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Pondering Christ in Amos

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Hi there, 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 daily lives. My name is Tristan, and alongside me is Jono and Ben.

How are you guys doing?

Good, man.

Very well.

We are continuing our series in Christ in Scripture, and we are going to look at the book of Amos today. So Ben, do you want to give us a recap?

Yeah. Amos is a kind of pokey book of the prophets.

Amos is mainly kind of criticizing Israel for getting their priorities wrong, that they're doing all the right religious things without focusing on the stuff that God cares about, which is justice and care for the poor.

And so I sort of found from Amos chapter four, five questions to ask yourself before you come to church. Am I hungry for the word of God? Am I thirsty for the presence of God?

Am I sickened by my sin? Am I grieved by the state of the world? And am I drawing near with fear and trembling?

And so I sort of put it to the night church last night, that if we answer yes to those questions, God will start to reform our priorities, such that we will gather to do the religious things like singing, praying, Bible reading, community for the

right reason, which is to encounter God and glorify Him.

Yeah.

And before we jump into those five questions and looking at what that looks like for us personally and maybe for the rest of the church, Jono, any reflections?

I appreciated the way Ben took a really chunky, difficult passage that's basically all about justice and injustice and honed it in on those five questions.

It was really great. The application worked, I thought, so I appreciated that.

Yep.

And the first one, Ben, as you mentioned, is, Am I hungry for the Word of God? And I want to ask, like, what does it look like to arrive at church genuinely hungry for the Word of God? And what dulls that appetite usually during the week?

I'll answer the second part first because I think it's easier.

Information, I think. I made the point that we live in the information age, 500 million new tweets, 294 billion emails, 65 billion WhatsApp messages every day.

We're just overwhelmed with information, voices telling us what to think and how to live and what's important. And so what that really dulls our appetite for the Word of God, because we just have so much in our heads.

And yet we're kind of called to come before God, hungering for the reality that is His Word, for a voice that rises above all the other voices, for truth that kind of builds us up, that we can feed on and be nourished by.

In the past, I've been part of communities that use language that fosters this passion for the Word. And it could be just the idea of, that was a good word. It could be that you explore communal response like preach it.

And it sounds a bit over the top, but it's like, no, no, we believe in the Word of God, and we believe in the vehicle of a preacher putting it into a sort of old-fashioned sermon and then preaching it with their heart and soul and empowering the Holy

Spirit. So I feel like there's something that the village can do together to create expectation that, you know, we love the Word of God. We love a good preach. That was certainly my experience as a young man.

The community created this sort of expectation. And that's why, you know, I have all my life said amen and asked for amen to the point of distraction and disturbance to the congregation.

But yeah, I just, I'm always, whether it's a funeral or a wedding, I'm looking for collective agreement that the preached word matters.

When it comes to that dull appetite in the week, I find it so interesting that most churches, or at least the churches I've been a part of, all three of them, is, it's specifically designed to combat that dullness in the middle of the week where

people are not there on a Sunday. Like there is an accountability group, there's life hub groups, there's youth, there's all these different avenues that you can get plugged into.

And that leads into the second point of trying to cultivate a thirst for the presence of God in those weeks.

And one thing I've been really sitting with since I got into ministry is separating what I do for work and what I do for personal, like my personal devotion. And it's mostly seeking the presence of God in both those camps equally and in the same way.

And I want to get the knowledge of two experienced pastors. What does it look like for you when you're seeking the presence of God outside of a Sunday? Whether it be it's something that you do, it's something that is different.

Like, what does that look like? Because sometimes we seek an emotional experience, and we touched on this on the previous episode, where you have a moment that you seek for. But what does it have?

What does it mean to have that thirst for His presence?

My most powerful experience has been in the church building.

It's not as though I haven't connected with the Lord in the natural spaces, like, for sure, but my most powerful times of both, you know, personal, intimate connection with the Lord, and that leading directly to a hearing from God about my role in

the church. They're hard to separate in a way for me, but I've found that walking around a dark church building for a good period of time has been just really helpful. And when I couldn't do that, I really missed it when I changed churches.

It was a bit harder to do it here. So yeah, I find that there's a connection between the personal seeking of being in the presence of hearing of just being with God, and ears opening and hearing his voice about my role, if that makes sense. Yeah.

I do relate to the struggle of when you're a like quote unquote professional Christian, said highly ironically, and you're reading the Bible all week leading ministry stuff, it's hard to also cultivate a personal faith.

We talked about what it means to seek God a couple of weeks ago in Ponder, I think, and one of the points that struck me then was at minimum, it means to be intentional.

No one seeks God accidentally floating into his presence without some level of intentionality, and so that looks like a hundred things for a hundred different people.

One of the little habits that I have, which is helpful is, I pray every time I walk out of our apartment building on the way to church, and often it's a beautiful day, and every time I walk out from being inside to outside, and blue sky and sun

shining, I'll just say, Yahweh our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth, you've set your glory in the heavens, which is Psalm 8. And I just pray the Psalms as a way of drawing my mind into the presence of God, and seeing his presence in

creation. And then when I sit down, I was telling Jack the other week, one of my least favorite parts of my day is arriving at the office and setting up.

Because you put the bag down, you've got the laptop and the screens and plugging and all the kind of stuff, and then you sit down for the day's work. But when I do that, recently I've been trying to pray and invite God into my work today.

In Psalm 90, it says at the very end, establish the work of our hands. Yes, establish the work of our hands.

And so that's, I guess, my point is to say that in the mundane things of life, we can also seek the presence of God, as well as in specific intentional times.

We had a cool, Jack and I had a cool moment last week where we lined up at the train station to go to college at the same time, which usually doesn't happen. He usually gets there much earlier than I do.

And I made this interesting observation to him and we both really got into the discussion. When you stand at the Metro platform, everyone's, it's one of the most quiet experiences you will ever have, but there's so many people there.

There's a huge crowd in peak hour traveling time, but it's still, because everyone's heads down on their phone just locked in to what they're doing.

And you can actually have a proper conversation that no one would notice because everyone's in their own situation. And my brain works where I can really focus better when it's quiet.

Like I'm not big on, I can't do distractions, like I don't work that way. And I found myself just being so still in the busiest part of the city at that time.

And it was just a moment of like, Lord, do you work in weird ways that we just don't expect? And that's the thirst when you have those small things throughout the week that call you back to him that say, I'm still here, like you still need me.

Yeah, and this next point is also a really cool one. And the way you worded it was interesting. Am I sickened by sin?

Like, do you want to expand on the choice of sickened?

I had about literally 10 different ways of saying that phrase. Am I sick with sin? Am I sick with sin and death?

Am I sick with sin, death and the devil? I had literally tried 10 different options. I kind of settled on this, am I sickened by my sin?

Because I was trying to get the repetition of, am I, am I, am I, am I? But it's that image in Amos, he talks about blight and mildew that choke the fruitfulness of a plant.

I think it's a really challenging thought for Christians that we're meant to bear fruit. We're meant to live fruitful lives, but sin can choke the fruitfulness out of us. And it's not that it kills us.

You know, I made the point that if you're a Christian, you've been set free from the penalty of sin. You're forgiven of sin, praise God. But we're still learning how to live in the freedom from the power of sin.

And so, I experience, maybe I'm unique, I don't think I am, I experience being sickened by sin, by my sin, to be clear.

And it's like, God, I don't want to keep doing this stuff anymore, but there's something in me, there's, you know, I used a basketball analogy.

I just keep on doing the things that I don't want to do, and so I'm learning in community with the saints that I gather with, how to live in freedom from the power of sin.

The immediate point that came into my head was a book that I read years ago by Jerry Bridges, I believe, Respectable Sins. And I think we fall into that category of where sin takes a hold of us when we don't acknowledge it in the first place.

Like, that's where it gets tricky when we don't give it the acknowledgement that it actually deserves in a way, like, oh, this is taking a hold of me.

And why is being grieved by our own sin a healthy sign, rather than something that is what grief usually is, it's a burden, it's something very pointy and painful? Like, how do we turn our grief by our sin into a healthy outcome?

Well, quite simply, because it draws us into the presence of the only one who can save us. Jesus said he's not come to call the healthy but the sick. He's not come for the righteous but for sinners.

And he doesn't mean that you could possibly be righteous without him. He means that he's come to help those who know they need help.

And so when we aren't sickened by our sin, it's this attitude of, I'm doing pretty well on my own, and I'll get a little bit of Jesus sprinkled in on the side.

But what we're called to is like, oh, I'm literally dead in my transgressions and sins without you, God. And even as a born-again Christian, I'm still stuck in these patterns that are embedded in my body, and I need your help.

And so it's important for us to remember our sin because it drives us to the Savior who can save us from our sin.

Yeah, and moving on to the next one, am I grieved by the state of the world?

And this is more like a pastoral care question that I came up with literally five minutes ago.

Looking at the outside world, outside the doors of this building, how does that, the context of that ever-changing world that's going through different times, like an information age or different trends, how does that influence or does it influence

the way you operate inside the church? Like does the outside world and the context that happening of what's happening out there change how you minister to the people inside the church?

It's the natural progression of being sickened by our sin, isn't it? That sin gets out there amongst the world, and it grieves us. We're sickened by our own sin, and we're grieved by everyone else's sickening sin.

So Ben's point, I think, is that one leads to the other, and there is a very keen awareness that things are not like they should be, that the Kingdom of God is not manifest like it should be. And so we work and we pray, Thy Kingdom come.

I think John Stott used to say that we preach with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other, and his point was that we're applying the timeless truth of the Bible to today's world and the things that we're going through.

And that's true, that we should be thinking about the context that we live in and how the gospel applies to us. But when I was thinking about this point, am I grieved by the state of the world?

I was going to reference some headlines in the news, like have you seen this just happened overseas or this happened locally? And then I realized, well, it doesn't, like human history is full of these headlines.

And so at any age that we live in, there's always suffering and sin out there. And so it's not the news specifically, but the news generally that we live in a broken world that needs God, that causes us to grieve the state of this world.

And so you asked, how does what happens outside the church influence what happens inside?

There's probably specific things of understanding the information age that we live in that's helpful, but more broadly, it's like the world is sick with sin corporately, communally, and it needs a savior.

And so what we do here is experiencing the renewal of God and being part of his mission to bring the kingdom, which is what dad just said before. And it's also the importance of lament.

That was a big point that I made, that if God, if you think that God stands aloof to suffering, to reference back to last Ponder episode, you're not going to bring your honest self before God.

But 40% of the Psalms are lament, which means that we're supposed to bring our real suffering and our real grievances into the presence of the God who can do something about them.

Yeah, and to finish off, we'll look at the last point.

Am I drawing near with fear and trembling? And a big word that popped up for me when you said that point was reverence. Because coming from my background, it was you don't put your Bible on the floor.

You don't do this. You don't do this. It's out of respect.

It's out of reverence. That's what the word I was always told.

And for anyone listening, what would you say on, what does it mean to draw near to God with reverence, with fear and trembling, but also holding to, in the other hand, the confidence that we have in Christ?

To be honest, if you're doing the first four things, you're probably gonna land on the fifth thing the right way.

If you're hungering for the word of God, thirsty for his presence, sickened by your sin, grieving the state of the world, that's gonna drive you into God's presence in the right kind of heart posture of fear and trembling.

I referenced just a couple of people I've seen when they walk into the auditorium, cross themselves or maybe it's a Catholic background, like I said, but it's just a reverence that we don't get to waltz into the presence of a holy God on our own.

It is only by the imputed righteousness of Christ that we are clothed in, that we get to call him father. And so holding the love and justice of God at the same time is a good thing.

Likewise, when we sing songs, we want to have a balance of songs that talk about our response to God and what he has done and our gratitude, but mostly what God has done for us and lifting up the name of Jesus and stating the truth about who he is.

Because I mean, I think it was AW. Tozer said, what comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you. And so we need to remember the nature of the God that we are drawing into the presence of.

Chapter 4, verse 12 is pretty full on.

He is talking about judgment, and then he just says, prepare to meet your God. Makes me think that God must manage his appearing before humanity.

Because there's a sense with air that's like, if you meet me, like it's curtains for you because like, you don't come before a holy God. It's like fire. Yeah.

It's just burning fire that is holy. And I mean, yeah, of course we would be reverent. Most of the time, I think in that sitting, we're just hiding.

We're just hiding before this holy God. That's the sense I get from that passage. I mean, drawing me with fear and trembling.

Prepare to meet your God. It's a scary picture. And so we need to be sickened by our sin to put us in a place where we are appropriately scared of a holy God.

And yet coming with incredible joy and even reckless abandon to run to the Father, and call him daddy. It's just like the classic Aslan thing, isn't it? You know, is he safe and is he good?

Not safe, but he is good.

Yeah, I think that's a great place to end off on.

But before we do, I'm going to bring back a palate cleanser question.

Oh, good.

Because I have a good one. Because we had a kingdom message in the morning and an internal community message in the evening almost.

What is your community moment that you have where it's just, this is just pure community right now within the context of the church? It can be, yeah, just what is your moment with God's people that sticks in your mind?

I really enjoyed, and you see it in video that we show every now and then. When we first moved into this building, that was really cool.

All the chairs turned up about 350 chairs, and on the back of a big truck, and it was probably an OH&S nightmare for lack of safety getting them off.

But just like a chain gang of passing the chairs and all the gear in and setting up this place, it was really exciting. It had been a long time coming, 18 years in the process.

But that was a wonderful sense of experiencing the community of God's people.

I think when we are singing together, not always, sometimes, there's not a great sense of unity in the song that we sing, but often when it's a hymn or a classic old song, when the people of God are singing the same words, there are a few moments in

life or certainly in a church service where every person in the room is so united in what they're doing in that moment. And sometimes I'll step away from the mic and I'll stop singing to allow the people of God to lead us in worship.

And there's almost nothing quite like it, that sense of being swept up in praise to God.

Yeah.

My one would be actually a really cool one that happened on our Young Adults Retreat in August, where we were all on the top of this hill, Mount Kedron, and we're looking at this cross and everything that's happening behind it, basically Sydney

behind it. And there was about 20 of us up there, maybe more, and we just all sat in silence, looking at the cross and what was going on behind it.

And I'll confess, my views weren't looking at the cross, I was looking what's happening behind, and that draw me closer to what's in the foreground of my mind, which was the cross. So that was a cool community moment.

Well, that's all we have time for, and hopefully this was helpful. We'll have Jack back next week, so your ears will be graced by his voice once again, and we will see you next week. Bye.