

Pondering the Ruin of Power

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

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 Sundays, and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

My name is Jack, and we're continuing our Roads to Ruin series talking about Ben's Sermon on Power. And we've got these little shorter 15-minute discussion episodes, which I hope you'll enjoy. I'm joined by Ben, Jono and Tristan.

Ben, did you want to give us a quick recap of your sermon on Power?

Yeah, sure. I got to cast my memory back to a week ago.

And actually, an interesting thing before I say that is the views on the YouTube sermon for Hurt are three times the views on my sermon on Power, which I'm not personally offended by, but I think it tells us something interesting about the topic of

Power. Hurt is kind of a universal thing that people like to talk about and to find healing on. But Power is a weird topic, and I felt that, preaching the message. It's awkward to talk about.

We kind of want to just pretend it doesn't exist. But for that reason, I think it is important to talk about. We talked about the spectrum of what it means to be powerful and powerless and how both of those things can lead to ruin.

The ruin of the powerful is corruption. The famous words of Lord Acton, power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. But then there's also what I think is the more insidious ruin of powerlessness, which is the neglect of power.

When we fail to act in situations where we are called by God to act, it leads to ruin. And if we don't use the power that we have, we eventually lose it.

So then kind of concluding halfway in the sermon, with this bleak picture really that power leads to ruin and powerlessness leads to ruin, it's like, well, okay, where do we go from here?

And I think the gospel solution is that power is bisected by love. The intersection of love and power creates this two by two grid of corruption, resignation, passion and resurrection.

And so looking at the story of the gospel, as Paul tells it in Philippians 2 that Jesus, though he

was in very nature, God made himself nothing, dying. That's the bottom right corner of passion, literally the suffering of Jesus.

And then from suffering and passion, Jesus resurrected. And that resurrection is power with love.

And so the sermon was a call to me and to the people of God from scripture to pursue love with power at the same time, even in fact to pursue love and give away power to others.

So you're talking about sometimes there's using power in love, and sometimes there's giving away power in love. What do you think determines which of those we should use?

We should do in terms of, I guess, as a matter of first understanding, what power do I have? But then how do I determine, okay, should I just give this away or should I use it proactively for good? I'm, you know, keeping it for myself.

I probably misspoke.

I think we're always called to give away power with love. And in doing so, by building up the power of another, that is actually the most powerful thing in the universe. That's Jesus on the cross, giving away power to others out of love.

I think that's the corner that we're called to go to. But then like the, you know, in the board game Cluedo, the little portal in the bottom corner, there's a portal in the bottom corner of death that leads to new life and to resurrection.

And that's the message of the gospel, is give away power to others in order to find the power of God working through you. Which is the discipline of service. Jesus washing the disciples' feet, is him submitting his power for the sake of them.

He's building their power out of love. And that's the kind of new creation moment in the gospels.

To maybe ask you an uncomfortable question. Ben, by way of example, you're in a position of power, right? As a leader in the church.

Could you give us an example of what like, giving away your power looks like?

Well, it's an uncomfortable thing to talk about. And I'm confronted by how little I do that, to be honest.

But if the truest form of power is service, then something I'm trying to keep in my mind when I'm

doing ministry, preaching or leading worship, is that I'm not here to flaunt power or to make a name for myself, but to serve God in that moment and to

empower other people. So it's sort of like this heart posture underneath everything that I'm trying to do, is to do it for the sake of building others up.

So you think like, when we try to equip other people to do tasks, that's a form of giving away power, rather than just the temptation is to like, micro-imagine, do everything myself. Like, okay, let me teach Tristan how to do this thing.

Maybe it's something that I'm really invested in, or for the kingdom. Let me teach Tristan the skills to do it, so that he can do it. And I don't maintain soul control.

Is that kind of what you were getting at?

Yeah. Feel free to butt in at any time.

There's more than two people at this table.

Well, you two are like locked into each other.

Sorry.

I've really put you on the spot. Sorry.

He asked you the question, so...

Well, you're all members of Starfare, you've all got power.

The way I view it today, especially this being my first time in a position of power, I don't like to call it power as well, I see it as a difference between power and influence.

So, power is, for me, power is what we teaching, that is power, obviously. And the influence we have is the way we conduct ourselves, the way we do it, the way we preach it faithfully, how we use that power, that's the way I view power.

But in terms of the topic of power, like the power that we have, I always lean on, I think we've said it a couple of times on this podcast, is Tim Keller's freedom of self-forgetfulness, of removing yourself from the situation.

And I think it's hard, it's really hard. It's a tricky thing to speak about.

It is tricky, especially thinking about non-positional power as well. Like you made the point that we all have power to some degree, right? We all have power in our relationships.

I wonder if like part of that is, okay, I sit down to a conversation with someone, I have a certain level of influence over them and their decisions, or over how this conversation goes.

Part of giving away power could be, I'm actually not going to give my opinion here. I'm actually just going to let them talk. I might ask interesting questions, but I actually want to respect their capacity.

Even if we're talking about a problem they have, I might want to respect their capacity to solve this problem, or respect their opinion and not pollute it with my own.

This is something I'm struggling with, and I've been learning about it college recently in terms of partially caring for people. But I wonder if that's one way to think about how we use our power in something as simple as a conversation.

Yeah, for sure. I think listening is one of the most fundamental acts of service that you can give to another person.

And to your point before, Jack, that we have more power than we think we have, the two lies that power tells us is that we don't have any power, and the power that we do have, we will use for good.

But both of those kind of end up to be a lie that's shown to be a lie after you have abused power. I won't retell it now, but I told a story of a time in my life at church when I discovered that I had misused power after I had already done it.

And so, kind of trying to help people see that they have more power than they think they have, and maybe that they don't always use it as well as they think they do, which leads us to the gospel.

Even so much as how we speak about other people, that's a form of power. If I go telling you, Ben, Tristan's a really nasty leader, and he's stealing money from the church or something like that.

If I go around slandering people, I'm exercising my own power and influence over someone else by the way I talk about them, because then suddenly your opinion of Tristan is going to change based on how I speak about him.

So thinking carefully about how we speak about, not just to people, but about people, is another way of thinking about the exercise of power, maybe.

It's just true, like what you said, power is a hard one. Corruption seems like a nicer word than obsession with self, to me.

I think of the manipulating matriarch as a ruinous power, you know, the grandmother, the mother, that's just, I will have my way.

In the same way, the abusive patriarch, there's a bit in the message where I talked about in that top left quadrant that stereotypically, maybe men, the power that they have is physical size and voice, the power that women have is stereotypically

verbal and emotional. The power that children have is screaming in the aisle of Kmart to get what they want. Jack, you mentioned positional power, relational power and personal power.

These different types of power, different people, even like the smallest person in a room can exercise a lot of power in their own way.

Really, anytime you're interacting with another person, you're exercising some sort of power. Surely, sometimes that there's a sense of power, hunger, that starts from a good place in that there's a desire for excellence.

They're like, I really want this event to go well, but I don't trust other people to do it.

So I'm going to exert power over this thing and make sure it's done exactly the way I want because I have a very clear vision, and I need all the power in order to do that.

There's sort of a kind of a good motive that starts there, but then it gets, there's almost a, power sometimes comes to a lack of trust, right?

That you're not willing to cooperate with other people, you're not willing to trust their input into anything that you want to exert your power and your ideas into that situation.

Or indeed God.

Yes, indeed. Well, exactly.

More, more specifically, God. That you're not willing to trust His plan. And that's like, control is quite a ruinous form of power as well.

That we come to realize, we come to think that we can control every outcome in our life. And that will lead a person to ruin, because you'll quickly find that's actually not the way that God designed this universe. You can't control every outcome.

And people resent it if you come to controlling as well.

That's another way it ruins you is that people don't like a tyrant.

Yeah, I mean, some listeners might love Donald Trump and that's up to you.

And I feel like he's been confronting to watch the presidency over a few terms, what it's done to him, the way he talks, the way it's sort of, I feel like I'm looking at Genghis Khan, I'm looking at Mussolini, I'm looking at some very power hungry

leader. And it's just sort of shocking that that can happen on the small scale too, isn't it? That's what we're talking about, isn't it? Just the change, the transformation of a man or a woman's heart.

It's quite monstrous, I think.

It's deforming.

Yeah, exactly. I think that's the word that I've been looking for. The power deforms.

I find that personally more helpful than corrupts. It makes us less human.

Yeah, there's a pattern throughout history, isn't there? That whole absolute power corrupts up. You can look at all sorts of leaders throughout history who gain absolute power, uncontested power, and you can look at what it does to them.

And they might start off being able to handle it, or keeping to who they were, but then over time, they slowly become something else.

There's a story of Alexander the Great, who he starts off as king of a relatively humble kingdom, and the kingship at the time was a little bit more sort of, yes, you're the king, but you're sort of acclaimed by the people, and it's a little bit more

of a more humble kingship, right? He then conquers this massive empire, and he's sitting enthroned in, I think it's in Babylon, and someone from Greece comes back from the old country, and they see his new subjects bowing down, fully bowing down

before him, face first like a god. And this person kind of laughs, because it's not what they did in Greece.

Alexander walks up to this guy, grabs him by the hair, and starts smashing his face into the wall, because power has transformed that man into someone who just will not take offense, who will corrupt. And he's become a monster, right?

And you can see examples of that through all sorts of leaders. You see it in Hitler, you see it in... It's a pattern where power just makes you into a monster.

There's very few people that can take that and not... Even David, look at what power does to David. I mean, he, you know...

The back half of his life is, you know, he acquires all these wives, he kills a man to take his wife. It just completely ruins his life. I mean, the path to ruin with power is pretty horrifying.

And I feel like that, just the term monster, is really helpful, because it reminds us, oh, that's right, the whole biblical story talks about a beast.

And as Tim Mackie, you know, so wonderfully unpacks, the beast is a recurring monster. That is Babylon, that's Egypt, it's whoever. Sometimes, it's a personality.

But yeah, that the devil is a powerful angel, and power has corrupted him to become a monster. And he will do that to anybody. He'll just take you somewhere.

I think that's what was in my mind. It's like, this power sermon is just scary. It's really scary that you could change so much.

Well, it's been a bit of a whining discussion, but I think we might close it there.

Thank you all for listening, and we will catch you on the next one.