

00:00

Introduction

Well, hello and welcome to Ponder. We're having a conversation about the word of the Lord as it was preached to us on Sundays and as we encounter it in our everyday lives. My name is Jack.

My fellow Ponderers for today are Tristan, Ben and Jono. How are you guys going today?

Hello, good, going well.

Awesome, awesome. So this week, we were looking at Christ in Numbers. Jono gave the sermon on Sunday.

0:36

Sermon recap

Jono, I wonder if you could give us just a quick recap of or a little summary of what that sermon was about.

Yeah, sure. It's a challenge to try to preach the whole book of Numbers in one go. It's got so much in it.

It touches on what you were preaching on about Leviticus, festivals, feasts, all sorts of odd purity issues.

So, my aim was to look at the whole book as a story, then see, look for Christ in the story, which is the big series we're in, Christ in Scripture, and then ask the practical question of, well, what does this story mean for us?

And so, we had points like requirements for relationship, which was the first 10 chapters, and then...

Consequences for contumacy.

Yes, exactly. And then, salvation for sinners, the looking up at the snake and what that means for us, and then, the whole idea of blessings.

1:34

Why is God so angry in Numbers?

So, a couple of questions on looking at numbers.

You talk about consequences for, what was the word, contu...

Contumacy.

Which means rebellious disobedience. Yeah, exactly. It's a good word, contumacy.

Contumacy.

One of the things someone I was talking to said was that God seems quite emotionally reactive in Numbers. Yeah, so that's a good point. Like, he gets angry, you know, when people do things.

That's the one that I think stands out most to us. What are we to make of this sort of emotional reactions of God?

I've been teaching this stuff for a long time. It's hard to actually really understand. Tim Keller has a great teaching on the need for anger, and that without anger, you probably haven't loved to the depth of what love should demand of us.

And Dallas Willard says, God probably can't trust most of us with anger. So, don't get angry if you can help it.

But he can be trusted with anger, and he's slow to anger, but he is so passionately filled with love for his people that the work of sin drives him to anger. And also with Lazarus, you know, Jesus is angry.

He says he's disturbed and angry at death and sin when he stands outside the tomb. And I feel like there's a bit of that going on.

The God's just like, whoa, Genesis, he's angry that he even created, you know, I think he's just got a passion against, a holy passion against the effects of sin.

Absolutely. And I wonder if also, I mean, we're using human emotional terms to apply to God, and this is a God who so much, these are just our best, our best attempt to describe how God is responding.

I mean, we can't actually know when it says he's angry, what that actually is to him, he's so much higher than us.

3:46

Why can't Moses enter the Promised Land?

Sort of following on from that, someone was asking, feels a little bit harsh for Moses to be denied to enter the Promised Land after just that one mistake. Any thoughts on that?

I can't remember the exact wording, but the higher the intimacy, the higher the responsibility, is often a way of describing our relationship with God, but the more revelation, the New Testament says, teachers will be held to a higher standard.

I think it's basically that, isn't it? Like Numbers goes out of its way in Exodus to say, no one has walked as closely with God as this bloke.

And when you think God listened to his pleas, his necessary pleas for the people, it's teaching us that he does ask a lot once he has revealed himself to his people. But it's shocking. Yeah, it's a shocking judgment.

Another angle is, we've been talking a lot about the centrality of story in the Bible.

It's part of the story that Moses doesn't get to enter the Promised Land. And so the calling of God on his life was to bring God's people out of Egypt. Like the name Moses means to draw out, and Moses drew out the people from Israel.

But God's calling on Moses was not to lead them into the Promised Land. So Moses, his story finished, and then the mantle passes to Joshua, and the name Joshua means God saves, and God saves his people as he leads them into the Promised Land.

Absolutely.

5:30

What's up with the bronze snake?

Sort of last question, looking purely at the text. You mentioned it in the sermon, this idea of the bronze snake.

It feels quite weird that this is one of the few times God is using some sort of physical sign, and it's of a snake, which sort of represents sin. And you touched on how that lays on to Jesus a bit, but it does feel a bit weird.

It feels a bit sort of idly. Can we talk a little bit more about that?

I'm sure Tim Mackey would have some incredible insight on the Bible Project podcast. I think Jesus very clearly so explicitly connects it to himself in John 3, that I don't think we could read numbers without going to John 3 very quickly.

Jesus says, just as the snake was lifted up, so the son of man must be lifted up.

So almost this image that you often see in the Torah of what they call anthropomorphisms, which is God in the human form, which in a way points us forward to the person of Jesus who is the fullness of God in human form.

In the same way, it's like this weird snake on a pole is a very clear pointer to the son of man who will be lifted up on a cross to give life to anyone who looks at him.

And without the understanding of God on a cross reconciling the world to himself doesn't make a lot of sense.

So if we don't bring the revelation of Christ and the gospel and his words from John 3 back into Numbers, you have exactly what the people said to you last night. It's confusing. It's also indicative of Numbers being so barbaric.

Like God is connecting with his people in that quite early Old Testament life. Like the woman who in Numbers 5, the water she has to drink and if it's bitter, her worm will miscarry and it's like, sort of seems like magic. It's in that genre almost.

I was saying to Ben before we started, it feels like someone else has written the Book of Numbers, because it's just jarring some of the things that are in it. But it's God's word and it only makes sense literally from Jesus' words.

And Galatians 3.13, because you see that he's hung on the pole.

8:00

What do we do with hard parts of the Bible?

That brings up something for me that you mentioned in the sermon.

When we come to hard parts of scripture, option one is to go, that's weird, let me go back to Psalm 23 and I'll just camp out in Psalm 23.

Or option two is to stick with it and to ask good questions and to seek good answers, but also to think, what is God showing me in this passage? Am I running from this because it touches too close to home?

Does God want to convict me and form me more in the image of His Son through this passage?

And now that is sort of hard to do with some stories, but that instinct to allow scripture to be the Word of God to me right now, speaking to my circumstance, I think is really helpful and important.

It's incredibly powerfully connected to the meta story of sin. A snake biting the heel of the seed of the woman, and someone taking that snake's curse and the human curse on them lifted up.

I mean, it's just as meta as you can get, isn't it, about sin and salvation. That's why in the point I said, there is salvation for sinners. It sort of lifts like communion or something, you know, it's just this moment in the story that's like, what?

And then when you squint your eyes and go, oh, it's big, it's just a big moment, this bronze snake being lifted up. Takes you back to Genesis, takes you to Revelation, the serpent being the dragon, you know, they're both reptiles, sort of thing.

There's a connection, I think.

Absolutely. Yeah, and very much like you said, in the sermon, you used the analogy of Jesus as the sun, not just that we see the sun, but by it, everything else is illuminated. That's what that makes me think of.

9:56

How do Israel's, Christ's, and our story relate?

Moving a little bit to some of the more application-based questions, you used this structure in the sermon of Israel's story, Christ in the story, and our story.

And something someone was saying is that sometimes it feels like these are three separate stories or three sort of compartments. How do we sort of bring them all together?

I would say they are three separate stories. We have to let them be three separate stories, but it's sort of welcome to the Bible 101, that the Bible re-interprets itself and remixes itself.

You look at the Book of Hebrews, it's constantly pointing back to the Book of Numbers and applying that story, the waters, the testing at Meribah, the fact that you grumbled against God. It's applying that story for a new context.

The way the Bible works is by events happening and then later events reflecting on those former events and recasting them in new light.

And then the whole story leads to Christ who shines back to this image of the sun, who shines the light on the entire scripture.

So we have to let the stories be separate stories, but then to do what God invites us to do, which is to hold the stories together. And I think that's what the sermon did, is let this text speak on its own. What is the story of Numbers?

How does the light of the S-O-N illuminate this story? And then how does that speak to us today?

Very good.

11:21

Are there consequences for our sin?

Something that you raised, Jono, in the sermon is this question of are there consequences for sin?

And you talked about it being more descriptive rather than proscriptive in that. You make a foolish or rebellious choice, and there are consequences for that. I want to dig into that question a little bit more.

Are there any times where God actually, actively brings about consequences for sin? Or is it always descriptive?

Yeah. Well, definitely, as we were just talking about Hebrews, Hebrews says he disciplines his sons. So the New Testament does say there is a proscriptive, active discipline.

But is the discipline the same as this idea of numbers with fearsome judgements that often involve death? I feel like there's probably a difference. Plenty of scriptures, God cannot be mocked, Galatians.

You will reap what you sow. I feel like that's probably quite descriptive as well.

Dallas Willard says that God has made this world in such a way that sin bears its own consequence. He says it in a much more eloquent way.

God has designed this world in such a way that sin bears natural consequences that should teach us not to go there again. So think about the Ten Commandments. Do not murder is Commandment 6.

And it's sort of self-evidently helpful, that commandment, because when you murder, it tears communities and lives apart. When you commit adultery, it tears families apart.

And so God has ordained that there are, in this world that He created, natural, descriptive consequences for our rebellion against Him. He doesn't have to actively tip His hand against us to punish us for that sin.

Now, there's a place for the discipline of the Lord. But He has created such a world where sin has consequences and righteousness has consequences. That idea of a man reaping what he sows.

If you sow to the spirit, Galatians says, you will reap life. But if you sow to the flesh, you will reap destruction.

13:26

How do we bear gracefully the consequences of our past rebellion?

Sort of following on from that, how do we bear gracefully the consequences of our past rebellion?

Maybe I've dissipated God in some way, I've sinned in some way, and as we've described, there are consequences for that. If it's descriptive, some of those consequences are still going to be around. How do we deal with that gracefully?

I think it probably for me goes, takes me to Romans 5, 1-5.

Suffering produces perseverance and then character, hope, in the context of love.

There is a lot to be learned about the Christian faith and the way of the Master by suffering, and in a generic, a general sense, sin causes suffering, and suffering is part of life.

The thorn in the flesh stuff of Paul, we don't know what that is, but it could easily be sin. It could easily be the consequences of his remorse and shame of killing so many people.

We don't know what it is, but I think God in His incredibly gracious way turns even the consequences of our sin into powerful soil of change and fruit. You need a really strong understanding of grace.

Yes, like so much in Christianity, we take the truth spoken over us in Christ and we run with it. And we hope for the best. We genuinely do.

We hope for God's best for us. He allows pain and suffering to be part of the process of us becoming Christ-like.

And I've seen this example in a lot of, like, some of my previous friendships, where they are at a point where they hold themselves to such a standard of, like, what scripture is saying, that they, it's like, it takes a long time to get to that place

where you have to really understand you're never going to meet that standard by yourself. And so they're following scripture to such a letter where they are depressed and they are, like, feeling so down about themselves.

And then when you try and explain to them, oh, there's this different side of the story, like that's why you need Christ, that's why we need the Spirit to acknowledge those sins within us, those mistakes, then only once we acknowledge it by the

Got two more questions I want to get to.

16:18

How can we not forget God the way Israel did?

First of all, in Numbers, there's this sort of cycle of, you pointed out four vignettes of rebellion. The Israelites seem to constantly forget.

They seem to somehow forget what God's done for them, and then they keep grumbling and forget his provision. I feel like a lot of us in different ways can be very forgetful of what God's done for us in our lives.

Do you have any like practical tips of how can we be less forgetful of God in our everyday lives?

Oh, it's a great question. I mean, memory is so important for life, isn't it? I think the answer for holiness is about habit and holy habits, as we might call them sometimes, produced through repetition.

Character is the sum of our habits, and so those habits become who we are. Even though our memory can be bad, you can overcome a bad memory by good habits, because you don't have to think about what I meant to do, you're just doing it.

That's, yeah, it is something really powerful. The life we live is not something separated from our body.

It's just our soul is, we are a soul, we don't have a soul, we are a living soul that includes all the factors of humanity, all the parts of humanity and body is part of it.

Another cool angle on this question is the difference between us and the wilderness generation in Numbers.

In reading the Torah as part of this series, I've noticed a few times it says the Spirit of the Lord came on a person, but it's always temporary. The Spirit of God comes on one person and then it leaves.

And there's this verse in Numbers 11 verse 29 where Moses says, I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them.

He's kind of looking forward to this time when one day God will pour out His Spirit on all people. And so we live in some ways a life that is reminiscent of the wilderness generation that forgets God.

But we also have the Holy Spirit in us, living in us that they didn't have. The one who constantly points us back to the Father, who testifies with our Spirit, co-witnessing that we are God's children.

And Romans 12 is classic for the renewal of the mind and the combination of worship being part of that renewal is what's required.

And then the rest of Chapter 12 goes into a whole bunch of practical stuff about being a different type of person, a kingdom person.

18:53

What is the role of music in worship, life and faith?

Just pulling up on that idea of worship, we had a nice moment in the end of the sermon of looking up in the midst of our circumstance and using worship as a way of lifting our heart.

What do you think about the role of musical worship specifically in changing life circumstance?

I think there's a real benefit to music, where it's a great vehicle to praise God.

And I think it's also dependent on the person, because some people relate more to what scripture is saying, and they're more academic minded, or someone is so music orientated, that that's their form of worship, that's their main form of worship.

And I think it's a very powerful tool that it could create, I don't want to say manufacture moments, but it certainly enhances what your heart is feeling.

Yeah, it's fascinating that what you say is right. Some people aren't so inclined towards music, but it seems like God is. It seems like you get a revelation in its worship.

It's hard to imagine that there's not some tunefulness about the worship. It's not, you know, there's, I think there's beauty in it. It seems like it's a big, big part of the kingdom, I think.

And sometimes we think, oh, those warm fuzzies we feel, they can't be real. That's being of some level of manipulation, but I reckon you just have to sort of go with it.

There's something about the hallelujah chorus that makes a lot of people go, we probably should stand. I find that interesting. Or other music that makes you feel like you want to fall down on your knees.

Or it elicits emotion just from you, from within you. That's fascinating, I think. And that's why I was keen to just put it into the sermon, because along the lines again of that nephesh soul idea, the soul being my life.

And I think of Psalm 103, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. So in a sermon that you're coming under truth being renewed, why not stop and express gratitude or just express words that identify truth. You are worthy of it all.

We talked about him being central in the tabernacle, in amongst the camp. You are worthy of it all, from you come all things, and to you are all things. You deserve the glory.

Yeah, we don't do it that much in church, where you sort of combine the expression of worshiping song in community, in immediate response to the word.

I was reading an article the other day where I think I have this sort of, I don't want to call it a condition, but they call it a condition. It's called frisson, which is your body is reactive to certain sounds and to certain emotions.

So like, for me, it's like, if someone hits a really good note in worship in church, I'll get goosebumps. I'll be like, oh, this is so cool. This is exciting.

And I think looking at the story and how your question about music and worship and what that brings up emotionally, I think that's what that is. It's frizzin. There's another word with contumacy that we can add to the dictionary.

That's cool.

22:21

How worship integrates heart, soul, mind, and strength

God created us as integrated beings, heart and soul and mind and strength. And so any worship that is not integrating all of those things is leaving out part of who you are as a person.

And so coming under the renewal of the mind through scripture and the integration of the heart and even the body, posture, standing, prayer, kneeling, is a way of integrating yourself and giving all of yourself to God.

And when we do that, it often unsticks us from a sticky life situation.

I've often thought that's precisely what music does because I feel like all music, even secular music, has the effect of stirring the emotions.

But when we combine that music with the words, the lyrics that engage the mind, we connect the truths with our emotions and we sort of integrate it all together. And then you put your hands up, your body posture acts it all together.

It's a great way. I think worship does what you said exactly.

Like just all the aspects that we've been speaking about, I can't get over the picture. Like if you just watch a standard movie, there's these different parts in the movie. There's these times of struggle.

Then you get the happy moments where there's a music montage on top of that moment. Then you get the climax of the story.

And when you read Numbers and all the different sections we've been talking about, there's been a time of deep, deep rooted struggle. And then there's this, the blessings. And then there's a music montage over that part of the section.

And it's like, it just gets to this climax of, of that God is sovereign in the story.

It's always a helpful thought to consider what would the motifs, the musical motifs be like Star Wars in the Bible. And in Numbers, you'd have a bunch of different ones. The Darth Vader one is probably used for the dragon.

Dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum.

Just get a handsomer recording of what numbers would do.

Yeah, I don't know when, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, where that came in in Numbers.

Yeah, that's for Joshua when he went to Yeah, that's for Joshua when he went to Oh, yeah, exactly.

24:32

What if I don't feel that God desires to bless me?

So you finished up the sermon talking about looking up, and you had this awesome line where God wants to bless you more than he wants to punish you. That is a beautiful image.

But I just wonder what you would say to some people who that hasn't been their experience where it feels like life has been tough, it doesn't feel like God's out to bless them.

I think the answer is Dallas Willard's answer of the Beatitudes, is the truth that speaks to that very real legitimate question.

Jesus starts off his greatest teaching by saying, if you are in the kingdom, if you know the king by the grace of God, you could be poor, hungry, the least, but you can be more than happy. You can be blessed. You are blessed.

And that's, that's the journey that when, when things haven't gone as though God is favourable to me, it's hard.

But I've got to come back to, I think scripture and say, do I believe, as we often sing, that God is good and his favour is towards me, and he is kind, and he knows that I can't, there's limits for me.

I think also, I've always found it helpful to think of the Holy Spirit as the best coach there is. And when you, when you think of a great human coach, they're just not going to flog you and go, more, more, more, you got injured.

No, more, more, more. Yeah, so sometimes we, I don't mean it in a judgmental, critical way, but sometimes we miss the, the rhythms of the way of the Master that help us take rest and do some of that self-care to be renewed again.

When it's just like, oh, I haven't had a win for so long. I just feel like God's face is not towards me. It's one thing after the other.

Yeah, so I would encourage people to go to the Beatitudes. And I'd also send them to 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 1, which is the classic one where Paul's like, favor? I don't feel much favor.

In fact, I'm pretty much losing heart to the point of almost taking my own life. I am despairing of life itself. But then that chapter one says, but God came and comforted me so that with the comfort he gave me, I could comfort others.

And so I would only encourage people to say, again, Romans 5, character comes from suffering and enduring that with God's help. Yeah, and it's an enormous faith question. Is God good?

Is he good? Can I trust him? And everyone's got to sort of work through that themselves.

I also would encourage people to say, take that disappointment straight to God, and do what the Psalmist says. Lord, you said your face is toward me, but I can't get a win. I can't take a break.

Just talk to God about it.

27:59

Conclusion

All right.

And with that, we might wrap up for this week. Join us next week when Ben will be talking about Christ in Deuteronomy. But otherwise, thank you for listening.

Thank you guys for coming on. Let me read the blessing from Numbers 6 to finish off. The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.