

Well, hello and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We're having a conversation about the Word of the Lord as it was preached to us on Sunday and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

My name is Jack, and pondering with me today are Ben and Tristan. We had a night enjoying our long weekend, guys.

So far, yes.

Yep, big prep week for me. Got exams.

Ah, Joyce. So it's gonna be fun. Well, we are today pondering on Ben's sermon on Christ in Judges.

Now, Ben, do you want to give us a little bit of a recap of that one?

Yeah, so we're in another tough book of the Bible. Last week was Joshua, and that was not easy. And this week is Judges.

And it also wasn't easy. We looked at the cycle of sin, which is a key part of the structure of Judges, this pattern that repeats itself 12 times, which is sin, oppression, repentance, deliverance, peace, and then sin again.

That pattern plays itself out over and over again throughout the Book of Judges. And I find that relatable in my life, the cycle of sin. And so I found it helpful to think of what the Book of Judges teaches us about how to break the cycle of sin.

And three things sort of emerged when you look at the Book of Judges as a whole. We need a community around us, a savior among us, and a king above us. And those are the three things that we have in the Gospel of Christ.

He is our friend, our savior, and our king. So that's sort of lots of little interesting learnings along the way. But that's how you break the cycle of sin.

Yeah, I think it was great to how you navigated the difficult book that is Judges.

And it actually reminded me of the last sermon that I heard on Judges, which was, I think, two years ago. And back then, the passer proposed that in that downward spiral of sin, you have two choices.

You either continue in disobedience or you grow in godly character, which is not by yourself, obviously. It's with that saviour among you, community around you and king above you. So it was good.

Yeah.

So I want to start with a question about the text and the story. So as you said, in Judges, it's about these kind of ad hoc leaders that get raised up in this cycle.

And of course, you mentioned the cycle where they're in the land, they sin, they get oppressed. God raises up a judge, delivers them repeat. Now, why does God use this system?

Why does he have this ad hoc way of doing things? We know, and we'll get to this in future weeks, that eventually Israel will transition to a monarchy.

But why does God just say, sort of, not appoint them some sort of leader that just constantly exists? Why this particular system, do you guys think?

Yeah, that's interesting. I couldn't presume to know what was in God's mind in that part of the story of the Bible.

Only to say that in this Christ in Scripture project, what we do constantly is step back and see the span of the entire story of the Bible at once.

And when you do that, you realize that the Book of Judges has a very key function within the big story of the Bible in telling us what life is like without a king.

And so Israel, as you made the point, Jack, that they sort of had these patriarchal leaders, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and then even Moses and Joshua. And then we enter this period of lawlessness and anarchy. There's no leader.

That famous line, in those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And so why didn't God kind of, why didn't Joshua slash why didn't God get a new leader in the same way to continue?

I think it's just part of the story of the Bible, of that experience of what life is like without a king, leads Israel to desire a king.

Now, of course, we're going to start looking at that next week in Ruth and the week after in 1 Samuel, which you're going to preach on, Jack. And we learn very quickly that even with kings, Israel still suck, the king still suck.

But that need for a good king above us points us to Christ. And so stepping back and looking at the story of the Bible as a whole, Judges plays a critical role in establishing our need for a king.

So that when Christ appears, 1500 years later, we see him as the king which fulfills everything that we've been looking for over the course of the story of the Bible.

And it does seem like there's a bit of, it is kind of, the Bible is a little bit ambiguous in terms of, from a purely human governmental structure perspective.

You know, obviously in Judges, it's got this line, everyone did what they saw fit, and Israel had no king, and that's interpreted as a bad thing.

But then when we move to one Samuel in a few weeks, there's a little bit, and Israel does ask for a king, that also is treated with a bit of foreboding, and like, is this really a good thing as well?

So there's, yeah, it's an interesting sort of ambiguity it has towards maybe trust in any human system. Humans as individuals without authority, or humans with authority.

Yeah, and I don't think the way it was written or put together, Judges, it's that it's not meant to trash what a monarchy is, or what a line of authority is like a government in today's context.

I think it's proving further how weak humanity is at its core. And it's exactly what you said. It's always pointing to Christ.

And it's kind of the opposite or invert way of saying, like you don't know how good something is until it's gone. It's the opposite of that. It's like, it's so evident that they need a sovereign king that is eternal.

Which points us to Christ.

It's interesting you mentioned the one Samuel connection that by the time Israel asked for a king in 1 Samuel 8, Samuel gets all defensive, who Samuel is the 13th judge. And he's like, no, you don't ask for a king. What a terrible thing to do.

The king is going to take your daughters and he's going to tax you and he's going to kill your sons in war. But then God kind of consols Samuel by saying, listen, it's not you they've rejected, it's me. And so God is saying that I am their king.

They should be living under me as their king. They have rejected me and they're looking for a human king. And so maybe that's part of the answer as well.

In this period of the story of Judges, Israel were meant to live under the kingship of God himself. Their covenant provider, their rescuer, the one who led them into the promised land. But they have rejected him.

And so they turn to these human leaders, which as you said, Tristan, suck all the human leaders in Judges.

Well, I mean, they start pretty good and then they get worse and worse and worse until by the time you get to Samson, he's just not a good person.

Yeah, absolutely.

I think thinking about the, what we've kind of been talking about, the impetus of Judges is towards the need for authority in some sense and ultimately God's authority.

You pointed out how radically different this is from our world's perspective, where we don't really like authority very much. And we are all about the individuals and everyone doing as they see fit.

I wonder what, I know I've encountered some people, and maybe you have two, who particularly struggle with this idea of authority, not just as part of the cultural ethos, but maybe because they have been at the hands of abusive authority, or through

various experiences, they have this resistance to this idea that someone should be lauding it over them. How do we, I guess, what's the message for someone like that, for people who really struggle with this idea of authority? Thoughts?

Yeah, well, the authority that we're talking about is God's authority. Jesus is the King who fulfills the longing for a King that Israel had, and He will never let us down. He reigns in justice and righteousness.

Read the Gospels and see what kind of King Jesus is. That's the authority that we're talking about, not a human authority, which very imperfectly misreflects His authority.

I think it's a real thing to recognize that what you said earlier, it's two different authorities that are rooted in two different things. One is rooted in love for you, and one is rooted in that person's own desires.

And so, I would say to establish, yeah, how we can obey God's authority compared to different authorities that have destroyed our view on authority as a whole. I said authority a lot of times.

It's just about recognizing that one is loving, and that's hard to get to grips with by yourself. That's why you need community. That's why you need all these different assets, which is found in the church.

And I think also important to note, especially thinking about the individual, that the authority of God and Jesus' kingship is not about destroying your individuality.

But I mean, CS. Lewis quote, I think he's from the Screwtape Letters, where it says that when we give ourselves up, when we give ourselves over to God's authority, we become more ourselves than ever before.

That God wants, that God knows our deepest level of ourself, our most perfect design. And by stripping away the sin and the sort of desires that kind of have been imported by our surroundings, we become more ourselves than ever before.

So the authority of God is not to cancel out your individuality, but it's born of love for you as an individual and about making you your truest self.

And I liked what you said, Ben, earlier in the sermon, where it was when you looked at the youth's perspective of it, where it's, they're the most digitally connected, yet so alone.

And I find it, even today, struggling in youth ministry, the lack of respect for authority or just any sort of leadership.

And I think in their perspective, they're getting pushed with content from all different angles of getting told what to believe in. And it's such an overdrive for them.

And that's why I think they're just like, you know what, no, like it's too much now. But I think we get bogged down by saying, like, why don't you understand, or this, this, and this? But I think in the youth context, that's where community comes in.

And it's like, no, this is very different to what you've been told to believe, like, choose life, basically.

Yeah.

Yeah, leadership in the way of Jesus is servant leadership.

In John 13, Jesus washes the disciples' feet, or in, I was just thinking before, in Mark chapter 10, Jesus calls the disciples together and he says, you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the gentiles, lord it over them.

But he says, not so with you, the greatest must be the servant. He's flipping leadership upside down.

And so to the people who have been genuinely hurt by those in power, even with Christian power, all you could say is that's not leadership in the way of Jesus. He is a good king.

And those who have positions of authority and power, which we all do in some, to some degree, we're supposed to follow in his example by being servants of all and for willing their good.

That's the kind of king that we need above us, and the kind of king that we have.

Amen. Yeah, I'm sure we'll talk more about that when we do our One Samuel podcast as well.

I want to talk about this idea of community around us. It's one of your points.

And it kind of follows on from Joshua, you were talking about how in the Joshua sermon, we were kind of relieved that they weren't actually fully genociding or wiping out the peoples around them, because that is a pretty sort of apparent concept to

us. But we also see the flip side here, which is the fact that now we have these peoples that are influencing Israel from their surroundings.

And you use this point to say how our communities impact us, and that the community around us shapes us into godly or less godly people. And so I just wanted to delve a little bit deeper into how do we choose our community?

And I think this is a tricky line to walk, and I think you acknowledged that a little bit in your sermon. You said, for example, we are the, what's the saying, we're the average of our five closest friends.

Let's say three of my friends are non-Christians who, maybe they drink a lot, maybe they swear a lot, maybe they speak in a way or act in a way that is, I don't want to be influenced in that way. What am I supposed to do?

Should I just ghost those three friends and sit in a little Christian bubble? I think many of us would say, oh, well, you don't want to do that. But how do we sort of use the phrase, be in the world, but not of the world?

How do we walk that line?

No, is the answer to the question, should we ghost them?

We're called to live in the tension, as you said, in the world, but not of the world, to be a witness to our friends, to tell them about Jesus, but also not to conform to the pattern of this world, as Paul says in Romans 12, verse 2.

And so that's a really tricky line of how you stay close to people and love them and show them the light of the gospel without conforming to their pattern of behavior.

I think it's probably helpful to have your very closest friends with the same values and the same faith as you, as this kind of anchor. And then from that steadfast anchor, you can kind of have a missional relationship with non-Christian friends.

And so I don't know how that plays out in terms of who your five closest friends are and how that works. But being embedded in Christian community is, I think, the foundation.

And then from that foundation, you can have, and not even that you can have, we should have missional friendships with people.

Yeah, I think what that looks like for a Monday morning when you approach life is just involving them in your life slowly. Like if your life is centered around Christian community, it's very easy to bring them in to that very casually.

It's not like, let's sit down and do life hub and a Bible study together. They're going to feel so out of depth, but it's rather, oh, we're having a get together with some friends.

And in a Christian community, it's a safe bet to place on those people. So yeah, it's using that community well to involve others.

And do you think there's, hucking back to what you were saying, Ben, do you think there's an attitude shift we have to have when it comes to friends we want to influence us and friends we don't want to influence us in terms of, when I'm going to hang

out with my non-Christian friends, I've got to think about this as I'm entering the mission field right now. This is not a place for me to sit and relax and, well, you know, you still have fun with your friends, obviously.

But this is a place where I'm on alert and I'm praying before I meet up with them. Like, how can I influence God?

Whereas when I'm around people who I want to feed into me, I can sort of let, I can sit and rest and let them feed in and not think of it sort of, maybe have my guard down a little bit more. Is that a helpful way to think?

Yeah, I think so. That's probably broadly wise. I'm not sure humans can be quite so protective about their influences.

I think culture, one of the powers of culture for better or worse, and I made that point in the sermon, is it just influences us in subliminal, unconscious ways.

And so, yeah, for sure, being intentional about praying before you go into those spaces and being aware that this is not the way you want to live. I'm sure that's helpful.

At the deeper level, I think we just get affected by osmosis from the place that we put ourselves in.

And so it's a call for us to be embedded in Christian community, embedded in scripture, renewing our minds, as Paul talks about in Romans 12 verse 2. With a different vision of what life is all about.

To kind of counteract the formation that culture is doing to us.

Yeah, I found it interesting, because we, at our current youth time, we're doing a series on godly relationships. And that's one of the main themes.

And I draw on one of the points that community as a theme is all over our lives from the very beginning. It's, in school, like, is that the right crowd to involve yourself with? Or, like, how are these people trying to change you?

And in week two, I said, like, show me your friends and show me your future. And it's exactly what you said. It's slow influences that slowly shape who you're going to be tomorrow.

And I pulled up Proverbs 13.20, walk with the wise and become wise for a companion of fool suffers harm. Like, it's, yeah, community can go both ways. So I think it's very important to establish your base in a good one.

The other point, which I didn't have time to mention in the sermon, but this is probably a good place to talk about it, is the ancient Christian practice of solitude, which is intentionally withdrawing from community or withdrawing from people to be

alone with God. That is a time-tested practice that Christians have done for millennia.

So it's Jesus himself, right?

It says Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness to pray and to be with God. And what you do when you withdraw is you start to become aware of the way that your context is influencing you.

Like a silly example is a couple of months ago, I, if just for some reason, I hadn't hung around my family for a couple of weeks, like a family dinner or something.

And then coming back, we had dinner at their house and I felt just being in my old family home with my family all together, it just, you start to feel yourself. And this is not a bad thing.

It would like, it's just, it's a thing, molding and changing and into certain patterns of behavior based on the context that you're in.

And at the same time, I was reading a book by Dallas Willard and he was talking about solitude and silence and withdrawing from regular life. And I had this, like it kind of clicked.

The reason you withdraw is to become aware of the way that your context is shaping you.

So that when you do show up with your Christian friends or non-Christian friends alike, your eyes are open to see the formative influence of all of these things on you. And so that's, I mean, I hope that's helpful.

We could talk endlessly about the ways that you practice solitude in different ways, but becoming aware of the formational influence is important.

Yeah, interesting.

So I want to think about now our own church communities. And you talked about one of the strengths of community and cultures that it normalizes things. Well, yeah, strengths for good or for ill, I suppose.

I want to think about our church community. And how do we normalize biblical values and biblical lifestyle? My question stems, I guess, from the fact that we're all being influenced by osmosis, by our surrounding culture.

And I think I've seen examples, I don't know, we've discussed examples where that culture sort of takes root in gatherings of Christians, even so. I mean, you know, you're hanging out with a group of friends.

It's not a church event or anything like that. Maybe you're playing video games and you feel very comfortable and you're not really focusing on it.

That's when sort of the jokes come out that maybe aren't honoring God or the swearing starts to happen. How do we create a community and culture that normalizes a biblical way of life? How do I make that in my life hub?

How do I do that when I'm hanging out with church friends?

That's such an important question. I would say it starts small. Jesus was constantly telling parables about trees and plants and seeds.

And part of the imagery that he's using is small things grow to become big things in time. So I would say start with yourself. Start with becoming aware of the way that you're using your words and that you're showing up in community.

And then maybe the word, I don't know, gracious resistance, gracious rebellion, maybe, that when you go into a place, you refuse to take part in the gossip and the different things that are happening and you can change culture slowly that way.

I remember when I was 14, I joined my first worship team and I was playing electric guitar. And there was a bass player there who had previously played, and even actually now he plays again with Hillsong.

This is like world-class bass player, crazy, awesome dude. And I got to play in a band with him. I was playing electric guitar next to him.

And the craziest thing was that in the practices, everyone's kind of noodling all the time, which means playing and just noisy and loud and just it's hard. It's kind of chaos in the band practice.

But he was there, this veteran bass player, silent, listening to the leader, not playing anything, just locked in. And his presence in the practice started to change the culture of the entire team.

Because everyone looked at him with respect and said, oh, I want to be like him. And the whole team kind of settled down.

Which for me is this illustration of the culture changing power of one person who graciously rebels against the cultural norms of a group of people.

And so I think any of us walking into a situation, we can choose to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world in that room. Even if it's a room full of Christians, we can choose to resist the norms and expectations of that culture.

And instead, you know, have the Sermon on the Mount as our vision of what life is about and what community is about. And over time, yeah, by the grace of God, by the movement of His Spirit, culture can change. And new things can become normal.

And those old things can become strange.

Another thing you talked about, Ben, in the Sermon was this idea of a transformational Saviour versus a situational Saviour, and the importance of shifting away from seeing Jesus as a situational Saviour, which I think we can all fall into at times.

But how can we change our mindset from seeing Jesus? Because you kind of get into a bit of a habit, right? And it's also a good thing to ask Jesus to help you with your situations.

I'm sure you would say that. But how do we change our mindset from seeing Jesus as the guy who, my genie in a bottle, who helps me with a particular situation, versus seeing him as deeply transformational for my whole self?

How can we get out of that mindset and start seeing him differently?

Yeah, I think instead of using him as Aladdin or something like that, it's a helpful way to appreciate God more. Instead of using him in the bad times, is absolutely praise him and worship him in the good times. Notice him in the good times.

Notice him that this is the reason why you're in this good season. And I think it makes it much more normal to go, it makes it less frequent to only go to God when it's bad situations or, yeah, just horrible seasons, which we all have.

But I think if we keep using him as our last resort, make him the first point of call in all things. And that's just seeking his face in all that we do. That's what the Sama says.

So yeah, I think it's just putting him in all contexts, in all filters, in all views. It's helpful.

Yeah, for sure. Yeah, I mean, you make a good point that he's not less than a situational savior, he's more. Yes, he does save us out of situations, but he's a transformational savior.

I think the main thing is a very deeply unpopular idea, but realizing you're more sinful than you think you are. Jesus said he's not come to call the healthy but the sick. He's come to call those who know that they need a savior.

And so that's been one of the graces of this year for me in having a daughter and getting married, or getting married a couple of years ago, having a daughter now, realizing I'm so much more selfish than I thought that I was.

And even in the past couple of weeks, I'm realizing I'm worse than I thought I was.

And I don't say that in a kind of self-flagellating kind of false humility way, but genuinely to say that when you realize that you're worse than you think you are, it drives you to a Savior who is better than you think he is.

So realizing that what I need most in life is not this little problem at work to be solved.

I need heart surgery because the problem in my life is not only the community around me, it's in my heart, it's the sin that has got a stranglehold on me and my motivational structure. Just really quickly, I found this helpful recently to reflect on.

The levels of sin from Robert Mulholland's book, Invitation to a Journey, he talks about gross sins, which are like the big, massive, loud ones that when you become a Christian, it's like, okay, let's deal with the porn addiction, like big, obvious

ones. And then you go a layer deeper and you get to conscious sins, which are things that we know we shouldn't do like gossip, but we're conscious of them when we do them.

And then you go a layer deeper and you get unconscious sins, which are the things that we're not even necessarily aware that are happening. We just kind of do quickly and we're, it's only until we reflect later that we realize what was going on.

And then the bottom layer of sin is attachments or idols. And I was realizing recently that as I kind of progress in the life of faith, I realized that I had been thinking of sin only in the gross sins category.

And so when you kind of kick some of those gross sins, you're like, hey, look at me, I'm kind of doing pretty well. I think I'm pretty much done with the whole sin thing.

But it's been a grace in my life this year to kind of feel like the bottom of the iceberg is opening up. And I'm realizing that my motivational structure behind almost everything I do is messed up.

I want my name to be glorified and I want people to think really well of me. And I want to use other people for my purposes. And I feel like God is graciously showing me that.

And so I'm, anyway, long story short, becoming more aware of my sin, but that's what leads me to a transformational savior who does heart surgery and who is in the business of changing lives in so much of a deeper way than we can even appreciate or

Yeah, I guess understanding how much you need transformation and that actually being a greater need than your day-to-day situations.

All right, well, I think it's time for our palate cleanser question. And today's palate cleanser question comes compliments of Hamish Noble, who offered it to me last night.

And I think this is inspired by the fact that we're talking about judges and of course, judges wear wigs. And so the question is, if you had to wear a wig for a year, what kind of wig would you wear?

For me, it would be dreadlocks. When I was a teenager, I kind of half wanted dreadlocks, but-

You're on the road, weren't you?

I was.

I'm sure there's some photos on the church YouTube or something of you when you had some-

I was well down the road, but there was a guy at my last church who had dreadlocks, and he said, it's a lot of work. You can't take hot showers because the heat loosens the knots and you lose your dreadlocks. And I really like hot showers.

So I thought I'll have long hair, but I won't have dreadlocks. So if I had to have a wig, it would be dreadlocks down to my shins. And that would be cool.

That's insane.

I would probably just go standard, like, barest as we. Yeah, like just go full on. I had a small afro when I was growing up.

So I think to like upscale it to like a full, like over the shoulders type of vibe. It's either that, it's either go 100% or zero. If I can wear a bald cap for the rest of my life, I'll do it.

A bald cap, that's an interesting wig choice.

Yeah, it's low maintenance.

It's perfect.

I mean, I'd probably go something like, like a restoration King Charles, the second spaniel wig that, not like the enlightenment wigs, which are kind of small and rolled up at the sides, but the sort of drapes, kind of like a judge's wig that drapes

down, down your shoulders, big curly, big curly. And like, not white one either, like black, yeah. Oh, cool.

And here's one more question I wanted to ask, not a sort of unrelated to the sermon, but something maybe we could offer our listeners is, what's a piece of Christian content that you've listened to or read recently that you can recommend to our

Anything from the Bible Project.

They're currently doing a series as of like early June, 2026 on the Ten Commandments. It's just incredible, like, do not murder. Okay, well, that's three words.

But the way that they, in their podcast, they spend an hour just diving into that and unpacking it. I've been really blessed by that podcast.

Yeah, so what specific episode is that?

All of them. Yeah, they go through, so they do a couple of episodes on the Ten Commandments as a whole, in their place in society and different things. And through the Ten Commandments and unpack them.

Yeah, I've been watching these 15 minute videos before each of the sermon.

It's by Tim Keller. He does a series called Discovering the Gospel. And it's basically what we're doing.

It's seeing Christ in scripture. So I think it's a good prep for on top of your own readings to approach the sermon.

I use them every week before I preach. I watch Tim Keller's video.

It's so good.

It's good.

Yeah. Very good. I think for me, there's a book series I quite like, which I've been thinking about recently, which is the Reading in Context.

I don't know if you have enough. It's a series. There's like about four books.

And so one of them be like reading Mark in context, reading Hebrews in context or reading Revelation in context.

And basically, what they do is each chapter is by a different author, and they take a section of the book of the Bible, and they compare it to a similar type of literature in the ancient world. I find that very interesting.

I mean, that's just sort of my hobby horse. A little bit is comparative studies, but I found that it really sort of helps immerse you in the world of scripture.

Interesting.

All right. Well, we might leave it there for this week. Thank you guys for coming on the pod.

And thank you all for listening. I hope you have a really blessed week. We will see you later.