right.

**MH** This is this is my attempt to play Devil's Advocate, is all.

**SM** Okay. I mean, Matt, this is a good question but to me it comes back to one of the things we've talked about in this context. Paul is in the city of Rome, or he's coming to the city of Rome. He's writing to the city of Rome. And he is concerned about evidently some kind of resistance going on in the city, I think, about taxes. All right now you probably know more about Romans - you've probably forgotten more about Romans than I know. But I think that's part of what's going on there. And I think Peter, in 1 Peter chapter 2 - what 17, whatever it is on through chapter three; Peter is also working out the relationship between the church and the state just beginning to explore. And both Paul and Peter, I think, have a certain pragmatism about them that the mission is so important that we don't want to get ourselves in trouble so much, that we don't do stupid things. So let's just try to stay under the radar and do what's - do good. Peter uses *agathopoieō* quite a bit and that idea is public benevolence. So I think Peter had a strategy. I think Paul had a strategy so he could get on with the mission. John won't put up with that anymore because John's beginning to experience something that Paul only experienced toward the end of his life. And I think the church has become a little bit more robust, a little bit more capable of handling itself. And they weren't just simply on Mission as a meager minority, but they're still pretty small. And John has a completely different vision that Rome is Babylon and it's going to come down someday. And the opposition to the gospel, to the people who follow the lamb and who put to death the lamb, are going to go down in judgment because this is not the way of God. So I would explain Paul, Romans 13, as the message of Paul for a given context at a given time. Probably early in Nero's reign. Had Paul written that letter six years later, he would never have said that

about Rome. Because Nero had started to turn and had gone against him. At least that's my dating of the book. Nero was and I think it's okay to say he was a first-class idiot, but John in Revelation 13, Revelation 12 whichever chapter you want to get into, is in a different context. And he's saying our best position is we have to resist the ways of Babylon. I think Paul would say that's pretty good I think we should resist it, but I don't write in such apocalyptic categories that you do, and so your images are starker and grander than mine. but I think Paul would sympathize with the importance of being dissident when Babylon begins to make its impact on the church.

**MH** That's good. Yeah I don't think for a second that Paul would want to baptize Rome as the New Jerusalem. That would be a mistake. Is it fair to say kind of along the... using something Jesus said is sort of a grid with respect to this question. Jesus said, you're in the world but don't be of the world. Perhaps Paul is showing us how to be in the world in Romans 13 and then John is showing us how not to be of the world in Revelation 13. Is that a good way to put it?

**SM** I think that's true it's good, yeah. And I think that these authors are all trying in these lines, in the New Testament are complementary in a kaleidoscope of exploration and experimentation of how they're going to get along. I mean, remember this, Israel was a nation, is a temple state. All of a sudden now the church is going to become International. And now it's no longer protected by the temple, and by people who believe in the Old Testament the Covenant, that God made. So they're exploring how to live in this world, and at times the best way to do it is to cooperate, and other times is to resist. I like what you said there.

**MH** Last question here. If you could talk to, sit down with just any pastor, just a typical pastor today, what would you say that is number one for that pastor to resist? And lead his congregation into resisting in our churches? And I'm talking about in an American context. Because different contexts might necessitate different conversations, but particularly in ours in this day and age.

**SM** Well the first thing I would tell pastors is spend careful time thinking of five things that you like about the United States as Government, and five things you don't like. And have the courage to say both. And then the things that we don't like, we have to learn to resist. And even the things that we do like; freedom, that we don't overuse our freedom; economic prosperity, don't overuse our economic prosperity. So I would say we have to become discerning agents. And this is not easy for pastors to do.

I have a pastor now, Pastor Amanda. She is courageous politically, but our church is not made of a bunch of people who all think alike politically. We have people on both ends of the spectrum and she's called to Pastor all those people. So we have to learn to use our language carefully. But I think if we show ourselves followers of Jesus first, and therefore we can appreciate what's good in the United States and also critique what's bad about the United States, over time we develop a completely different theo-political discipleship that our churches in the United States need.

**MH** That's so good. Thank you so much. Everybody the book is called, *Revelation for the Rest of Us: a Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple*. Scott thank you so much for hanging out and sharing your thoughts with us today.

**SM** Well thank you. It's good to meet you and that we're kindred spirits in some ways. I don't want to get you into much trouble.

**MH** No. No, no. It's an honor to be a kindred spirit with you. So I really I really appreciate it Scott, thank you.

59:12 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.