

# What If Jesus Was Serious about Heaven?

## With Skye Jethani

Recorded Nov. 16, 2023 | Released Dec. 11, 2023

### TRANSCRIPT

**NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.**

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome back to The Denison Forum Podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum and host for today's conversation. On The Denison Forum Podcast, we hope to give you ideas and equipping that encourages you to live as a citizen of God's kingdom. We're going to talk about that some today with our guests.

We want you to be salt and light in every place that God gives you influence and opportunity, that you might reflect the presence and goodness of God in your own life and toward other people. We want to help you to understand today's culture and to live redemptively in that culture.

Today we're going to talk about the intriguing topic of heaven, and our guest is Skye Jethani. Skye is a graduate of Wheaton College and also holds a Master of Divinity degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is a former pastor, an award winning author, a podcaster, and a speaker.

He is co host with Phil Vischer, who you may remember from Veggie Tales Day. They do a podcast together called Holy Post that I highly recommend to you. They have more than 600,000 downloads per month at the Holy Post. Skye has written a number of books, including a series of books called What If Jesus Was Serious. One of those books takes up the topic of prayer. Another takes up the topic of the church. His most recent installment in this series: What If Jesus Was Serious about Heaven? We're going to talk to him about that today. I think you'll enjoy the conversation. Thanks for coming along with us.

Welcome to the Denison Forum Podcast. We're glad to have you with us.

[00:01:47] **Skye Jethani:** Well, thank you for having me.

[00:01:48] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, the first thing before we get into the work that you've shared in your most recent book, there has to be a story around the name Skye. You just, nobody meets a lot of people named Skye. So, tell us a little bit about you, your backstory, maybe your journey to faith and also engagement in ministry. Tell us a little bit about you.

[00:02:07] **Skye Jethani:** Yeah. Well, we could spend all day on that story. I grew up in Chicago really close to where I live now in the suburbs of Chicago. And my father's an immigrant from India. My mother is a Chicago native and I have a mixed ethnic background for sure. Being Indian and my mom is mostly English and Scandinavian.

But my father's family is mostly from a Hindu family background, although he never really bought into it. My mother comes from a Christian family. And so, she raised my brother and I in a Baptist church, but we didn't have a unified family faith background. So by the time I was probably middle school age, I just dropped out of any church involvement was wrestling with questions about faith and identity and beliefs probably earlier than most of my peers just because of the diversity of my family.

We also traveled a lot. I think before I graduated high school, I'd been to over 30 countries. So I had just seen a lot, the diversity of my family. You know, it's just a very, very diverse upbringing. And so in high school, I really hit a lot of those questions about, well, what do I believe in? Am I a Christian or is it just because my mom is, what about my dad's beliefs?

It was just all over the, But in high school, I got connected to a youth group through some friends and started reading the Bible, started reading a lot of other things too, like the Quran and the Bhagavad Gita and philosophy and eventually came to a place of really being drawn to the message I was reading in the New Testament, in the Gospels, and yet having a really difficult time with the evangelical subculture that I was somewhat familiar with because what I was reading in the New Testament did not look a lot like the Christian subculture in America.

And that kind of reached a crisis point by the time I was a senior in high school, where I really, really did feel drawn to the message of Jesus and the gospel, but really, really, really felt repulsed by American Christianity. And it was between the summer of my high school senior year and freshman year of college that I had a somewhat dramatic encounter with God that kind of struck me upside the head and was a real turning point for me where I really committed myself to follow Jesus regardless of the shortcomings I saw in the people who claimed his name and so went off to college studied comparative religion figuring I'd already been doing that for a couple years anyway

[00:04:29] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Okay.

[00:04:34] **Skye Jethani:** without any real likely job prospects after I graduated because who hires anybody with a religion and history degree? So I ended up going on to seminary not just because of that but I had a few mentors in my life that recognized some qualities and gifts in me and they thought was probably something I should consider. So I went off to seminary got married during those years and then eventually found myself at a church here in Wheaton, Illinois.

And I've been a part of that church for 20 years, became an ordained pastor. Fast forward the story a little bit, ended up working for Christianity Today for 11 years in different editorial and executive roles. And then since 2015, I've been more or less independent doing podcasting and writing and books and different things. So that's sort of the rough outline that gets you up to 2023.

[00:05:24] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So, so just kind of curious what is, kind of describe the nature of your relationship with your dad. What does he think about your faith and your work as a minister? What's been that like?

[00:05:37] **Skye Jethani:** Well, when I made the decision to go to seminary, that was a tough pill for him to swallow. He thought I was crazy. We fought it out, honestly, for a couple of months. And eventually he had this dramatic turnaround where he suddenly supported my decision to go to seminary. And he said he would pay for the whole thing,

[00:05:57] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Oh, wow.

[00:05:57] **Skye Jethani:** which I was Yeah, even better. And for a long time, I could not figure out what happened. Like, why did he change his posture on this whole thing? What I found out later was that my older brother, who's an atheist, had been talking to my dad throughout that season. Like, , my dad was calling my brother up and kind of venting to him about, you know, Skye's crazy and he's become a Christian and he's going to seminary and all this stuff.

And my brother, my atheist brother, who I'm very close to, basically convinced my dad that he should support me. And he said, you know, you may not agree with Skye. I may not agree with Skye, but he's not crazy. Because my brother and I, he had wrestled with the same questions I wrestled with. He obviously came to a very, very different conclusion than I did, but we respected one another's journey.

And so he convinced my dad to support me. So, you know, anybody who appreciates whatever ministry I have had or has benefited from anything I've done in one way or another, you can thank an atheist. yeah.

[00:06:55] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah.

[00:06:56] **Skye Jethani:** And now, getting back to my dad, we have a very good relationship, and he's very supportive of what I do, and, in fact, frequently he has joined me on international trips where I'm speaking to missionaries or doing other work in the church globally, and he comes, and people assume he's a Christian, they think that he's on board, but he's just, he's a very curious, open minded. iNtelligent man who's got his own, you know, path that he's going and we dialogue about that stuff all the time. And I'm very grateful for his love and support through all this.

[00:07:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Well, thanks for sharing that, that as we come into the holiday season and families will be gathering and I suspect a lot of people listening to our conversation will identify with having diverse family members and diverse perspectives. That's certainly true. I come from a large family have seven siblings and There's a lot of different viewpoints.

Anytime we get into an opportunity to gather together. And so that's helpful. Is there a story about the uniqueness of your name?

[00:07:57] **Skye Jethani:** Yes. Skye is actually a nickname and it's a nickname I've had my entire life. I didn't even know it was my nickname until I was probably 10 years old. My given name is Akash, which is a Hindi name. Which means sky. So, since I was born, I've always been called Sky. My middle name is Charles, which is actually my Norwegian grandfather's name. My maternal grandfather. So, I, my name really represents the crazy diversity of my family and background, for sure.

[00:08:24] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Fantastic. Well, I would also suspect that through your writings, as well as through your work with Phil Vischer, people have probably encountered you. A large number of people have encountered you that way. What's it like to work with Phil Vischer? Thank you.

[00:08:38] **Skye Jethani:** What's it like to work with Phil? Well, first of all, Phil and I were friends before we ever worked together. So, I knew him in that capacity. He was at my church. I actually knew his mother before I knew Phil. His mom taught at Wheaton College for many years. So Phil and I became friends around the time that, I don't know if people know his story very well, but VeggieTales was created under the umbrella of Big Idea Productions, which was his film thing.

So as Big Idea was kind of collapsing in around 2002, is when Phil and I first connected. And what brought us together in a way was, as he was going through that pretty dramatic shift in his

own life, he was re evaluating how he related to God and came to a place of recognizing all that he was trying to achieve for God through all of his output in his filmmaking, stuff like that.

And he wrote a wonderful biography called Me, Myself, and Bob, where he outlines this story and how he kind of, deconstructed in a good way, some of what he had inherited from his evangelical heritage, which was, I need to go out and change the world. I need to go out and do all these great things for God.

And coming to a place of recognizing, well, actually God doesn't need me. And this deep communion with him is what he desires for me. And so Phil and I connected around those kinds of issues in that season of his life.

And then weirdly enough, a couple of years later he had an idea to start a television show. He wanted to do like a talk show, like, you know, the Tonight Show or something like that, but from a more Christian perspective. So he, we'd go out to lunch regularly and swap, you know, stuff we're working on. So he starts pitching me this idea of doing a talk show. And then he said that he'd like me to be on it. And I thought he wanted me on as a guest and he's like, no, no, I want you on like every time as my sidekick.

[00:10:18] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Okay.

[00:10:18] **Skye Jethani:** we actually filmed four pilot episodes of The Phil Vischer Show, which was this late night talk show. And he was going to take those episodes and pitch them to different Christian networks, online networks, or television networks to see if he could make it happen. And obviously never went anywhere. But during that time of filming those four pilot episodes, we thought, well, let's start a podcast to go along with this. So people can kind of get a behind the scenes look of it. And that's where the pod, The Phil Vischer Podcast came from, which eventually became The Holy Post.

So my work with Phil really kind of came in sideways unexpectedly from a friendship, which It became a very short lived television show, which became a very long lived podcast. And it's been a ton of fun, like he, I think the fact that he and I share a certain outlook on faith, outlook on culture, creativity even though he does most of his work with kids and I'm primarily speaking with adults there's just a lot of congruency there.

[00:11:12] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Well, it's good work. And I've been helped and encouraged and blessed by the Holy Post and by both the two of you and others on that podcast. So to our audience, I just would highly recommend it find the Holy Post and it's fun, and it's also very profound all at the same time.

But, in addition to being a podcaster in various pathways, you're a speaker, an author, and this book that we're going to talk about today is entitled *What If Jesus Was Serious About Heaven?*, but is actually the fourth in a series that is under this umbrella. *What if Jesus was serious?* Kind of where did the series come from, and in past expressions, you've talked about prayer. You've talked about the church and building community. You've talked about, I kind of summarize the first one as dealing with truth and those things that make us uncomfortable. But what is it about this work that caused you to create this series? Yeah. And why pick up the topic of heaven,

[00:12:13] **Skye Jethani:** Yeah, well the series began because I write a daily devotional that's a subscription based daily devotional on an app and an email called *With God Daily*. And years ago, I did a series in that devotional going through the Sermon on the Mount. And I got a pretty strong reaction from my subscribers to that content.

And I had called that series, *What if Jesus was serious?* Like, what if the things he teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, which are, you know, a collection of most of his most famous ethical teachings And

[00:12:42] **Dr. Mark Turman:** right? Yeah,

[00:12:44] **Skye Jethani:** to that. And one of the things we've done with that daily devotional is the way I've sort of pitched it to people is it's a devotional for people who hate devotionals because it's not sappy and sentimental and gooey.

It's more thoughtful and hard hitting. And so when the idea of doing a book came along the series, it was meant to be a devotional series, but I didn't want to pitch it as a devotional series. So we took that content from *What if Jesus was serious* and we revised it a little bit, made it into a book form and off it went and it did really, really well and all these books are very short chapters and each one includes a doodle or drawing that I've done, which illustrates the point.

And I think that format has worked well for a lot of people bite size, hard hitting truths that are and not just verbal. And so then, because of the success of the first book, we've expanded it to these other topics. Sort of *Jesus was serious about prayer*, *the church*, now *heaven*. And the *heaven* one in particular, I knew at some point in the series, I was

going to have to tackle this topic because as I say early on in the book, an awful lot of Christians have made heaven the goal and centerpiece of their faith. And in a weird way, I think it's very, very, very malformative. When we put heaven at the center and we make it the goal, we're actually misinterpreting the gospel. We're misinterpreting our faith. And it's like, if you have a map, but it's leading you to the wrong destination, the map is no good. And we need to rethink that map.

So I wanted to do the book on heaven, because frankly, this may sound like an overstatement, but I don't believe it is. Virtually everything that popular Christianity says to us about heaven, I think is wrong and unbiblical and ends up warping malforming our faith. So that's what the book is really intended to do.

Is what did Jesus really say about heaven? What does Scripture really mean by that word? And where is its proper place in our faith? Because it's not the goal. And it's not the centerpiece.

[00:14:39] **Dr. Mark Turman:** because it, and that was one of the things that really intrigued me about the book from the beginning is not only the idea of a mental map and the idea that we talk with words, but we think in images. Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe says that, you know,

that, We need to engage people's imagination whenever we're teaching or preaching to them in the context of a church. Because the human imagination is incredibly vivid. And I keep running into that every time I hear somebody talk about a movie that's become popular, and they said, well, I read the book, and the book was so much better. And a lot of us that are visually oriented are like, well, how could a book be better than a movie that's on a big screen?

The reason for that is, is because the most vivid screen that you ever look at is the screen of your imagination. Which just the way I look at it, and that's why just the format of the book, including the doodles are really significant, because I started reading this book, and I'm like, wait a minute, I had to stop and say, Am I reading a doctrinal piece, or am I reading a devotional?

And I was initially confused by that of in this series of, okay, now, which, what kind of a tool am I using, I guess is what I would say. So it's significant doctrine, very, what I would call very profound doctrine, especially to take on something as significant as heaven and to make the statement that you just made.

I mean, that's a pretty bold statement to say most everything that American Christianity thinks about heaven is probably wrong. That's a pretty big foundational doctrinal kind of question. And then you pick up this book and you start thinking, well, this couple of times reading through a few of the short chapters, you're like, well, this was fun that, Oh, this is a cool looking drawing.

And it's great. And then you start reading the content and you're like, okay, well, this is not just warm, comforting, devotional. This is a foundational doctrine is kind of the reaction. I want our audience to be prepared for that. They pick up this resource. I want them to be clear about that and so helpful in that it, I had a conversation as recent as yesterday about digital discipleship or seminary by email.

And this might be an expression of that, of, Hey, we're going to take a big, big doctrine and we're going to try to break it down into sections and then we're going to try to break it down into. Okay. Okay, think about this for about six or seven minutes. I, am I describing the layout of the book? Well,

[00:17:19] **Skye Jethani:** Yeah, I think you are. And I agree with you. Like the format can be a little bit... Deceptive at first not in a bad way, but I, like when the very first book in the series came out, I remember going on Amazon to check it out and Amazon had listed it under children's books.

[00:17:34] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Okay. Yeah,

[00:17:35] **Skye Jethani:** they saw the doodles on the cover and they go, Oh, this looks like it's for kids.

It's brightly colored and things. They go, this is a kid's book. And it's definitely not a kid's book. I mean, I do know teenagers who have read these books and benefited from them and families who've used them, but this is not children's stuff. It is deep theology and doctrine, but it's in bite sized pieces and it's meant to be accessible.

It puts the cookies on a lower shelf in some way. But yeah, there's a couple of years ago, I encountered a statistic that said the average American reads less than one book a year. And when I think about how many dozens of books I read every year, I'm making up for a bunch of Americans who don't read at all.

So as an author, I love writing a 200 page book that's really deep and thoughtful, but I also know most people are never going to pick that up and read it. So part of my methodology here was to try to create written content that is short, accessible, visual, and can bring deep biblical truths to people and an audience that wouldn't normally pick up a deep theology book. And to write in a way that feels accessible and challenging, but still, uh, So that's the reason for the format.

[00:18:43] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And when you pick up the topic of heaven, people have to engage their imagination because one of the things you point out in the book is there's relatively little included in the Bible about okay, this is what heaven is going to be like. But before I ask you to answer that question, I want you to unpack a little bit more kind of the premise of this book, which is the difference between having a Christ centered faith as opposed to a heaven centered faith. You've already alluded to it a little bit that having a heaven centered faith is basically a form of escapism. Would that be a fair way of saying it?



[00:19:19] **Skye Jethani:** Yeah, it is escapism. It's also utilitarianism. And what I mean by that is, you know, the popular way people hear the gospel in a lot of American and Western culture is, uh, you are a sinner, and because you are a sinner, the wages of sin is death. And that separates you from God, and if you want to live forever in heaven, then you need to trust that Jesus paid the price for your sins on the cross.

That's all true. I believe all of that. But if that's all you understand the gospel to be, then what essentially you're saying is heaven is the goal and Jesus is just the means by which I get there. And in that formulation, the real object of your devotion, the real goal, the real allegiance you hold is to an afterlife in heaven.

It's not to Jesus. He is just a device. He's a means. He's a methodology. he does say, I am the way, but he's also the truth and the life. He is the goal. One theologian put it this way. He said, the gospel is not how people get to heaven. The gospel is how people get to God. And if you would be happy in heaven, if Jesus were not there, You will not be there,

[00:20:31] **Dr. Mark Turman:** wow, no,

[00:20:32] **Skye Jethani:** which is a pretty striking statement, but over and over and over and over again, when you read the Gospels and the words of Jesus, he is not calling people to align themselves with heaven. He calls people to align themselves to him. You know, he tells the rich young ruler, go and sell all you have and come follow me. It's not, you know, fix your eyes on heaven, it's fix your eyes on Jesus. He is the center and goal of our faith, and if we merely want to use him to avoid hell or use him to avoid death or use him to get, you know, a mansion in some fairytale heaven that we've inherited from our tradition, that's, in a weird way, it's no different than the prosperity gospel.

That says, well, I just want to use Jesus to get a BMW. I just want to use Jesus to get, you know, a great house, or I just want to use Jesus to be famous. Well, I just want to use Jesus to have life in the clouds one day. What's the difference? It's an eternal heavenly prosperity gospel, and it's not what Jesus taught.

[00:21:30] **Dr. Mark Turman:** no. And yeah, just by personal testimony, just share with you that really struck me deeply. I had a professor at one time who said, you know, if you could go to church and sit there and never recognize the person of Jesus in the service and be totally comfortable if you were not a Christian, you came in there as a Muslim or as a Hindu or something.

If you could be in that environment and be totally comfortable, then there's something wrong with that worship service. And and then added to that going back probably almost two years

now, just ran onto this verse in John 17, when Jesus is praying after the upper room experience. And he says, this is what eternal life is.

Verse three in that that you know, my father, and you know, me, that's what eternal life or heaven is. It's not about arriving at this destination as much as it is focusing and coming into greater oneness with this person. And that's where we get so wrapped up in destination that we don't think about the relationship, which is what in essence, faith is all about. It's about the relationship.

[00:22:44] **Skye Jethani:** And one thing that's really striking about that, again, going back to the popular way the gospel is preached in so much of our culture, is, and to your point about the power of imagination, you know, revival preachers, going back to the 1700s, figured out that if you paint a really vivid vision of hell...

You can frighten people into faith. On the flip side, a lot of 20th and 21st century preachers have figured out if you can paint a really ravishing vision of heaven, you can lure a lot of people into faith. But what's crazy is when you read the book of Acts, for example, the apostles preach eight gospel sermons in the book of Acts.

They don't mention heaven or hell once in any of those gospel sermons. So, if the apostles at the very beginning of the church who are first spreading the gospel, if they never brought heaven and hell into their presentation of the gospel, why is it so central to ours? Instead, what they preached was the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and bringing our allegiance and loyalty to Him.

That was their message. And yet, in so much of the preaching I've heard in the American church over my 47 years, I hear very little preaching about Jesus and a lot of preaching about heaven and hell. And I think we've got that really backwards.

[00:24:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. One of the ways you come at this early on in the book is you talk about the kingdom of the earth and the kingdom of heaven. And then you use this phrase, the idea of thin spaces I want you to unpack that idea, that, that phrase, thin space. And the idea we so oftentimes think about earth and heaven and we think that there's a wide chasm.

Part of that is because of this one story that Jesus told about a beggar who died and there was a rich man who was not a man of faith and one went to heaven and one didn't. And there was this chasm and sometimes just really get overly focused on that one story that Jesus told. But what do you mean by is heaven closer than we think?

And is that what you're driving at in the term thin space,

[00:24:55] **Skye Jethani:** yeah, to take it one step back from that, you first have to realize that most of our English Bibles are really poorly translated when it comes to this word heaven. Virtually everywhere in both Hebrew and Greek, in the Old and New Testament, the word for heaven is actually plural. So when Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven in the Gospels, for example, it's actually the kingdom of the heavens. And, the reason for that is in the ancient world, again, the Hebrew world, they did not see heaven as a distant realm for the dead. That's not what they believed heaven was. In fact, Genesis 1. 1 actually gets it correct. It says, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The heavens to the ancients meant the atmosphere, the air that's right around us.

It means the upper atmosphere where the clouds and the birds and all in the rain is. And it's the highest upper realms of space, meaning where the sun, the moon, the stars, and it's the abode of God and angels and spiritual beings. The heavens was not. far away. The heavens were as close as the air we're breathing and the wind around us.

And so when Scripture speaks about heavens and earth, the earth is the physical terrestrial ground on which we abide and the tangible things we can touch. And heaven is that invisible realm, which is right next to the earth. Where God and angels and other spirits abide, but they're not distant.

They're right here. Which then gets to this idea, your question of thin places. What we find throughout the Bible is there are times and places where the barrier between the earth and heaven, between the physical realm and the immaterial realm, becomes transparent. And one can pass between the earth to heaven.

And one vivid example of this is in Genesis where Jacob has his dream and he sees the heavens opened and angels ascending and descending on a ladder between the two. And he wakes up and he goes, Oh my gosh, God is in this place. And I didn't even realize it. That's a thin place where the invisible realm became visible to him for a time.

And then throughout the Old Testament the thinnest of thin places was believed to be the holy of holies in the middle of the tabernacle or the temple, where God's presence intersected the earth, where heaven and earth overlapped one another. And you could move between the two, between the presence of God and the presence of people through the temple.

Jesus comes along and he shocks everybody when he basically says, I'm the temple. And he even references that scene of Jacob's stairwell and says, you're going to see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. I am that gateway now between heaven and earth. So this idea in

modern Christianity that heaven is just where the righteous dead go after they die, that's really not strongly present in the Bible at all.

It's much more, heaven is right here all the time adjacent to us. We just don't see it or recognize it all the time, but God's presence is everywhere. And as close as the air we breathe is him and his kingdom, we just need to be aware of it.

[00:28:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And it's reflected, right, in our most familiar prayer, in what we commonly call the Lord's Prayer. And people pray this, oftentimes without really contemplating what Jesus is, Jesus is not simply putting together a pretty poem in the Lord's prayer. When he says to us, pray your kingdom come and your will be done, right? He's not just doing that so that this is poetically inspiring to us. He's actually teaching us something very profound about the connection between heaven and earth, right?

[00:28:41] **Skye Jethani:** Right. Yeah. And this is one way of putting it is that this is the entire point of the Bible. At the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, God walked with the man and the woman in the garden. And the garden is seen as a temple space. It's a space where heaven and earth overlap. The realm of people, earth, overlaps with the realm of God, heaven.

And then they're cast out of the garden because of their sin and rebellion, and heaven and earth split apart. So the realm of humanity is the earth and the realm of God is heaven. And then you get those thin places, those glimpses where the two intersect again, like the temple. And then Jesus comes along and says, I'm now that overlapping place.

And the ultimate goal that you see at the very end of revelation is the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven. To the earth, and the great declaration is the dwelling place of God is now with his people. It's the reunion of heaven and earth once again. So the entire point of the Bible and the coming of Jesus and his sacrifice and his resurrection and the filling of the Holy Spirit and the church is to reconcile heaven and earth, which is the Lord's prayer.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's what this whole thing's about. This idea in our heads that the goal of Christianity is to get away from the earth and live in heaven after we die forever, we're actually profoundly misunderstanding and abusing the narrative of Scripture.

Because the goal is not that Christians would leave the earth to abide with God in heaven. The ultimate outcome is that God comes down from heaven to dwell on the earth with us and that we will occupy a unified heaven and earth, a terrestrial, physical heaven and earth with God for eternity.

[00:30:24] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, so let me jump ahead a little bit because you just sparked my interest in this. You did a great little doodle on this in the chapter, but you talk about the difference between understanding this whole doctrine from the standpoint of, is Jesus coming on a rescue mission or is he coming on a restoration mission?

Talk about the differences between those two. We've already alluded to a lot of it already, but flesh it out a little bit more if you want, but why is it different to understand that difference that this is not about Jesus and you sometimes honestly, I sometimes get this idea when I'm reading first Corinthians chapter 4, right?

About the trumpet sound and the clouds parting and Jesus coming. We will all be caught up together with him in the air. I've preached that at so many funerals. I can do it without a Bible in my hand, right? But talk about why it matters that we don't have the mental map of a rescue mission, that we need to have more of a mental image of a restoration plan,

[00:31:27] **Skye Jethani:** Yeah. There's a lot of theology and history behind these two visions, but the rescue mission idea assumes that there's a whole bunch of God's creation that he doesn't ultimately care about. It assumes that he's okay with chucking it all and throwing it away and rescuing a few people off of the sinking ship.

That is not the image of the God of Scripture that we find in the Bible. We don't find a God there who abandons and replaces. What we find is a God who rescues and redeems. He restores. And so, the best evidence I can give you of this, and we should get into that text about, you know, meeting Jesus in the air and all that, because I think it's a really important and often misunderstood and mistaught text.

But the greatest evidence I can give you for this restoration idea is Jesus own resurrection. Whether in the gospel accounts or in 1 Corinthians 15 the imagery is really, really important. Jesus is dead. He is crucified. He's buried. And on the third day, he rises again. And in his resurrection, Paul calls his resurrection the first fruits of the harvest.

Meaning it's the beginning and sets the pattern for what is to come. And then he says that our eventual resurrection will follow the same pattern. And in Romans 8, he talks about how creation itself will share in the glory of the children of God with our resurrection, that the creation itself will be resurrected.

Well, what was true of Jesus resurrection? When Jesus body was put into that tomb, was it left there to decay and rot and be thrown away? And was he given a brand new body when he was raised?

[00:33:10] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. No.

[00:33:11] **Skye Jethani:** No, because if that were what Scripture taught, if that's what Christians believe, that would not be resurrection. That would be reincarnation. You'd be given a new body. The scriptures are really aggressively clear on this point. That same body was raised. He had the wounds in his hands inside and he showed it to his apostles. It was the same body, but

[00:33:35] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah. And that is distinctly Christian. I just want to pause right here. When you start talking about the differences between Christianity and every other faith This is one of those places that is distinctly Christian.

[00:33:48] **Skye Jethani:** That's right. And it's also what made Christianity so controversial because the apostles went around saying the tomb was empty right the body He was raised, but this is the interesting part. It's the same body But it was transformed, his body was changed in some weird ways, right? He appears and disappears in a way he didn't before his crucifixion.

He ascends into the heavens. He isn't completely recognizable right away to his apostles. And, you know, Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus, like he exhibits different qualities. And Paul talks about this also in first Corinthians 15. He talks about how the body that was sown perishable is raised imperishable.

You know, it's transformed. So here we have this tension, this theological tension. And people, theologians refer to it as continuity and discontinuity. There's continuity because it's the same body, but there's discontinuity because it's changed. And as I said, Paul says that'll be true of us when we are one day resurrected.

We will be given physical bodies. They'll be the same body, but perfected and changed. And then you can extrapolate that out to the redemption that awaits all of creation. This earth will endure. But it will be transformed and changed. It will be redeemed. It's not going to be thrown away just as Jesus body was not thrown away and he wasn't given a new one.

This earth will not be thrown away and a new one created. It will be the same earth, but renewed and transformed, filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea, as Isaiah says. And I know some people hearing that are going, wait, wait. What about where Peter and Revelation talk about a new heaven and a new earth in the first earth is passed away. We can get into that. The language is a little nuanced there, but the short of it is there are two words for new in Greek. There is Neos, which means young, and there's Kinos, which means new in quality. And the words that are used there for new heaven, new earth is not new in age, but new in quality, it's speaking of the renewed heaven and earth, the reunited heaven and earth, the redeemed heaven and earth.

So it's all again, rooted in the resurrection of Jesus. His Resurrection on Easter Sunday was the beginning of the new creation. That's why it happened on a Sunday, by the way, because Sunday was the first day of creation in Genesis 1. And so we have to look at his resurrection as the pattern for the redemption of all things.

And you just can't make the case that his body was thrown away and left to rot, and he was given a new one. Yet that's what many Christians think will happen to the earth. And it's just not what the New Testament teaches.

[00:36:20] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And this is just listening to you describe that. illustrates so strongly why having clarity about biblical teaching, having robust doctrine as a foundation of faith is so important and is not something easily achieved nor quickly achieved. These things are big, big ideas. Okay.

And I can hear people saying people that have been in church and read the Bible significantly, which would be a lot of people who listened to us. I could see how they would say, well, I could see, I got off track here because, well, wait a minute. Jesus was raised bodily. Okay. I'm good with that.

And he ascended bodily and we believe he's coming back physically. But then the Bible says that God is spirit. And so is heaven material or not material? And that's where you get the stereotypical, you know, we're all going to be like ghost like figures floating around on the clouds. And as you point out an endless worship service, which some people would kind of just wince at that idea based on what their worship experiences have been, but.

You get that idea. And then to what you were just saying a moment ago, Peter's saying that, you know, , in his letter, all of the earth is going to be burned up. And what kind of people ought we to be because this present world in some sense is going to be burned up. I thought you did a really good job of explaining the difference, what Peter is striving at as implication of what he had learned from Jesus. All that to say, Skye, is, okay, what is it that Peter's referring to when he's saying that stuff is going to get burned up? Is it everything is going to get burned up? Give us an insight of what you're trying to describe there as getting inside the mind and understanding of Peter,

[00:38:15] **Skye Jethani:** Yeah. But okay. I will do that. I promise. But let me back up just a minute because, you know, you brought up the fact that people, you know, and maybe Christians their whole lives, they've spent decades in the church. They've read the Bible a lot, sometimes we have to recognize that what we think we know is not what's actually in the scriptures.

I'll give you some silly examples. Most people assume that the fruit that Adam, the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, was an apple. Scripture never says it was an apple, never identifies what kind of fruit it was. People assume that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The text never says it was a whale.

We just have inherited that belief. It says a great fish, but we make it into a whale, right? We think there were three wise men who visited Jesus after his birth. The text never says how many wise men there were. Three is just tradition that we've inherited, right? We have all of these assumptions from 2,000 years of Christian history and tradition that then we carry with us as we read the Bible.

Similarly, we do this a ton with heaven. We think that the end point is that we will exist in a spiritual form in an immaterial heaven with God. That is not what scripture says. The end point of the Bible is that we, God's people, will have physical bodies and we will live on a physical earth where we will reign with Jesus.

The goal of the Christian life, the telos, the final state of things, is physical and terrestrial. It's earthly. It's not going to heaven when you die. And like that blows people's minds when they hear it, but it's like if you just put your assumptions and baggage aside and read what is actually there in the text, it's that is the message and as far as going to heaven when you die and this immaterial afterlife thing. There's virtually nothing in the Bible about that, but it's so dominant in our tradition that we think it's crazy I mean there could have been 12 wise men people go.

I know there can only be three. There could have been 15. We have no idea how many there were but you know We just have this tradition we get really attached to it now to your point in Peter and in the destruction of the earth When you read that in its proper context, it's really important. I don't have my Bible in front of me and we could turn this into a whole deep study, but it's important to realize that Peter begins this whole section talking about Noah and the flood in Genesis, and he says that the world was destroyed.

I

don't know anybody who interprets the flood in Genesis 6 to mean that the planet itself was literally thrown away and destroyed and God created a brand new planet Earth. With the flood,

[00:41:11] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right.

[00:41:12] **Skye Jethani:** which it's almost nonsensical when you think about the story of Noah, cause he's in an ark with his family and a bunch of animals. And if the earth was destroyed by



the flood, if the planet was thrown away, was the ark just floating in outer space until God made a new planet and put Noah on it? Of course not. The imagery there is the floodwaters destroyed civilization. It destroyed humanity. It destroyed the evil of the earth and washed it all away. And then when the floodwaters.

[00:41:49] **Dr. Mark Turman:** It's a cleanse, an ultimate cleansing.

[00:41:52] **Skye Jethani:** So Peter uses that imagery and then he says, well, the same thing's going to happen, but it's going to be with fire. But for some reason people go, Oh, this time the planet's actually going to be thrown away and destroyed. And God's going to make a new one. That's not what he's saying. He's saying again, the systems of the world, the civilizations of the world, the evil corrupt ungodly things of the world are going to be purged away, not by water, but by fire.

And that's imagery you get in the Old Testament. It's imagery that Peter actually talks about in his earlier letter. The refiners fire, that wonderful old hymn anthem that we would sing back in the eighties and nineties, you know, to purge away that which was impure with fire. Is a purifying effect. And it gets deeper. And when you go into that text even more.

It's funny because after talking about the earth being destroyed by fire, Peter then says, Oh, the earth is actually going to be exposed and all of its works laid bare. Well, how can you expose something after you've destroyed it? It's he's not talking about the material destruction of the planet. He's talking about the destruction of the evil of the world, just as the evil of the world was destroyed by the floodwaters. In Genesis six. So once you put that lens on, you realize he's speaking about the coming day of the Lord, the judgment of God, when Christ returns and all of his enemies are put under his feet and the resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead on Easter Sunday.

That same power is unleashed over all of creation and those who belong to Christ will be transformed by that power, glorified by that power. We will share in his glory, it says. But those who don't belong to Christ and the things that are opposed to him and his kingdom, that resurrection power is going to be so overwhelming that it will destroy them, like a purging fire. That's the imagery that Peter has here. So it is ultimately an image of redemption, cleansing, of purification. It's not an image of utter destruction.

[00:43:54] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, and that's why words matter, right, when you start using words like restoration and words of refinement as opposed to the word of replacement or the idea of rescue that we're just trying to survive for a while right, until we get transported out of here. And we just, again, don't think deeply enough.

But even , in the utilization of some of those words, we could easily get lost and move away from the idea that it is about relationship, that it is about, the word oneness that Jesus so focuses on in his prayer, right before he's arrested is this oneness that he has with the father that now becomes available to us with him and the father because of what he's going to do on the cross.

And that, and there's a lot about that that we don't understand, but in some sense the Bible teaches that marriage gives us a picture of that, right, of if you're building a healthy marriage with God in the center of it, you start to experience a oneness that In some ways you can't even fully describe, in that kind of dynamic relationship.

But Paul comes along, you know, Ephesians 5, most people know that well. He comes along and we're not really sure which relationship he's talking about at any particular point in that conversation. Is he talking about the relationship we have with our spouse? Or is he talking about the relationship that all of us have with God through Christ?

And the metaphor is going back and forth all the time, but the ultimate expression of that is, is that life is about the ultimate greatness and joy of life and life in Christ is oneness. And the ramification of it is, it's not just simply about individuals, it's about the entire created order.

[00:45:42] **Skyye Jethani:** That's right. So the oneness we share with Christ now through his spirit will be the oneness that the entire earth shares with heaven when they are reunited. And as I said before, quoting Isaiah, the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. It's that oneness. That unity, that's what you see in Genesis, in the garden, where the Lord walked with his image bearers as one.

Like, that's the direction we're going. The escape idea, the rescue idea, ultimately, I think it's it does such harm for two reasons. One, is it presents us a false vision of who God is. As I said earlier, it presents this vision that he doesn't ultimately care about most of what he created, and he's fine throwing it away. And that's just not the God we see in Scripture.

But then secondly, it results in Christians not caring. about this world. Oliver Wendell Holmes famously said that some people are so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good. And yet, Jesus comes, and he dwells with us on the earth, and he didn't behave like people and physical things and the earth didn't matter.

He healed and touched and fed And cared, and that's what you see the early church doing. And yet, in modern times, because of certain theologies, there's been centuries of Christians who've had the posture of, the world doesn't matter, who cares, it's all gonna burn, who cares about injustice, who cares about poverty, who cares about healing bodies, who cares about... The poor and the sick and the lame and the enslaved or whatever, because we're just here to preach the

gospel and rescue as many people off a sinking ship as possible. That's antithetical to the message you see throughout the scriptures. And it's antithetical to the vision of the future that you see in Scripture,

[00:47:24] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And you see it, you hear it echoed in various strange kind of weird ways when it comes to care of the environment and this whole, you know, if you want to really light up some people, you just say the word global warming,

[00:47:39] **Skye Jethani:** Right.

[00:47:39] **Dr. Mark Turman:** no matter where you are, who you are, you just use that terminology and you can light people up.

Right. And depending upon their theology, they could go in a lot of different directions with that conversation. But this idea, it somewhat blows our mind to think okay, well, you know, a lot of people have body image problems and a lot of people have really serious health things. And they're like, I don't, I want a new body.

I don't want this one anymore. But the idea of, Hey, you are going to be a physical being and you're, you know, number one question that pastors always get when somebody dies, Am I gonna know my loved one in heaven when the world is, I know it today is not here. And we're in this new order of things, this restored or renewed reality.

Well, I know these people. I'm like, absolutely. That's what life at its essence is about relationship. That's why Jesus said the most important thing was to love God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself because it's, you know, it's all about relationship and that's gonna be in the context of a renewed and restored physical reality. And I love the way you brought this around, because this is kind of where I wanted us to land, which is why does this matter in terms of how we not only think, but how we live and act and engage with our world based on a right understanding, a more accurate scriptural understanding of heaven. Kind of tie a bow on it in that way

[00:49:10] **Skye Jethani:** this gets back to your excellent point about oneness. As I started out in the beginning, heaven is not the goal and centerpiece of our faith. Jesus is. And our call is to live in union with him, unity with him, which he has made possible through his work on the cross of redeeming us from our sin.

He has opened the way that we might live with him and the Father. So if that's the goal, is oneness with Jesus, then that means we are children of God, and to use some Pauline language

from the New Testament, we are citizens of heaven. Some people will throw that around and they'll have the attitude of, well if I'm a citizen of heaven, then earth is not my home, I'm just passing through.

And people because of our, you know, modern framework, we think when you're a citizen somewhere, like if I'm a citizen of the United States and if I go to England, I think of myself as a tourist there. I'm just here temporarily. I don't really care about, you know, improving England or voting a good government in the office or something like I'm just a tourist.

I'm here to take in the sights because I'm ultimately going to fly back across the pond back to the United States. That is not the way Paul it meant that we are citizens of heaven. We are not just passing through this earth before we get to heaven.

In the ancient world, to be a citizen of something, to be a citizen of Rome, for example, meant you were a colonizer. It meant that if you were a citizen of Rome, but you lived in Philippi, or if you're a citizen of Rome and you lived in Jerusalem, or you're a citizen of Rome and you live in Alexandria, it means it's your responsibility to take the values and practices and customs of Rome and embed them in Alexandria or Jerusalem or Philippi.

So when Paul says, you are now a citizen of heaven, you've been united with Jesus and you're a citizen of heaven. Our mission, our goal, our life is to reflect God's kingdom. Here on the earth to embed those qualities of kindness and justice and righteousness of meekness and peacemaking and reconciliation and forgiveness and mercy and hospitality. We are to take those heavenly kingdom values and make them true where we are on earth Because we are preparing for the day when heaven in its fullness is reconciled to earth.

And as I said earlier, everything that's not of heaven is purged away and everything that is of heaven is glorified and magnified on this earth. That's our mission now But if you think this earth doesn't matter if you think you're just a tourist passing through waiting to go home Why would you give your life and effort to making this world and our communities more like heaven? Why bother? Why polish the brass on the Titanic? That's not the message of the New Testament. We are now citizens of heaven, united with Jesus, and we want to see his kingdom embedded and cultivated here, now, in anticipation of its fullness in the day to come.

[00:52:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And the reign of this king, right? Which when seen in that light, as you just described it, Makes everybody's job and skill set and gifts valuable, right? I love the part of the book and we're about to run out of time, so we'll end here. I love the part of the book of, hey, we're going to do a lot of the things in heaven that we do here on earth.

That's one of the amazing things about Jesus, right? Is he did not only amazing things, but he did mundane things. I mean, he went to a wedding, which was a big celebration, right? Did his first miracle at a wedding. And then when he's resurrected, he's cooking breakfast for these guys that are out on the water.

It just

is

[00:52:44] **Skye Jethani:** don't, don't forget, he spent most of his time on earth just working as a carpenter.

[00:52:49] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah,

[00:52:49] **Skye Jethani:** He only spent about 10 percent of his time on earth actually in public ministry.

[00:52:53] **Dr. Mark Turman:** no and we need to reorder our mind that whatever table chair or other wooden thing that Jesus created when he was a carpenter with his dad and then beyond, he cared about that. And he was manifesting the culture of his kingdom in that environment. And if you're a carpenter and electrician, if you're a banker, if you're a teacher. No matter what you are, musician, that becomes your opportunity to embed these kingdom cultures focused on this king. In that environment

[00:53:27] **Skye Jethani:** That's right. You know, if we believe that this earth is just going to be destroyed and nothing other than the souls of the saved will be rescued from it, then nothing ultimately matters except preaching the gospel and ministry. Doesn't matter if you're a carpenter or a baker or an accountant, whatever, just doesn't matter.

And unfortunately, a lot of Christian communities communicate exactly that false doctrine. If this world will endure, if it will be redeemed, if everything that is done in and for Christ has lasting impact, then all of our work matters. Our vocations matter. And I mean, that's why Martin Luther, he was asked once, if you knew that Jesus was returning tomorrow, what would you do?

He said, I'd plant a tree. Because his vision of the future was not one of the destruction of the earth. It was one of the redemption of the earth. But we've so lost that in modern Christianity for various reasons we haven't gotten into. But we need to restore our biblical vision of the future, not our inherited cultural vision, which unfortunately is often very disconnected from the actual teachings of the apostles and Jesus.

[00:54:31] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Skye so good. Yeah, it's so good. This conversation should go. I got 20 more questions, but that everything we've been talking about folks and so much more is in this book very concise very accessible and a work that you need to ponder about heaven. This is Skye Jethani. The book is titled, What If Jesus Was Serious About Heaven?: A Visual Guide to Experiencing God's Kingdom Among Us. You can find that at all major booksellers. And I hope this conversation helps our folks to do just that, Skye. And again, just thank you for this work and for the conversation today. And just want to thank our audience for taking some time to listen to us.

It will transform the way you go about your day. It will transform the way you not only think about your future, but the way you think about what you do every day that is leading toward our future, which is so, so important for all of us as kingdom citizens who are on a path that we know where Jesus is taking us.

And that's so good. Skye, thank you again. I hope we can do some more conversation down the road. I want to thank our audience for listening. Please rate, review us, and as we always say, please share this with family and friends. We want it to be something that encourages, instructs, and equips them as well so that we can live fully as citizens of the kingdom and reflect as salt and light onto our Father and onto our Savior.

Thank you, and God bless you.