

Pondering Christ in 2 Kings

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Well, hello, and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We are 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.

I'm joined by Ben, Jono and Tristan. And today we're discussing Ben's sermon on Christ in 2 Kings, or really it was a sermon focused on exile, wasn't it, Ben? Did you want to give us a recap of that sermon and what it was about?

Yeah, yesterday's sermon was the second part from last week's.

We looked at Christ in 1 Kings last week and then Christ in 2 Kings, which as you said, Jack, was really a thematic exploration of exile, which is the key theme at the end of 2 Kings.

And so we traced the theme of exile through Israel's history under five successive empires, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, and then saw how not only is Israel's story the story of exile, all humanity's story is a story of exile to the

east out of the Garden of Eden. And so the plot line at the heart of the Bible is how a human being is going to get back into the presence of God, into the kingdom of God, because we live in exile.

And then the good news at the end of the sermon is that Jesus brings the kingdom of God to earth, the exile ends in the kingdom.

And so we as followers of Jesus are called to live in the kingdom of heaven while still being subjects of the empire of earth, to walk the tension between those two things, which is a tricky task and hopefully something we could talk about today.

Jono, Tristan, any reflections from you guys on the sermon?

Yes, I would say I'd really like the point of being agents in the agents of the kingdom in the earthly empire. Like I like that concept of secret agent, secret agent. Yeah, like like we are God's little missionaries trying to to save the world.

But it's not us saving, it's presenting him as savior. Yeah, I like that concept.

I appreciated the seriousness of the lament of Psalm 137. It's just, it's a dark, dark book, 2 Kings at the end, isn't it? Setting fire to the temple and it's just terrible.

So it was it was a good setup for lament and exile. And we took that.

Yeah, absolutely.

And as you've been saying, the exile was sort of the thing that permeated this sermon. So I wanted to start with this idea of why exile?

You talked about how, yes, Israel is exiled from their homeland, but you also said that humanity is exiled from the Garden of Eden. What is the significance of the use of God's use of exile in response to sin?

There could be a lot of answers to that question. One of them is that sin ruins things. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were naked and ashamed and they hid and they made prickly clothes for themselves.

And so living in a certain place with sin around you kind of ruins that place. And so it's actually a grace of God to exile His people from the Kingdom when we sin.

I remember years ago when I was 17 in a Bible study, one of the guys who was a couple of years older than me pointed out for the first time that it is a grace of God that He exiles us and He doesn't let us eat from the tree of life and live forever

in a sinful condition. Because when we're exiled from the garden, we don't get to live forever in this state of sin, but we wait for the salvation that comes in Jesus.

And so sin breaks things, it hurts people, and God exiles us as a way of ultimately saving us to welcome us back into the kingdom again.

It's a powerful picture, exile. It feels like there normally needs to be someone doing the dragging off into exile. Certainly the people of God have that.

There's another nation. So I guess we have sin or the devil drags us somewhere. But I always feel like this idea of home is so powerful.

That we have it turned in our hearts. We're designed for God, and we live away from home, and exile is that picture. We're not where we should be.

We're not in the kingdom and the presence and the rule of God. But there's typically some power that's taken us to that place, which I guess is this rose to ruin idea we've talked about a bit lately.

Yeah, interesting. I like the point you just made, Ben, that about the idea of sin defiling a place. And that, of course, connects to your whole thing of God's kingdom being God's people in God's place and under God's rule.

And it makes me think of some of the places in Leviticus where it talks about people's sin defiling the land, and if you allow your sin to defile the land, the land will vomit you out. It's an interesting image.

So we've established this idea that we live in exile from God, but then you brought up the point that Jesus, in some ways, brings the exile to an end, that he reconciles us with God, but that at the same time, we've got this now and not yet dynamic

where we're still kind of in exile, but in other senses when not in exile. Could you sort of clarify, explain, I guess, how our experience of exile before Jesus differs from our experience of exile after Jesus?

Originally, we're exiled from the kingdom, and then when we become a Christian, we become part of the kingdom, but that kingdom has been in some ways exiled from the empire, which is what Ben gets to later in the sermon.

So the empire of this world, the kingdom of like the flesh, or the ruler of the kingdom of the air, Ephesians talks about the evil one, we are aliens and strangers in this land, our citizenship is in heaven. So it's a weird thing, isn't it?

We come home into the kingdom by the grace of God, we come to Jesus, we become a citizen of heaven, but the now and not yet is, well, heaven is getting into our heart, but the more it does, the less at home we feel this side of heaven on this earth.

Yeah, that's like kind of links with the idea of in Revelation, that the call to God's people to come out of Babylon, there's almost a sense of, yeah, you're no longer exiled from the kingdom of God, but that involves also you kind of withdrawing and

Yeah, it's the ark of Noah, Noah's ark, isn't it?

You come into the ark, but you are separated from the people in doing so.

Yeah, the sense that sin and God cannot coexist, and so you move from exile from one to exile from the other.

So thinking practically about that, about how we kind of live in this exile within the empires of this world and belonging also to the kingdom of God.

You brought up, Ben, the idea of Daniel and that there are some things in Daniel's experience that where he's like, yep, I'll go along with this, and others where he's like, no, I'm gonna be different from the world around me.

What are some principles for how we draw that line between where we resist the empires, where we actually take a stand and say, no, I'm not gonna go along with you, versus the things where it's like, yeah, it's okay for me to conform to this.

I'm reminded of that story in the gospels where the Pharisees are trying to trick Jesus. This is in the final week of Jesus' life before the crucifixion. They ask him, should we pay tax to Caesar or not?

And Jesus asks for a coin to be brought to him. And he says, whose face is this? Caesar's face.

And he says, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's. I think that's the answer. That that which rightly belongs to God, we give to God and God alone.

That is glory and honor and worship and prayer. But that which comes from and is concerning the empire, we give to the empire.

And so Daniel and his three boys at the start of Daniel, they take on a new name, they take on a new language, a new culture, but they don't pray to Nebuchadnezzar as God.

They give to God what belongs to God, and they give back to the empire what belongs to the empire. Which again is a tricky line to walk, how you make the decision between those two things. And so that's why Daniel was praying multiple times a day.

He would pray in secret for the wisdom to live as a citizen of the kingdom and a subject of the empire.

Yeah, I would say to build on that. I think I mentioned this a couple of weeks about a spirit-trained conscience.

Like, when it comes to discerning on what you feel strongly about, what to push back against and what to stand firm in, I think through prayer, through discernment, your conscience will, you will feel a certain way about something and you know it's

wrong. Or, you know, like, oh, that's, like, I can let that go. Like, it's over time that that builds up, but it's also through testing and proofing of what we have in God's Word. Like, it's going through all those different stages.

Like, it's, like I said, it's over time that it builds up.

That's what Paul says in Romans 12, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And then this is kind of what you just said.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing and perfect will. The transformation of the mind helps us to see clearly what belongs to God and what belongs to the world, and to know God's will.

The prayerful assessment of culture, of morality, in mission thinking is called contextualization. That's a huge, huge issue. What do you do when they have, that culture has multiple wives?

It's polygamous. Do you just come in and say, that's wrong. Missionaries, cross-cultural workers have found that it's a little bit more nuanced.

It takes time to understand culture. And so, yeah, it's a good question that's at the heart of mission.

Trying to work out, what do you drop off and what do you hold on to staunchly as the gospel penetrates a new aspect of the empire, the world's empires.

So to press into that a little bit more on a practical level, have you guys in your experiences come up with any good rules of thumb as to where I draw the line, what my red lines are, and where it's okay for me to engage with the culture?

It could be on any subject, could be on money, could be on media, could be on...

I would say for me personally, it all comes down to my family of origin type of stuff where the boundaries were drawn early on.

And when I was going through formation and really growing in my faith as a young boy, like that's really helped me put firm boundaries today.

But if you don't have that, any recent Christian, I think one of the main identifiers that I have now is when I make an excuse for something, like if I always have to double back and make an excuse for me to do something or to spend money on

something, usually that's a big one for me where I'm like, yeah, if I'm making excuses for it, then I probably shouldn't do it. Sometimes I go through with it, sometimes I don't, but that's the way you learn.

Yeah.

Yeah, I relate to that. If there's something that I find myself, like I constantly need to justify it to myself, I'm like, is this really good or am I just trying to justify it to myself?

Yeah. What we're talking about, I suppose, is ethics. And I remember studying ethics at Bible College and was quite helped by learning that there are different motivations for ethics.

There's what's called deontological ethics, the ethics of right and wrong, that some things just should not be done because they are wrong. Doesn't matter what good comes of it, it's wrong. Some things are right just because they're right.

But then there's also what's called teleological ethics, which is concerned with outcomes, not with right and wrong, but with good and bad.

And in different arenas of life, I find that quite helpful to think that sometimes you need to be thinking, is this, you know, practice with money or entertainment or social media, is it good or bad? And thinking about that ethically is helpful.

Sometimes you also need to think, is it right or wrong? And knowing when it needs to be deontological and when it needs to be teleological is quite helpful. Because the line sometimes is gray and it takes wisdom to learn what path to take.

And sometimes it's black and white. It's right or wrong. And so there's not much kind of deliberation required.

So just to clarify that, sometimes you're looking at the outcome that an action produces, and sometimes you're just looking about, is the action in itself right or wrong?

Yeah.

Because to take it back to Daniel, you know, there's the decree that you must pray to Nebuchadnezzar when the bell rings or whatever that thing is.

And Daniel could have gone, oh, you know what? I just like, I'm going to stay alive. I can do so much good if I just pray to Nebuchadnezzar and go along with the flow.

That would be thinking about the good and bad that comes from this. But he said, no, no, this is not a good or bad ethical reasoning situation. This is right or wrong.

It is not right to pray to Nebuchadnezzar. And so regardless of the outcome, and literally not Daniel, but the other three were thrown into a furnace for holding the line that they did.

Of course, they were saved through the furnace, but sometimes it's right and wrong, black and white, and you need to discern when it's black and white, and then when it needs to be a good or bad ethical reasoning.

That got real complex, but I personally have found that helpful.

It's helpful too to think, what do you think Jesus would engage in, as a very basic on a Sunday school response to your question, what would Jesus do? Would he participate in that joke that was towards the edge of holiness?

The Bible is so like full on, do not even associate with those who are walking in a very sinful way. Like not because we don't do mission, but it's like cut it off. Like the Sermon on the Mount, it's very, it's fierce, isn't it?

Like to protect holiness. But it's hard to live there. Really hard to live there.

I mean, Tristan, few weeks ago talked about or in his sermon he preached, getting too caught up in the rules, and that religiosity can just take you over. I think it's a constant swinging of just trying to be led by the spirit.

We have to be, there's a living spirit with us to find wisdom. It's very, very important. And the conscience being part of that, and community being part of that.

But we choose who we're going to hang out with, partly to justify some of our lifestyle choices. You sort of get drawn to the ones that don't poke you in ways you don't want to be poked.

And my experience is that there is something incredibly freeing and life giving to embrace more holiness, more light than more dark, and more world. But you can just find yourself in a season of like, whoa, the room's darker than it used to be.

It's just dabbling in whatever that's just taking you off track, road to ruin stuff.

To do a little bit more, I guess, thinking about our culture, what we would call at college, cultural exegesis.

Ben, you talked about the various empires that dominated Judah, and you talked about the different policies they had, you know, like Assyria sort of assimilating Babylon, sort of keeping these groupings as elites in Persia, letting people go home, as

these different tactics for the way that they dominated the people of God. I wondered if it could be helpful for us to think about how our, quote unquote, empire, what are its strategies of subjugation for us?

And how can we sort of be aware and navigate those?

Well, there was the classic response to the question that Jon Ottberg had for Dallas Willard when he said, what should I do to become more godly? And he said, ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. And then Jon Ottberg said, then what?

He was just functionally moving to the next thing. But that's from a very wise person. Hurry is a big part of the empire, the Western empire that we live in.

And what comes out of that is lack of neighbor relationship, lack of the community, the village. It drives us to work longer hours to, and materialism, or our idea of what we need. A house is probably something we need.

But to do that, if you're maybe married, you've got to both work full time, and it's sort of a hurry cycle, that you don't have a lot of time to reflect and be human. And you become more doers than beers. So I think that's a huge part of the empire.

Extracting work from us, and producing then anxiety. I mean, I'll give all the answers, but social media creates a very anxious world that we live in. And it's volatile and judgmental, isn't it?

Yeah. Lots of things we could describe, buzzwords that we could say about the empire, aren't they?

100%.

What do you guys reckon if you were to throw in the buzzwords?

Consumerism would be another one. Jack and I often walk around Westfield getting lunch or something, and we talk about the Westfield of the road as being the temple of consumerism.

People worship at the altar of the checkout, exchanging, not bloodied animals, but money for goods, worshipping the kind of idol of self.

I think identity is a big one, not in terms of gender and all those things, but more making work and identity for yourself, or making, what is the priority, making the priority your identity, like whatever that shifts in your life through different

seasons. Like people just put themselves fully and make it a part of themselves.

We looked at that in terms of the work aspect with the men's course that we did, where people just don't have time for family, don't have time for all these things because their whole identity is putting themselves into work.

And the way they give back to their families is by doing the work. So it becomes them. It's difficult.

It's so complex, the system of the empire that you touched on this, Dad, that it's a good thing to want to own a home and to raise a family in a place that is your own.

But if you want that good desire, then it might mean living in Sydney that both parents have to work, which means daycare, which means all sorts of things.

But how do you extricate yourself from the complex sin flesh world tangle of the empire when, yeah, everything's just so connected and tricky to walk the line.

The answer is intentionality in community. That's not an answer that gives you the answer, that doesn't solve the problem, but that's the best way you could approach it.

There are really significant decisions we need to make both on the micro level and on the macro in our lives that put us in a position where we are able to live the lives we want to live, to glorify God.

You know, the classic VIM principle is a really important thing for all this. Vision, intention means you can have a vision for something, you can align your will and be very intentional to do it. Your intention is to do this thing.

But if you have the means, you don't have the money to actually live out the vision of having time for your family. Probably have to move somewhere, do something that's a bit more radical, or combine with others and do something in community.

Which is what's happened over the centuries, hasn't it? You know, radical communities. What often happens is there are a group of people that take Christianity seriously, and it produces in them something a bit radical.

And they do it together. That's exciting.

I think we need that in our generation, that heart of come out of Babylon. I think the church, this is like the most wild over generalization of the global church.

But in the west at least, we're probably too compromised by Babylon, and we need to hear Jesus' call to come out, and to be more radical, and to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, different to the world.

I might move on to some of the questions that were submitted.

We've got two questions submitted today. One of them I think I'll just answer and then I'll open the other one up to you guys.

So first of all, we have a question that says, Do you think Ezekiel 47, where water flows to the east, turning the salt water to fresh water, has anything to do with the east exile being redeemed? I'll just answer this one.

I had a look at the passage. I think in context, it's not quite hitting at where you're getting at. It's talking about the water flowing into the Dead Sea, and it's kind of marking out the boundaries of the land of Israel.

So, it's not necessarily talking about Babylon in the east being redeemed, and it's sort of flowing east, because it's sort of, that's the direction of the temple.

But that passage is talking about the eventual return of the exiles to their land, and the prosperity of the land of Israel itself.

So, in a sort of a roundabout way, it is talking about the redemption from exile, but the eastward direction is not really a part of that. So, but thank you for submitting that question. The next question, I'll read out.

Thank you for the wonderful sermons on 1st and 2nd Kings. Now the Boney M song makes more sense.

My question, I know that God gives us choice to serve and worship Him, but sometimes I wonder if all those Israelites that were scattered and far from God's place and rule, were they doomed for failure?

If God has a purpose and a plan for us, is it just our choice to choose wisely? Surely God, the Creator of all things, can turn people towards Him.

I try not to get into discussion about the geopolitics of the world right now, but clearly the world needs Jesus. How can I be more effective as a citizen of heaven, where Jesus has placed me in light of current affairs? What do you guys think?

I feel like there's 2 parts to the question.

One is the acknowledgement that there are a lot of extras in the Cecil de B de Mil film of the Bible. You know, there are a lot of extras.

There's a lot of like, there are these characters we know about, but there's what about all the thousands, hundreds of thousands of Israelites, Canaanites, Moabites, all these people that just, they fill in the human actor spots, the extra spots for

the story. That's a good question. What about them? What about all the individuals in the north, near Samaria that get taken off?

Are they all worthy to be judged? Well, that's not above our pay rate grade. That's God's judgment.

But it's a good question. It's like in the Old Testament, how much did God show interest in individuals? I think that's where the question is in a way.

But then the other part of the question is, can you make a difference as an individual in the setting that you've been located in by God? And surely that answer is yes.

We can make a difference from the all sorts of decisions we make about how we're going to live and be light and salt, doing good where we've been planted.

The second part of the question was maybe answered by our previous conversation of how you live as a citizen of the kingdom in the middle of the empire.

Yeah, I would say there's a real opportunity that's presented the way you live. Like, we did this series in Romans in Term 1 of this year, and one of the main takeaways was the way you love your life will bring opportunity to share Christ.

That's the gift that keeps on giving when it comes to our faith.

And yeah, I think the way you love your life, the way you go by example, and the way you operate should bring up questions in a world that doesn't operate like that, to be set apart that way. So yeah.

All right, and with that, I think we'll end it there. Thank you to our question askers, and thank you all for coming on the podcast, and thank you all for listening. Hope you have a really good week.

Bye bye.