

Pondering Christ in 2 Chronicles

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 Sundays and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

My name is Jack, I'm joined by Ben, Jono, Tristan, and a guest appearance of Stephen. Thanks for coming on the pod.

Happy to be here.

And today we are talking about Christ in Two Chronicles and the sermon Jono preached on Jono, did you want to give us a recap?

I love the portion of scripture in Chapter 6 and 7 where Solomon is giving this great prayer at the dedication of the temple.

And there's this line, he says, hear from heaven, he asks God for lots of different things and he says, hear from heaven and forgive, hear from heaven and do justice, hear from heaven and heal the land, restore.

And so I tried to build a sermon around that as a big idea. What does it mean for God to hear from heaven? And that reminded me of a question that led a mate of mine to Christ.

He was an adult unbeliever, and the process of him getting saved was this question that an evangelist said to him, his neighbor, ask God, are you there and do you care? And that led him to Christ, to faith.

And I think it's a great question for anyone who's wondering about faith, that may be an agnostic, unsure about whether there's a God. If there is one, does he care?

And so that's the question that I tried to build a sermon around, because I feel like it's the essence of really the story of the Old Testament. There is a God who is invisible, who turns up in different ways and reveals his presence and identity.

But the big question is, is he there and does he care? And the story has been really clear. He cares heaps, and he wants to know the people of Israel.

And then extrapolating that to the New Testament through Jesus, this God who is there and cares, cared enough to come here and show us how to know the Father. So that's a bit of a winding answer.

But it really comes back to that question, are you there and do you care? And then that was, I tried to answer that question in a way, in God's response to Solomon, that is in 2 Chronicles 7, 14 to 16. A really amazing portion of Scripture.

If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and praise, hit my face. We said we worked through that line by line.

Yeah, I really felt like, you said it's a summary of the whole Old Testament, that question. I think it really, it's a key part of the Gospel itself, and I felt like I could very easily see how we get from there to the Gospel.

Reflections from you guys, maybe start with Stephen.

I really enjoy the evangelistic angle, and I've, over the course of my life, seen evangelism and encouragement as very closely linked together, just encouraging people where they're at in their faith.

And so, I was quite connecting with the word if, and that's the relational aspect between us and God. So, a lot of the time, we can think about how God's created the world, how he's got plans. But this is if we turn to him.

So, if we turn to him, and we're the people who are called by his name, then things will happen. We're relating to God, we're asking questions. And then from there, good things happen.

So, like the rest of the sermon, turning from evil, hearing from heaven, forgiveness, healing, and restoration. So, that element where we interact with God, there is an if part, there's a part for us to play in this relationship.

I love this part of scripture, especially that line, hear from heaven. I remember being 19 and reading the Bible heaps and discovering that prayer, Solomon's prayer, hear from heaven.

And it was in July 2019 when we as a church were finishing up at the school down the road, about to move in here.

And we did this awesome, I think we've told this story before, but we did this awesome thing as a church where we got to write messages on the bottom of carpet tiles, which are now literally the carpet that we're standing on.

And I wrote, hear from heaven, on one of the carpet tiles. I don't know which one it is.

I had forgotten that.

Somewhere in this building, there is a carpet tile that says, hear from heaven, which is Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple.

And when I wrote that, I was praying for this church that God would hear his people's prayers in this place, in this building, which is just such a great promise that he is here and he does care. I love it.

Not to Rachel Ridley-Smith, who came up with that idea, I think, to do it.

Oh, I see. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

It's a great idea.

Yeah, my reflection from the sermon wasn't so much the hear from heaven part, but more 714 in two chronicles where he says seek my face. And that triggered one of the first Bible passages I ever got told to memorize.

Now Psalm 27 verses 8 where it says, My heart says of you seek his face, your face, Lord, I will seek. And that's the basis of what my family brought, like all our cousins and stuff to.

That was our first response to anything is to seek the Lord's face in all that you do. So that was a nice reminder. And also asking the question of, are you there?

Do you care? But the other way, like, I know there is God, I know that I'm his child, but am I there with him? Do I care?

Like, just flipping the question on myself. So, yeah, that was my takeaway.

I want to dig into a little bit about what it means to seek God's face.

I'm drawing from that response, Tristan. So, Jono, you shared a little bit about your experiences back at the Sanchez Forest with that sort of mini revival and fasting and praying and seeking God's face.

I wondered if people around this table could share a little bit about their experiences, what it means to seek God's face, to seek that intimacy and that close relationship with God.

Yeah.

What do you guys think?

A memory that comes to mind for me is, we often talk about quiet times or escaping, like alone in your room or before the sun rises or things like that.

So as a child, you don't often have an example of that, when if your parent is just not with you or has gone out early in the morning.

But there was a time back in Warrnambool, country Victoria, where I grew up, and there was things happening in the church.

I remember my dad praying with the pastor and going out early in the morning before they both had to go to work, and walking along the beach and seeing the sunrise, and that prayer time being quite special.

And there was sometimes I just woke up early enough and I said, oh, can I come along too?

And it was just, it's a special memory in my mind, and something I think, seeing God's creation getting out early in the morning to seek His will, to seek His face in a certain situation.

Often, we're more, we put more effort into it when there's a significant challenge in front of us. But yeah, that's something that comes to mind for me.

Love that. That's really cool. How old were you when you did that?

Probably young teenager, maybe 12, maybe 13, 14.

Very special memories.

Yeah.

We've been getting, I mean, I've been getting back into fishing a bit.

There's effort to chase the sunrise. There's effort to get out at dawn. That just reminds me, as I hear you say that, that finding the Lord in the solitude and quiet of and stillness of the morning is a chase.

What does it say? It's the glory of, glory of kings to conceal a matter and the glory of princes to seek it out. And this idea that God is not hiding but he has to be found.

So I guess all that to say there's a level of intentionality, which is, I guess, where we always come back to. There's a bit of a chase.

I think that idea of intentionality is helpful, that at absolute minimum, what it means to seek God is to be intentional, to set your mind, your heart on him. If you're not setting your mind on God, you're literally not seeking God.

And so as you said, Stephen, there's so many different ways that you could seek God through scripture, prayer, being in nature, being in community, but being aware of God's presence, that he is here and he does care, is helpful.

I'm reminded of Colossians 3 verse 1. Paul says, since then you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above.

That set your hearts is literally seek, seek things above. So it's again that call for us to be intentional about setting our mind and heart on God and finding him everywhere.

Yeah, when it comes to seeking, seeking his face and seeking, seeking the Lord, I find for me personally, yes, there's, you have moments where there's a very intentional effort to seek the Lord, or if it's fasting for a big decision or something like

that. But for me, it was always, what does it, it's always the phrase of keeping the Lord in the forefront of your mind. And one Chronicles 16, 11 says, look to the Lord and your strength, seek his face always.

Like that always part, it's not seek his face in moments or in times of need. Yes, those things. But always in terms of being kingdom minded, being aware, like you said, Ben, of the work he is doing that goes unnoticed most of the time.

So that's always the joy that I find where I am very intentional about it as well, but it's also a joy to see these different things pop up of what God is actually doing. And that's my version of seeking his face in my active purview of things.

I'm just going to add, maybe part of the reason that memory sticks out to me is it is so challenging to get up for the sunrise, like Jono mentioned. And I think it's great when we can bookend our days. What's the first thing you think about?

What's the last thing you think about before you go to sleep? And so I have a better nighttime routine, and just encouraging my mind, I'm thinking about this for my following week. How can I be thinking about God as I wake up in the morning?

Often it's to go do ministry or we're praying about the events of the day or whatever it might be, just giving our needs before him. But I feel like I've got a stronger nighttime routine. The book end, the back end is better.

But how can God be the first thing I seek in the start of the day, and also the last thing I think about at night, often with gratefulness or reading the Bible?

One of the aspects of the challenge and inspiration that we experienced back in the late 80s when there was this little mini revival was reading some of the stories of God reviving and renewing other people.

And I mean, John Wesley is one of the classic revivalists, and he was stirred before the Outer Gate Prayer Meeting where they all got together and were seeking the Lord and had like a Pentecost sort of experience in his sense of the baptism of the

Holy Spirit and empowering of a bunch of evangelists in the late 1700s, I think it was. But it came from him doing a trip to the states from England, coming back on a boat, and he meets a guy called Count von Zinsendorf, a Moravian, and he finds out

that they've been having a prayer meeting for 100 years without stopping. And he's just like, Excuse me, did I hear that right? And I feel like that's what you need in the church.

You need to hear the stories of others who have had exactly what we have, the gospel, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God. But they took it somewhere different, and that's all about seeking God's face.

So somebody, a small group said, we're going to pray, we're going to seek God's face and find out what he wants us to do. And somehow they just kept on praying and praying.

And out of that was birthed much of the great awakenings that happened in the 18th century, crazy stuff. So I remember we were reading that and we thought, well, shouldn't we be praying more? And so we started doing it.

Yeah, that's amazing.

I want to shift focus a little bit to some questions we had submitted by Kathleen. And part of the question, part of the verse we were looking at involves calling on the name of the Lord.

And, Jono, you mentioned sort of the importance of names and what they can do for us, and how important the name of the Lord is, and how powerful it is. And so this question revolved around, do names still carry that weight for us?

And should Christian parents, for example, be praying about what names they should name their children? I don't know, what do you guys think?

My immediate reaction is, I'm not sure in the New Testament, it's made very clear that it's so important.

I'm open to be changed on that, but I wouldn't say my recollection of reading the New Testament, I'd say, praying for the name for your child is a really important thing.

Yeah, the only thing I can think of is Jesus renaming Peter. That was very significant, but he's literally the rock, the apostle. Certainly in the Hebrew Bibles, or in Hebrew culture and language, names are a much more important thing.

When Courtney and I named our daughter Esther, we certainly thought about it a lot and thought about the meaning of the name.

Esther means star in Greek, which is kind of a nice word, but more importantly, a great woman of God in the Old Testament, so it's a story of Esther. I think it's not going to hurt to pray for the name that you name your child.

It's the name that won't change. You can get married and change your last name, but your first name you normally keep. So I think it's important for sure.

It feels strange for me to weigh in on this one.

Hi Kathleen, thanks for the question. And I think praying for your children, more important than praying for the name that you give them, but definitely it should have thought behind it.

Like, if there is a name that sounds strange in your culture, or even the meaning of the name is not something that is godly, it might seem strange that some names kind of have a worldly attachment.

But yeah, just having a name so that it just sounds cool, or I'm thinking of Hollywood people who give names that seem strange, that seem very commercial, or like a piece of fruit, or they're just trying to be different.

But yeah, I think the emphasis being more that you would pray for your children, more than the name that you give them. But god would give them a rich blessing in the meaning of their name.

I think about the meaning of my name a lot, and I think about meanings of names, and I ask people about meanings of names because it comes up a lot in the Bible.

Not that we want to be boxed in by that, but god could bless us and encourage us through our names.

If anyone wants to know more about names in the Bible, I'll point you towards Abigail Markey, who wrote her honors thesis on this.

I'm sure she won't mind me shouting her out in the podcast, but she would be very thrilled to talk to you about ancient Hebrew naming conventions.

I'm feeling bad that I change your name so often, Stephen de Stefanos.

But that is the Greek.

That's the original. I feel like it's just being very biblical there. It's like, you know, that's where it originates from and comes from.

Like when you're at, you know, speaking from the pulpit and saying, in the original Hebrew or Greek, your name is this.

Names are interesting. I remember reading an article a couple of years ago about names, and there's this idea called nominative determinism, which is the question of whether somebody's name determines their future in any way.

And there's all these studies that have been done that have pretty much conclusively decided names don't determine destiny.

For instance, a person with the last name Baker has no higher statistical likelihood of being a Baker than somebody with the last name Shanks, which is interesting in a kind of statistical sociological level.

But now coming back to 2 Corinthians, pardon me, 2 Chronicles 7, it says, if my people who are called by my name. So it's actually not about, I mean, the name thing is interesting, what our name is.

But the more important point is that we are called by his name. You know, Yahweh, the gracious and compassionate God.

We are the people who literally are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who bear the power and the presence of God himself, which does transform our future far, far, far, far more than our name.

It makes me think of the word Christian, or Christ ones. Like, we have his name in us as we walk around, so we bear his name in that. And if we're going back to kind of the Hebrew side of that, we could be called the Messiah ones.

So, you know, it's nice to read two chronicles and go, this is kind of where it was all finishing up, leading to hope, leading to Christ. And we bear that name as Christians.

Turning now to sort of what you identified as one of the central aspects of the sermon, Shano, which is this idea of hearing from heaven.

And this is this refrain that Solomon, or that said again, and again, that you mentioned also, Ben, that God would hear from heaven when people pray towards the temple and bring forgiveness and restoration.

And I guess there's an interesting question to be had about the distance of God when he is up in heaven, and how we connect that to his presence in heaven, to his presence on earth, and his action on earth, and sort of the interplay of that distance.

I just wondered if any of you had thoughts on that, that you wanted to expand on.

There's a teaching from Genesis that would say the heavens, I can't remember what is in Hebrew, but the heavens are around us, rather than spatially above the clouds. They're here.

And so that leads you more to the Venn diagram of the heavenly realm and the earthly realm, and there's an intersection.

And that was a big point that I was trying to make, that the, it's called a thin space, a liminal space, a space of closeness to God, where he hears, we have revelatory encounters.

And I think it's a really important idea, that it's, throughout the whole Bible, these pockets where he is found.

But that is opened up with the spirit, who is everywhere anyway, but, yeah, being made manifest more obviously through people, as we are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And the most incredible fulfillment of that idea of the heavens being close, when Jesus is raised from the dead and he comes in and out. He is there, and then he's not.

And I just always feel like I can't think of a better way to describe it, that he pops out of the heavenly realms, and then he disappears. And he's just, he's right here. And that's a bit like the Romans part that says, God's not too far away.

He's right close.

I think that's an absolutely crucial point. In Solomon's prayer, the hear from heaven prayer, heaven is always plural, heavens.

And Jack could verify this in Hebrew, but certainly in Greek, the word heaven, uranos, is the vast majority of the time in the plural, meaning the heavens, not heaven.

And I think remembering that is helpful because it breaks down the notion of heaven as a single place far away in the sky.

But it's like the heavens as in the worlds, the canopy above us, which is high above us, but it's also as close as the air around your skin. And that's the point of Jesus saying that the kingdom of heaven has come near.

The realm of God, where God is, the place of the activity of God is here right now, interacting with space, time and matter on earth.

And so God hearing from heaven is not that he's got really long ears very far away, but it's that he is right here, present, working around us.

And so the call for us is to humble ourselves and pray, seek his face, turn from evil, and he will hear from heaven. And act for his glory and our good.

My mind went to Psalm 23 and the different places that are mentioned and there's no heavens or mountain necessarily. I was thinking of mountain top experiences, it feels like the high places are where you're kind of closer to that intersection.

But God is with you in all places. Green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters. Right paths for His namesake.

Even in the darkest valley, He's with me. He comforts me. He prepares a table for me, even in front of my enemies.

And I'll follow Him. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

So I've kind of just focused on the places that are mentioned in the six verses of Psalm 23, which is a psalm that a lot of people know and brings great comfort, that God is with you and present in all circumstances.

And it finishes with the temple, not a mountain or the heavens, but I like that God is with us in all these places of life.

It's a great line, isn't it? I will dwell in your house forever, because that's what we do. We dwell in the temple of the Holy Spirit forever.

Our bodies, which are then resurrected.

One interesting question I think about the context of this verse, which my wife pointed out to me, is that at least in Chronicles, a lot of this verse has, it says, the Lord appeared to Solomon at night, and sort of personally starts describing this

vision, which is obviously for the whole of Israel, but is describing it directly to Solomon. And I wonder what that says about the role of leaders in guiding people, us as the people of God, to this place and sort of working towards the fulfillment

of what God has said here, or communicating what God has said. Thoughts on that?

The theme of God appearing at night is quite significant. I was reminded of when God makes the Covenant with Abraham, it happens at night, because there's that scene in Genesis 15 where God says, hey, come out of the tent, look up at the stars.

Obviously, it's night if you're looking at the stars. And God says, can you count the stars? No, that's how much I'm going to bless you.

And so I'm kind of connecting that with Solomon. Again, God appears at night to respond to his prayer, taking him outside with this great hear from heaven thing.

So, the theme of God's appearance at night promising a future glory is quite a significant biblical theme.

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night.

Yeah, I think he does it again in Samuel, when he speaks to Samuel about Elijah.

And I think what that says for leadership, if that was the question, it's to not make it about yourself in a way, in terms of, like, I find, like, when I'm, if I have to correct someone on something, like, if it's a terminology or just, like,

something wrong, I find it, I used to find it very challenging to not make it about myself, like, well, I've studied this, we can correct this. But I think there's a real grace that you need to show in terms of what the Lord is displaying here is,

like, just gentle, gentleness and, like, lowliness, and that sort of hard character is important when it comes to leadership, I feel.

Did the angel come to Mary at night?

I don't think we're told.

Yeah, I mean, that would be interesting.

I think of what you were saying, Tristan, I really like that, like, trying to step aside to a certain degree, like, if God has given you something, it can be really encouraging individually to get that timely word.

How apt is a timely word? It really lifts your spirit. So if I get a message from someone at a time when you're feeling a bit low or just tired, it really lifts your spirits.

It feels like healing, reinvigorating. But to come from God when He gives you a timely word, and if it's about His people, like to try and hold on to that feeling, to that reality of, God, this feels good.

This feels good that you've given me a future hope for this person, for these people. And you want that hopefulness and that encouragement to flow through you to the next person.

And I think, you know, we've highlighted that 2 Chronicles is a book of hope. We, there's a lot of similarities between 1st and 2nd Kings and 1st and 2nd Chronicles, but this is to point God's people towards hope, hope of a future that's coming.

And I find it interesting that the intimacy of all those experiences in the Bible, and even when it comes to the other side of it, when it's discipline, that's a very, not a crowd sort of thing, where it's 2 people or 1 person talking to you.

So I think that's also another quality when it comes to leadership in a way where there's a level of intimacy that is required in terms of dealing with things softly and privately in a way. So I think that's another quality that comes out of that.

It's interesting, sort of slightly detouring from the leadership question.

I was just looking at the text again, and I went to an evangelistic, like altar call at the end. But if you translate this to the New Testament, it really is a challenge to Christians.

If you look at that, if my people, who are already called by my name, I think that's an interesting thing to just acknowledge, that it's always hard to take things out of the context of the Old Testament, let me land it where it first began.

But there is truth about it having some impact on us today. And it's really speaking to Christians. My people, who are called by my name, they have a sheriff's badge on.

Sometimes you have to humble yourself and pray and turn from your wicked ways and seek God in repentance. And he will raise you up, restore you, heal you, forgive you, and do a work. It's good to remember.

And that was my reflection of flipping the question.

Like, are we there? Do we care?

Yeah, gotcha. I was following it exactly.

That sort of flip side of it, because we get lost in the...

That's so cool.

We get lost in the comfort of everything that's around us and daily lives and going through the emotions and saying, oh, I'm busy, those sort of phrases. And we almost need to check in.

That is so good, Tristan. You went completely over my head. The challenge, the discipleship challenge is, are we there?

Do we care?

Yep. Come on. For those listening, Tristan just fist bumped at.

That is a great twist.

Are we there?

Do we care?

Good job, Tristan.

Okay, let me move on.

Last week, I read out part of a question, or the palate cleanser aspect of a question sent to me by Karen Braiding.

I promised I would do the first half of it this week, and I think it's fitting since we're at the end of these historical books, at the end of Looking at All the Kings, and she has a question about the kings. So let me read it out.

After David, there were three kings of Judah who were praised, Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Both Hezekiah and Josiah were called the best. I'll read out the verses cited.

So, 2 Kings 18, verse 5 to 6, Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him amongst all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him.

He kept the commands the Lord had given Moses. So that's Hezekiah.

And then 2 Kings 23, verse 25, neither before or after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did, with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strengths in accordance with the law of Moses.

Do you think it was significant that they were the best in slightly different ways, or were they both equally the best, or is this just hyperbole? Which is your favorite?

What do we think about these Kings who were both called the best, there was no one like them before or after them?

I want to say the airbrush artist just got carried away, did the same sweep.

Well, these verses are from Kings, which is interesting. Sure, okay. Because Kings is normally a little bit more critical.

Yes, good point. I think certainly there's what we call a formula going on here. So a formula is just a certain way of expressing, a certain thing.

So one of our classic formula is, this is what the Lord has said, and you read the prophets, and before they say anything, they always say, this is what the Lord has said.

So there's certainly a formula here where if there's a really good King, they'll say there was no one before him, like him, either before or after him.

The same thing as if you read throughout Kings, they'll say, he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, or he did well in the eyes of the Lord. It's a certain phrasing to communicate something. So certainly there's that going on.

And that is a key feature of the Hebrew Bible, repetition of the same phrase.

For instance, in the second passage that you quoted, the one about the kind of praise of Josiah, it says, neither before or after was there a king who with all of his heart and soul and mind and strength lived in accordance with the law.

That's echoing almost verbatim the language of Deuteronomy in the Shema, here Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength.

And so that's a quite a good instinct to pick up on, where if I heard this language before, and I always when I'm reading the Bible, if you have that thought, go and find it, because you're going to find something interesting.

Go back to Deuteronomy 6, and then think, oh, that reminds me of, you know, something else, and you follow that trail.

I think it's a tricky question to answer in terms of, I don't think of which is my favorite kings so much. I'm not the best with favorites. I might have a couple of favorite things in life, but overall, I just enjoy life and be in the moment.

But given the context of our conversation, I think about their success being connected with them seeking God. So even what Ben's just mentioned about, you know, loving God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength.

These kings were seeking after God again and again and again, continually. They didn't give up. They were consistent in seeking God and following his ways.

And that gave them success to rule God's people the way God wanted. But there wasn't many. So these are examples that are highlighted in the Bible, examples for us to go, OK, we need to do the same.

Yeah, it's a good point, Stephen.

And I think also they are the point that they might be good in different ways is also valid. I think Josiah, you know, you mentioned, Ben, that that deuteronomistic language coming from Josiah.

I mean, his whole thing is that he rediscovers the law and he rediscovers the deuteronomy. And so he's particularly good in that way.

And Hezekiah is good in a different way in that he cleanses the temple after his father and grandfather desecrate it. And so they are unique in different ways.

And I think, you know, it's like you said, that the aspect of their reigns that is harped upon is their relationship with God. I mean, both of these kings, they're not particularly powerful kings. They're towards the end of the history of Judah.

Josiah dies in battle. He's not a very successful warrior. Hezekiah is basically unable to defend the kingdom from Assyria.

He's able to just stay in Jerusalem and that's about it. But it's the relationship with gods and the different ways in which they return to god that makes them unique. But thank you for that question.

Thank you guys for coming on to the podcast today. I hope you all have a very blessed week. Bye bye.