Episode 139 *Revelation for The Rest of Us* with Scott McKnight, Cody Matchett and David Capes

**Scott McKnight**

My name is Scot McKnight and I'm a professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary in Lisle, Illinois, just in the western suburbs of Chicago.

**Cody Matchett**

And my name is Cody Matchett. I am a PhD student in New Testament and a pastor from Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

**David Capes**

Dr. Scott McKnight. Cody, as well. Good to see you both today.

**Scott McKnight**

Good to see you.

**David Capes**

Thanks for being a part of our conversation. We’re going to be talking about a book that you guys have done together. And I'm always fascinated by how the process works, because I've done some books with other people. It's entitled *Revelation for the Rest of Us, A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple*. Interesting words. It’s published by Zondervan press, and it's a fairly recent publication. First, congratulations on the book. Let's talk a little bit about your collaboration. How did you guys come to collaborate on this book? Cody, let's start with you.

**David Capes**

Yeah, I, like many other students, came to Northern Seminary to work with Dr. McKnight. And upon my arrival, I had taken a few classes. And then Scott invited me to be part of this project with him. It was in the early stages at that time. And so, he invited me to be a part of it. And I of course, said yes, without knowing anything else about what the project would entail.

**David Capes**

You had read the book of Revelation. Right?

**Cody Matchett**

Right. I had.

**David Capes**

 Scott, tell me a little bit about your invitation to him.

**Scott McKnight**

Cody was my graduate assistant, actually. He was working with me and I think he was working with Vijay at the same time, or then started working with Vijay. Because he was an outstanding student that we had, and he could do Greek and Hebrew very well. And loved studying the Bible. As a TA, I was writing lectures for a class based on years of wanting to say something about the book of Revelation, and then I would pass stuff on to him. And then I taught the course. Cody taught some of it, but I sent the notes to him all the time. And I told him, I said, I think we've got a book here. So, I said, soon as the class is over, I'm gonna start writing or as soon as my lectures were prepared. I think by December 1, I was already writing, and I would pass it off to Cody. And then after a while, I'm not sure that we sent a proposal to Zondervan, apart from the whole manuscript, but I think maybe we did. They gave us a contract. And then we started writing and went back and forth the way co-authors do and Cody added this and then I would add this and he wrote some of the sidebars. And that way, I can always say, if someone disagrees, I can say Cody wrote that!

**David Capes**

I disavow any knowledge of that, right? I just I don't know how that ended up in the book! Well, it's a great book. Let me just say this. And you know, Beth Allison Barr said, this is the most powerful interpretation of Revelation, I have read. That is high praise. High praise indeed. And so let me ask this, Scott it sounds like you and I heard some of the same sermons and saw some of the same movies, like A Thief in the Night. And we were scared to death and read some of the same books at the time. But that was a very, what you guys call a speculative view of Revelation. Unpack that a little bit for us.

**Scott McKnight**

Well, David, I don't know if you had the experience I had. I remember as about a 10 or 11 year old, I was in my driveway. Running hurdles. My dad was a track coach. So, I was always doing stuff with the hurdles. And it was getting darker and darker. And my parents weren't home and my sisters weren't home and I thought the rapture occurred. I thought I was left behind way before Tim LaHaye used that expression. So, I grew up in that. But the question whether we had the same experiences, did you read Salem Kerbband's Guide to Survival

**David Capes**

No, I didn't. I didn't read that one.

**Scott McKnight**

He was Hal Lindsay before Hal Lindsay became Hal Lindsay. And he wrote this book on a guide to survive the tribulation if you didn't get raptured. And it was just sort of a graphic discussion of the whole book of Revelation and I bought it hook, line and sinker. My parents thought it was good. My youth pastor thought it was the best thing going. And then I had a kind of an awakening, illuminating experience, enlightenment in college. When I first encountered other interpretations of the book of Revelation, I think. By the time I got to seminary, I was no longer interested in the rapture, and the book of Revelation questioned like that. And it was my PhD work of reading through all the Jewish apocalypses that convinced me that that sort of reading of Revelation, which is so literal, fails, ultimately fails, miserably in the book of Revelation.

**David Capes**

Well, Cody, tell me a little bit about your experience starting off. And I don't know if this is true, it’s just an observation, is that when we're younger, we seem to get caught up into the eschatological stuff more. And then as we get older, we move away from that. It’s still important, but it's not as important as it used to be. Cody, what about your experience?

**Cody Matchett**

Yeah, I've noticed a bit of a generational divide and gap on this question. And Scott and I actually chatted about this quite frequently. I didn't grow up in the church. And so, you asked me if I've read the book of Revelation. Because when I first came to church, I was like, I don't know what that book’s about. But the way people talk about it can't be right. I mean, I was able to recognize that pretty early on. And so, I had the experience that I've noticed with a lot of my younger students now. Which is my students just don't want to read it at all. They have no interest in eschatology, because they know that the people who are speculating about, this plague is COVID-19. And this is a B 52 Bomber, which are ancient history now. And that sort of approach. They could recognize that that speculation approach, speculating with the sign at the time, is not the right way to read it. And so, for them, they would rather have a form of silence at this point. I don't know what that book’s about, but I don't really want to talk about it. And that was probably my experience for quite a while. I know that something's wrong. But I don't know the right way to read it. And so, then I sort of throw my hands in the air and say anything after those speeches to the churches from Jesus,-I don't know about that stuff. That would have been my former approach. And I see that in a lot of young students.

**David Capes**

And so, after chapter three, there's not really much to say. You guys describe four different kinds of perspectives. One is the preterist view, which says, basically, everything was written to, for, and about the first century, and maybe we can read it with profit, but it's really about the first century. And then there's a historic view which views revelation coming forth in the ages of the church or the period of the church. And then there's the idealist view. There are other views as well but where do you guys fall on that? Scott?

**Scott McKnight**

Well, the way I like to talk about those four views, is they're framed by the time of when this stuff is happening. Did it happen in the first century? Is it going to be futurist and happen in the future? Is it all the time, I think this confuses the book as an apocalypse. I don't think it's that predictive the way people talk about it. So, I call the views that we've articulated, a Theo-political hermeneutic. That it teaches us how to think about the politics of our world, in the categories of how God sees it. But I like to think that I'm a preterist, who sees the text as having a timelessness about it rather than an idealist because I think it was definitely written to seven churches in Western Asia Minor in the first century. And that Babylon is Rome, of the first century. So, it's really anchored in that time, but it has this sort of cosmic vision that transcends time as well. So, I'll say it is a timeliness. That it becomes a timelessness.

**David Capes**

That's a good way of saying it. If you read it as a speculative thing, futurist only, then the people who first received it are left scratching their heads. This means nothing to me, right? I have no clue what any of this means. But if you're able to see it as ciphers of what's happening in the Theo-political realms, or in the political realms, at least, there's a call to them for that. So, to read it well you say you've got to read it Theo-politically. And you've got to see God in part of that politics. I heard one time that politics participates in the modest dignity of the penultimate, which is a really interesting way of thinking about politics. I think I read it in *First Things*, but it's talking about the importance of politics, but it's always pin ultimate, to the to the ultimate, and it can only impart to us a kind of modest dignity. It can't impart to us any kind of long-term dignity. It's a beautiful statement. But as you think about the book of Revelation, does that ring true for you guys? Some statement like that. That politics participates in the modest dignity of the penultimate.

**Scott McKnight**

I think that's what Revelation is actually doing it's describing Rome as Babylon as a corruption. Giving a divine perspective on Rome, in order to understand that that sort of government has to go down, before justice can come, and then you will find a new Jerusalem, which sort of forms a utopia. It's not long enough to give us much vision of the utopia, or the passages aren't. But it sketches, the erasure of injustices in Babylon, in order to give the vision of New Jerusalem. So, it sounds like *First Things* and it sounds like a justification for participating in politics more than I would do. Yeah. But there is something really helpful about that statement,

**David Capes**

One of the things you talk about is how necessary government is. No matter what government we have, government are certainly necessary to human society. And yet governments are almost always prone to some kind of corruption that is deep and wide. But what I hear you saying is that we ought to look beyond that, and we ought not as Americans particularly, or Westerners, in general, to give too much credit to those who are our politicians. They can only do so much. And very often what they do is the wrong thing, or a selfish thing or a corrupt thing. Because they do something good, and then they turn around and do something that's not so good. Cody, does that ring true for you?

**Cody Matchett**

Yeah, I think it does. I think it's really easy for our eschatological hope, the hope of the New Jerusalem, the erasure of evil, these things that Scott mentioned, I think that for a lot of younger Christians, at least in my country, in my context, there is not only an abandonment of eschatology, but actually an abandonment of the church in this belief that politics will save. That actually, this kind of social amelioration project will bring about the New Jerusalem. And the sad irony at times is that sometimes what we're doing is we're deeply believing that we're building the new Jerusalem, but we're actually building the new iteration of Babylon, while we are celebrating the fall of a former iteration of Babylon. And we don't have the apocalyptic vision to see it for what it really is.

**Scott McKnight**

We should have written that up!

**David Capes**

I started to say that needs to be written up! You know, what we're seeing in the West is this acting out of the sayings you have to fight fire with fire. One side has to fight the other side with political drama. We're always being enjoined to participate in Babylon, in a sense, and do it the Babylonian way. But that seems to be the opposite of the vision, Scott, that I hear you guys portraying with Revelation. That, in fact, Babylon has got to be completely and totally dismantled?

**Scott McKnight**

Well, okay. The second half of the first century was the church's opportunity to explore how the church was going to relate to the powers of this age. So, let's just say from late 30s on, Paul begins to get into this situation in the diaspora. And at first, you know, they could just kind of meld into the local synagogue and just kind of carry on the synagogue’s relationship. But in the pages of the New Testament, I think we see four different visions of how to relate to the state. Jesus has a riddle.

Give to Caesar what Caesar and to God's what's God's. And some days, I think I know what that means. And other days I don't. But Paul has a Romans 13 that I think is accommodationist for a missional purpose, and probably a I think, a critique of zealots. But nonetheless, it's a sort of, just stay out of trouble, so that we can do what we're called to do. The pastorals are, let's go to First Peter. Peter says we need to become more activist in First Peter chapter 2:11-17. We need to be more activist in doing good in public in the public sector. I mean, he uses this Greek verb Agha thought boil quite often and is now informed and that’s public benevolence.

**David Capes**

To do good.

**Cody Matchett**

To practice the good

**Scott McKnight**

Yeah, but it's public benevolence and in Bruce Winters, which is really an excellent book, he gets into this. But then the pastorals, use the Greek word you Subbaiah, which is often translated godliness. But Chris Hockley otavi has made a really good case that this word means civilized piety or a socially respectable religious practice. And so here in the pastorals we've got, Paul, you know, probably still saying, I'm a little bit more advanced than Romans 13. Now, we're learning in the Western Asia Minor that we got to act like this. We got to conduct ourselves in ways that are acceptable and respectable. And then Revelation says, I've had it and we’ve got a burden to place down.

**David Capes**

Which came first right!

**Scott McKnight**

I think Revelation was later than anything else, in the New Testament. But I do think that John has realized that Babylon creep is going on in the church. And we got to sit hard on this. And when John chose to write an apocalypse, he chose in a sense to get himself in trouble with postmoderns today, because it's so either-or, it's so black and white. It's so, you're in or you're out. It's so much judgment of God. But you know, you can't really blame John, for doing what apocalypses do. What he chose, right? And apocalypse?

**David Capes**

That's right. Yeah. So that was the genre that he chose, and you've read enough to know exactly how those kinds of symbols work within the world of the apocalypse. If there's any particular takeaway from the book, what would you want it to be? Scott, we'll start with you. And then Cody. So as people read your book, what do they walk away with? Thinking now, doing now? Being now?

**Scott McKnight**

Yeah, I think it's very important. And I think we have quite a bit about this. It takes a while for us to want to get to where it is because we want to lay the groundwork for understanding how to read Revelation. But to me, John, is in a situation where they're powerless. And the powers are beginning to make their presence felt in the church. And John has sort of three strategies discern, Babylon, and Babylon creep in the church. The second thing is he calls them to be faithful allegiant witnesses to Jesus, which means speaking up and speaking out, confessing your faith, and it means putting your body on the line, it's an embodied witness. And the third thing, which I think is the most revolutionary dimension, is he teaches them to worship the lamb. And any act of worshipping the lamb as the King of King and Lord of lords, which is not from Handle. That's actually from the Bible. Any worship of Jesus, the lamb, as the Lord and King of Kings, is subversive. So, they learned to be dissidents when they worship the lamb. And here's what I would say, this is not so true of Canada, because it's a perfect country. For Cody.

**David Capes**

Yes, kinder and gentler.

**Scott McKnight**

Yeah, the more we worship the lamb, the more perceptive we will be of the presence of Babylon. And I believe the chaos in American churches today is a direct result of its failure to worship the lamb.

**David Capes**

But we're going to worship services. We're going through the motions, but the question is, are we truly worshiping when we get there? Is it not a show? Is it not a performance? Finally, I have to ask you about the Barmen Declaration. That is really such a powerful part of the book. Cody was that your idea or Scott was your idea?

**Cody Matchett**

It was Scott's idea first. Scott sent me an email one day and said what do you think of the Barmen Declaration? I think it might be a good place for us to land this. And I said, I'll read it.

**David Capes**

I've been a while since you had read that probably right.

**Cody Matchett**

Yeah, I was not quite as familiar with the Barmen Declaration at that moment in time. So, I read it in fact, this last time for a class. I had a class on Revelation this last winter with 30 students and this was for our last class. I had them read the Barmen Declaration. And they really actually appreciated it. But I'll let Scott discuss it.

**David Capes**

So, Scott, for those who don't know or can't remember or are younger, and don't know the Barmen Declaration. What was it exactly?

**Scott McKnight**

This is about Hitler's Germany and the rise of the German church de Deutsche Christen, which was a total conflation, mixture of the church with the state so much so that the state was beginning to overcome the church. And there's a lot of things to say about this. Carl Bart was the leading voice in the Barmen Declaration where some German pastors met together. And you know, it all has to be tied eventually to the Confessing Church. If you can here in in Germany, and Bonhoeffer, you know, was significant in that, especially for Americans who don't know that much about what happened. But they came together, and basically decided that they were going to announce that Jesus was Lord. And that Hitler was not, without getting themselves killed. You know, Bart was put on trial in Germany for his lack of commitment to Hitler. And because he didn't want to say, a Heil Hitler at the beginning of his class, and he gets before the judge, and he expounds the first two commandments. I thought, I feel like we're in this state in the United States. This was some people with Christian nationalism, with the partisanship of American Christians. They're either so Democrat, that the Republicans are demons, or they're so Republican that the Democrats are demons, that we have sold out to the political process. And I thought the barman declaration could provide an outline of the sorts of things we could talk about. And Cody helped with this. As you know, this wasn't just my text, with Cody adding some footnotes. So, he made contributions everywhere. And one of his advantages, he helped clarify prose at times where I made assumptions that Cody's thought nobody that I teach would have any idea what you're talking about.

**Cody Matchett**

Yea, about the Barmen Declaration, I make my joke to say Scott had sent me the email. And then it became this wonderful world within which we could write a chapter. It may sound maybe negative in some ways. But as Scott is articulating, kind of a society of people who are saying, there's this partisanship, there's division, there's compromise, there's danger. We're coming around this and we're signing it. And I think to come back, Scott made all these points about what do we want people to walk away with, when they read our book and think about Revelation. And we start with imagination. And I think that where this goes wrong. I have worked on this with students and with people in my churches. I think it begins with a total co-opting of the imagination. And once your imagination has been assaulted, and I'm working with Walter Brigham on this. And in his book *The prophetic Imagination*, once your ability to imagine has been so assaulted by the Royal Consciousness, as Bergman calls it, you can't conceptualize any other futures or any other ways of moving forward, other than what that Royal Consciousness wants you to think. And I think that the Barmen Declaration in and of itself invites us into these acts of prayer and worship and confession. To bring us back to as Scott said, worshipping the lamb, that we can discern the powers of Babylon, and our day.

**David Capes**

And that will certainly show the difference between those who are dissidents and disciples, and those who've been co-opted by Babylon. I really enjoyed the book. The title of the book is called *Revelation for the Rest of Us, A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple*. It’s published by Zondervan. It's a great book. It's a book you’ve got to sit with for a while to ponder it. But I think it really speaks to where we are right now in the West. So, thank you, guys, for being with us today on The Stone Chapel.

**Cody Matchett**

Thank you, David.

**Scott McKnight**

Thank you, David. We're honored to be with you.

**David Capes**

One of the things I love about doing these podcasts is that inevitably, I learned something, whether I wanted to or not, and today I did. I hope you enjoyed that as much as I did. For more info about our guests,check out our show notes. They're there for you. Subscribe to the podcast. We'd love to hear from you. Leave us a comment and rate us. You know the drill. We're on Apple and Google and Spotify and iHeartRadio and Stitcher and other places. Thanks for listening.