

00:00

Introduction

Well, hello and welcome to Ponder. We're having a conversation about the word of the Lord as it was preached on Sunday and as we encounter it in our everyday lives. My name is Jack, and my fellow Ponderers for today are Ben and Tristan.

How are you guys going?

What's up?

Doing well.

That's great to hear. This week, we are looking at Christ in Exodus, or Ben preached that last Sunday.

0:35

Sermon recap

Ben, how about we start with you giving us a little 60-second overview about what that sermon was about?

Yeah, sure. I guess it starts with three Greek words. The Greek word Exodus or Exodos means way out.

The book of our Bible called Exodus literally means in Greek way out. When you look at the story of Exodus, you really see that it is the journey out of slavery in Egypt, of the people of Israel, through the ten plagues.

And then they way into the promised land. But in the middle of that, those two pieces is the way through, the way through the wilderness.

So in the sermon, we looked at those three things, the way out, the way through and the way in, and the sense in which Christ fulfills them for us, and also the sense in which the season and the story of our life is reflected in the story of Exodus.

So that's Christ in Exodus in one minute.

1:27

What do the ten plagues mean?

That's awesome.

Let's start by talking about the way out. This sort of is the part of Exodus, I guess, we would all know with the Ten Plagues and Moses and that sort of thing.

I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about the Ten Plagues, and sort of why those specific things? Why blood in the Nile? Why frogs?

Why locusts?

It's interesting looking at the Ten Plagues. So you blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the firstborn.

Many scholars have pointed out that the Ten Plagues are directly lining up with one of the gods of the Egyptian pantheon. So one of the gods that Egypt worships.

And we really see this as not only God's deliverance of His people out of Egypt, but God's supremacy and victory over all other gods. That He is greater by far than all of the gods of Egypt.

And so these Ten Plagues is like this cosmic battle between Yahweh and the gods of Egypt. And we see who comes out on top.

And what makes this, I think, more interesting is that the first two of Ten Plagues, it says in the scripture that the Egyptian magicians did the same thing by their secret arts. So God turns the river Nile to blood, the Egyptians do the same thing.

It's kind of like point for point, God and the Egyptian gods are matching. The second happens the same. God brings frogs everywhere.

The Egyptians bring frogs everywhere. But from the third one on, the Egyptians stop being able to match. So already you're seeing God's supremacy over the gods of Egypt.

In another sense, I think we missed the fact that it would have sucked to be in Egypt during this time. Because your river is turning to blood. You've got frogs everywhere.

You've got gnats everywhere. For both Israel and Egypt, it's not until, I think it's the plague of, I can't remember which one it is, but towards the end, God starts to make a distinction between Israel and Egypt.

So that Israel don't experience the plagues and Egypt do. And so, it's just not a good time to live in Egypt.

But this is the cost of what it takes for God to redeem His people out of slavery, which I think over the course of these 10 plagues, you see the consequences kind of ramping up each time, culminating in the death of the firstborn, which is the 10th

plague. Kind of this insane picture of how deeply held in bondage the people of Israel were in Egypt and what it would take for God to redeem His people from slavery. And that's the kind of the cost of the 10 plagues. Here's a thought.

3:54

Have we forgotten the cost of salvation?

Do you think when we read this passage today and we look at the plagues and like what you said the weightiness of that cost and what it takes to redeem people or people, like do you think we have lost that in today's culture where it's like, yes, we

Yeah, I think no doubt we have, especially for those who have been a Christian for a long time.

You know, we were coming up to Easter again and on Good Friday, we retell the story of Jesus' crucifixion and Easter Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection. And if you've been a Christian for a while, it's like, I know this story.

I could tell it with, you know, my eyes shut. I could tell it from memory.

It's like broken, that broken record.

But this is the story of our salvation, of what God did to redeem us from our bondage to sin.

And so I think we have to keep coming back with fresh eyes, even praying for fresh eyes that we would, in a deeper and deeper and deeper way, appreciate what Jesus did for us on the cross.

5:05

What does slavery to sin mean?

Let me jump on that.

So in the sermon, you talked about how, if you're living in Egypt, Jesus is able to bring you out. And obviously, not talking about the country of Egypt, but about this spiritual Egypt that keeps you enslaved.

What does that actually look like in terms, what do you think are the oppressive forces that are keeping people in slavery? And yeah, what do you observe that being in our lives today?

Yeah, Jesus says in John 8, 36, or 34 to 36, that anyone who sins is a slave to sin, which is an interesting phrase, because you'd think that anyone who sins is just a person who sins. They've done one action.

But Jesus says, no, if you sin, you're a slave to sin. He's talking about sin as a power. And before Christ, all of us are born into a world that is under the power of sin.

And that means as many different things as human beings can invent of ways of dishonoring God with our lives.

In terms of bondage to sin, I often think of addiction or patterns of behavior that we're stuck in, that we can't seem to find our way out of on our own, just routine practices that are deforming us against the purposes of God.

Jesus says that if you sin, you're under the power of sin, and you're stuck in slavery to it.

6:39

What does freedom from sin mean?

And so what does it look like, you know, like real practical for someone to be released from that?

Like if you walk us through, I guess, maybe a story you've heard or something you've seen of the way that that sort of oppression or that slavery can be broken through Jesus or through the gospel.

Well, just to address the second part of the question first, the conclusion of that passage in John 8, 34 to 36, Jesus says, if the sun sets you free, you will be free indeed.

And that is the good news, that we are free indeed, those of us who trust in the sun. This is not my story, but I've heard of many stories of people who were deeply in slavery to substance addiction of any of the kinds that you would think.

And this, even on a biological, like a neurochemical level, addiction is not an easy thing to break. We have withdrawal symptoms, we keep needing to go back because we become dependent on a substance for our well-being.

I've heard stories of people coming to Christ, and that slavery is broken in an instant, in a supernatural way that doesn't make sense, that he has just redeemed.

I met a guy a couple of months ago at church who was a young guy who was, he told me that he was an alcoholic, and then he came to faith, and then the alcohol was just gone.

He just didn't drink anymore, and he found it the easiest thing in the world to do. So that's kind of what the Gospel does. It sets us free and free indeed from slavery to sin.

Now, a lot of stories are not quite that dramatic, and it seems like God wants to invite us to walk with him over a bit more time as he teaches us what it means to live in the freedom of the Gospel.

But certainly the God we serve and we live with is the one who breaks chains, and whether he breaks them in a moment or over a process where he invites us to partake with his kind of chain breaking work, he is still the one who sets us free and makes

Yeah.

And I think like when we think about slavery and slavery to sin, like we often throw around this term respectable sins, like in terms of not that you respect it in an admirable way, but you respect it in a way where there's serious transgressions

behind it. And I think if we have this loose concept of what sin is, and we lose the power of it, it just draws us so much further away to a point where we might not even understand the depth and the meaning of what redemption is.

And I feel there is a real respect to Tristan in that way, where there's a serious acknowledgement that needs to happen through the spirit of what you're actually doing, the weightiness of it.

And in today's context, at least from a youth perspective, it's social media. It can be used in a great way, but also in a very wrong way.

Yeah, that is interesting.

9:41

How to know you're in slavery to sin

I keep going back to this passage in John 8, 34 to 36. What happens just before Jesus says his words there is the Jews that he's talking to say, we've never been slaves of anyone. And Jesus says, if you sin, you're in slavery to sin.

But that idea that we think that we're not in slavery to anything. We think that we're totally rational, autonomous human beings who make decisions to check social media to have another drink, to do whatever.

And there is a truth in that, that it's a conscious decision. But it's also at a deeper level that we are, we have some sense of slavery to these actions. And the way you can tell is if you try and stop.

Yeah. If you try and stop going on your phone, social media, whatever it is, and you find it hard, you realize that this, not necessarily a sin, but this thing has more of a grip on my soul than I think it does.

And so I love the spiritual disciplines that Jesus invites us to, like fasting. Food is a good thing. God made food.

He made the body for food and food for the body. But fasting is this practice where we intentionally stop engaging with a good thing in order to reorient and reform our hearts' desire for that thing and put them in proper relationship to each other.

But you don't know if food, you don't know if you're in bondage to food in some kind of way until you stop. And then the condition of our heart becomes clear.

It's like that classic gag line they put in comedies of someone who's addicted, I can quit whenever I want. And it's a very ironic line because they say that, but then they don't actually quit. There's no evidence of that.

Yeah, awesome.

11:27

How do you know if you're in a wilderness season?

I want to move to The Way Through. And this is about Israel being brought through the wilderness. And you talked a lot about how God never wastes the wilderness.

Now, there'll be, I assume people who are going through a season of wilderness listening to this, I feel like I've been in a season of wilderness for a while. Very easy to say that.

It was quite the blanket statement.

Yeah, very easy to say that. But it doesn't always feel like it helps when you're actually in a wilderness zone. I mean, I, you know, you know that.

But what would you say are tips for getting through the wilderness?

And before that, like even, what are some ways we can recognize that this is a wilderness?

Oh, great. Yeah.

Well, I'll take the second one first then. I think this theme of the wilderness is such a massive theme in Israel's story. And certainly, it's, it extends well beyond Exodus to the rest of the Torah.

They're still in the wilderness, this enormous theme.

And the main theme of the wilderness, as I read it, is this sense of stripping away both the good and the bad, that yes, slavery is gone, praise God, but also the food and the shelter and the comfort of Egypt is gone.

God strips away things from us in the wilderness season in order to teach us something.

And so, if you're in a season that's maybe between two places, you've come out of one thing, you're waiting to go into another, you're asking, where is God in the midst of this season?

You feel like a lot of what you used to find comforting has been stripped away. That could be a sign that you're in a wilderness season.

Yeah. What would you say to those who are going through that wilderness and have that attitude?

13:17

How do you make it through the wilderness?

I don't think there's, there's not an easy answer.

If there was an easy answer, it wouldn't be the wilderness, because the wilderness is defined by this questioning of where is God. I think we would be wise to look to Jesus and what He did in the wilderness.

You know, the Gospels record that Jesus, after He was baptized, went straight into the wilderness for 40 days, where He fasted the whole time and was tempted by the devil. So this is an intense wilderness experience.

And we see Jesus in the wilderness depending on scripture, on words, not His own words, but He's relying on somebody else's word to speak over Him.

I think part of what happens in the wilderness is we can't generate our own faith and our own enthusiasm from inside. And so we come to learn to trust something outside of us, and that is the Word of God.

And that is what God has said is true, even when it doesn't seem to be true to...

Again, it sounds so easy, and it's so hard in that season, but to hold on to what God has said and to trust that He is faithful, to look back at your life and to see the faithfulness of God and to know that that is evidence that He will continue to

be faithful in the future. And one day, by God's grace, I hope you look back and realize that God used that wilderness to do something in and through you.

And for me, it's like, I always picture this image of a footpath, and I always go back to, in my mind, I have this image of a safari park in Africa, where all the animals have these wild footpaths that they follow on. And it's not different routes.

It's one or maybe three, one to three footpaths where it leads to water. And when you're tracking animals, it's where's the footpaths going. There'll always be water there.

But then once you go off that path, you're on your own. Like it's truly a surreal thing. Once you leave the path, you physically have to go through a lot of things to get back on that path.

And you can also link it to Pilgrim's Progress where it's Christian trying to come back to that path and what God is leading him to do.

That's interesting. That kind of reflects Israel's experience in the wilderness that they were constantly grumbling and wanting to turn back, go back to Egypt, back to the way things came.

But God was leading them through, kind of like relating to your image of leaving the path that God is forging in the midst of the wilderness, to do our own thing or to try and cut it short our own way.

Or to use another illustration, that kind of sense of when the sun sets, and that's sort of a metaphor for one season of life ending, and you're kind of in this dark night of the soul, as St. John of the Cross called it.

Option one is to keep chasing the sun the way that it's set, and you'll never catch it. Or option two is to turn around and face the darkness and walk into the darkness with God and wait for the sun to rise on the other side.

And that's actually the way to get through the night. Not chasing the sunset, but turning around toward the sunrise and waiting for God to kind of bring a new day into your life.

Amen.

16:32

What content didn't make the final sermon?

All right, let's move to our cutting room floor segment. So what's some content that you looked at in preparation for the sermon that didn't make the cut, but that you think is really cool or, yeah, you'd like to talk about?

I mean, so much stuff, like this Christ in Scripture project is insane that we're trying to cover an entire book of the Bible in about half an hour. Exodus is such an insane book with so many cool things, you couldn't possibly cover everything.

The main thing which I wish we could have talked about is that central scene in Exodus sort of three and four where God appears to Moses in the burning bush and he reveals his name, Yahweh, the God I am, the ground of being itself.

And as God reveals himself to Yahweh, he says, this is my name that you'll call me forever from generation to generation, this revelation of the character of God. I wish we could have delved into that idea of who God has revealed himself to be.

And the fact that the story of the Exodus is kind of the story which matches on to the name Yahweh. That Yahweh is, who is he? He is the God who is greater than all the gods of Egypt.

He's the God who leads his people out of slavery, parts the Red Sea, leads them through the wilderness, and then reveals himself on Mount Sinai in glory.

So that's the second half of Exodus, is that picture of God's glory coming down from heaven on to the mountain and meeting with Moses, and God is on his way to dwelling in his among his people.

The second thing that which hit the cutting room floor is the Ten Commandments. This is such a central part of the Torah, kind of the summary, the condensing of 613 commands down to 10 commands.

We didn't talk about that at all, but the Ten Commandments are so crucial.

18:22

What is the role of the Ten Commandments today?

I want to ask you guys, what do you think is the role of the Ten Commandments in our life today? What function do they have?

Well, I think they show us how to live in accordance with the way God wants us to live and how to be the sort of people that God wants us to be. Obviously, there's a lot more teaching that gets sort of laid on to them.

To be faithful to God is to be obedient to him. I think that they show you how to do that.

Yeah, I find it as like a framework where it's like having a travel guide where you're on this journey, you're on this path, and this is the rules of the trip beforehand.

And sometimes we don't follow it to the letter, to what each command is, even though we should try to. But that just re-emphasizes why we need the guide in this whole story. So I always find it as rules for the trip ahead.

It's interesting that the Ten Commandments, often in kind of academic world, is not called the Ten Commandments, it's called the Decalogue, which means ten words.

Yeah.

Because it's ten words, more than ten words, but ten kind of phrases in Exodus 20.

But often, when you talk about the Decalogue, you realize that the Ten Commandments doesn't start with the command, it starts with, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery, therefore have no other God before me.

And so we miss this fact that God doesn't start with the command, and then once we have kept the command, He will save us by grace. We start with salvation by grace, that He is the God who brings us out of Egypt.

Now, because God has saved us by grace through faith, in Christ, obviously, most fully, because we have been saved, therefore walk in obedience to me. I think it's crucial that in Exodus, we get the order of those two things right.

He's the God who saves, and then out of salvation comes the expectation that we should be holy as God is holy.

Do you think there's a real presence of it?

20:35

Do we talk about the Ten Commandments enough?

Like, is it spoken about enough if we're not looking outside of doing a Christ in Scripture project? It's like, are we, like, I don't know, for you two, are you cognizant of the Ten Commandments in daily life?

Like, to a point where there's a serious weight behind it?

Certainly not as much as I should be. There's that idea that the Ten Commandments are on the wall of the Supreme Court in the United States.

I think if every single person in the world were to fully keep the Ten Commandments, 90% of our world would be right. Don't murder, honor your father and mother, keep the Sabbath, have no other God.

If we keep the Ten Commandments, we are 90% of the way toward a better world.

And so, that's why, you know, the 613 commands get synthesized to ten, and then Jesus takes those ten and synthesizes that to two, love God and love others, which is the summary of the ten, which is the summary of the 613.

And so, I think, you take those two, love God, love others, and you want a bit more detail, then you come to the ten, you know, and then you look at them, and then you want more detail on that, especially in an ancient Israelite context, and then you

So, you just said that if the whole world followed the Ten Commandments, you know, we'd be a much better world.

21:55

Should the Ten Commandments be in classrooms?

You may or may not be aware that in the moment in the US., there are several states trying to make it law to have the Ten Commandments put in classrooms. What do you think about that? What are your thoughts on that?

I know it is sort of straying a little bit from our topic area, but I thought it was relevant, given what you've just said.

I would come back again to to the Ten Commandments themselves. The first of the ten is not, have no other God before me, it's I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt.

Therefore, and so when we take the Ten Commandments, and if you ever see the Ten Commandments where the first word is, have no other God before me, you're not looking at the Ten Commandments, you're looking at the half the Ten Commandments.

Because the Ten Commandments start with the nature of who God is, as the God who has saved us and walks in relationship with us. And so I don't understand the political side of whether we should do that in schools or not.

Apart from to say that if you start with the command on what we must do, you're getting the Ten Commandments wrong. It has to start with the nature of who God is and the fact that He saved us, that we might have relationship with Him.

And out of that relationship, which is culminating in Christ, then we come and walk in obedience.

Yeah, so rather starting with a you must or a strict instruction, it starts with invitation. Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, that's great. I had another question about the Ten Commandments.

23:37

Should we practice Sabbath?

So in terms of daily life, some of the Ten Commandments, pretty common sense, right? Don't murder, don't steal. Things like don't commit adultery, right?

Most people, we would consider those pretty extreme crimes, and most people would be sort of clear of those. There are a couple of them though that are a little bit more sort of commonplace.

I wanted to ask you about the command to keep the Sabbath, which I think is probably the one that people maybe think about the least. Do we do Sabbath enough? Do we do it right?

How does that look in a modern context where people have workplaces that may require them to work on weekends or have sort of odd hours? How would you approach something like the Sabbath, which seems to really interrupt people's lives in a sense?

Well, that's another tricky question.

The first of several thoughts is that our modern notion of the weekend is a byproduct of the Sabbath law that, I mean, why should it make sense that we should not work all the time in the post-industrial revolution world?

But it was this sense that God commands us to rest that is the heartbeat behind Sabbath. I also think in Exodus 20 it says, honor, remember the Sabbath, honor it, keep it holy, because in six days God created the world and on the seventh he rested.

So the logic of the Sabbath command is creation. Back to the very start of the entire Bible, that's the reason why we should rest. And so it's a complex question about whether all businesses should shut down.

I don't know how the Sabbath works out at a national kind of cultural level. But certainly this invitation to rest is core to the way of Jesus.

And let me try to thresh out what my thought pattern is. It's like in terms of the Sabbath and looking at just what society sees as a seven day week, where Sunday is like your day of rest. It's like, I don't know, it shouldn't be an interruption.

I feel it's more of like what we spoke about earlier in terms of going into that day with a restoration in mind. Like the way I try to explain it, if someone asks me, is how did you prioritize your week?

And in different contexts, it could be, I prioritize it around work. I prioritize it around social events.

And I think a believer should have at least the thought pattern of, okay, let me try to prioritize what my life is around the church and what that is doing.

And in our context, it's about having a Wednesday life hub or a Bible study where it's at the midpoint of your week. And your week can either go both ways from that point.

It can either go worse and you come to life hub with the attitude of, oh, bummer, like, this isn't, it's such a bad week. But then you can come out of that saying, oh, I feel restored. I just met up with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

And you go into the rest of your week with that encouragement. And Sunday, I feel, plays the same role.

And in terms of the rules of not working and like shutting down things, I think it affects differently in different context, like depending on what it is. And that's what makes it tricky.

Like some things are needed on a Sunday to do, like uni students need to finish an assignment on Sunday to submit it Monday morning. So there's a real, it depends on, I think, on your conviction on it.

I don't think there's a real black and white answer to it.

And that's why Jesus said, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

27:47

What is Sabbath and what does it do to us?

He kind of lifts off our shoulders the burden of rest, and he gives us the gift of rest. At the same time, I came across this quote the other day that Sabbath breaks down our, has this, treasured illusion of indispensability.

Whoa, whoa, whoa, okay, break that down for us.

Sabbath breaks down our treasured illusions of indispensability, that we think that we are so important. We think that the world will fall apart if we don't work, if we don't get the assignment in, if we don't show up again.

But if this is an illusion, we are not indispensable to the functioning of the world. God made this world, and it will keep spinning whether we work or not.

And so in Sabbath, we teach ourselves that work is a good thing, but rest is also a good thing. And we break this illusion of our indispensable and come to be creatures who rest in the presence of God.

I think that's such an awesome invitation for our time in a world that is pushing for more and more and more productivity, trying to squeeze more out of every human being.

To actually one day a week or however you practice Sabbath, because the Sabbath is made for man, not the other way around.

To let go of work and to trust that God is the one who brings fruit out of anything and we can do more in our rest than we could do in our work apart from Him.

Yeah, amen. Okay, I got one last question for these Ten Commandments before we finish up.

29:07

What does it mean to not bear God's name in vain?

You were talking about the burning bush and the revelation of the name, Yahweh, and God's character is being a big theme. One of the Ten Commandments is not to take God's name in vain.

It's a bit of a tricky command, I think, for some of us when we approach it. What does it mean? I know when I was growing up, it meant not saying phrases like, oh my God, or not using Jesus as a method of frustration.

I've heard that interpretation of it. I know that later in Jewish circles, they stopped saying the name of Yahweh because they didn't want to take it in vain. That's why we get Lord as the translation in our Bibles.

What's going on there? Should we be avoiding saying Yahweh? What does it mean to not take the Lord's name in vain?

Another tricky question.

The first thing I would say is, name is far more than the number of letters that identify you in contrast to another person. To bear the name of something is to act in accordance with that person's character.

So when we say things in Jesus' name, we don't mean J-E-S-U-S. We mean in the character, the likeness, the will of Jesus. That's what it means to do things in Jesus' name.

So bearing the name of God is to live in relationship with Him and reflect Him to the nations.

And so my reading of this command is not primarily that it's about the words that we say and not saying certain four-letter words or the five-letter name of Jesus, but it's about not bearing the character of God in a way that is unfaithful to who He

really is. Which comes back to this image that Israel are called to be a light to the nations, that everyone looks at the people of Israel and they see embodied in human form the character of the God that Israel walk with.

And so for Israel to not bear the name of God in vain means for them to faithfully reflect that God to the nations. Such that when the nations look at Israel, they say, oh, this is what your God is like. He is holy.

You are holy because he is holy.

Yeah, for my perspective in terms of using the Lord's name in vain, I grew up in a very traditional sense where that term of like my God or like Christ, it had such a term of reverence behind it that you were almost fearful from the older people in

your family and you used it out of context. That's why you wouldn't say it. So I think that was helpful to grow up with the attitude that there's a real reverence behind the name.

And especially like what you were saying, doing something in his name, there's a real respect behind that.

And yeah, that's always been my, like why I refrain from saying it just from my own personal convictions, because if I use it lucidly, it's, yeah, it's just, it won't sit well with me, right?

Can I say something coming out of that? I had a realization last year that I found myself saying, holy cow, when I would like, something's incredible, wow, holy cow. And eventually I had this deep conviction of what on earth am I saying?

Exodus 32 is the story of the golden calf that the people of Israel turn away from God and worship a cow. And so this word, I don't know the etymological origins of the phrase holy cow.

But when I say it, I'm like, I do not want to be referring to that story. And so I made a decision to not say holy cow anymore. But it's also this sense that it profanes the word holy.

You know, Revelation has this picture of God as the, it says, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.

And I started getting to the point where I would hear those words and I would think, holy, holy, oh yeah, that's the word I say when I stub my toe, holy cow, yeah, holy God, holy cow, same thing.

This is very convicting for me that I should not misuse the word holy, but the word holy is set apart for reference to the one who is worthy of that word. I'm not using that word anymore to describe an incredibly surprising situation.

So it sounds like where we've landed is that to carry the name of God or to bear the name of God doesn't necessarily mean just our words, it means our representation. That said, there's a certain reverence that we should carry the name of God with.

So a little bit of both hand there. All right, well, I'd like to thank you guys for coming on the pod today. Thank you all for listening.

I hope you have a very blessed week and we will be back next week looking at Leviticus.