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Pondering Christ in 2 Corinthians

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 here with Ben, Tristan, and Jono. And we are talking about Jono's sermon, Christ in 2 Corinthians, which was a pretty powerful sermon, I thought.

And Jono, just before we get into the nitty gritty of it, I just wondered what were you thinking about in the lead up to formulating this sermon?

Were there any things that were on the cutting room floor that you wanted to chat about?

What made this a bit unusual is that I was just working through health issues that are probably what we might call chronic, like an issue that I have, and that was making me feel weak in the week up, and I

was leading up, and it probably manifested in emotion in the sermon. But there's just, it's a full on book. It's a full on subject, a weakness that is meant to be good.

Like on the cutting room floor, I think powerlessness is just a huge subject that we didn't really name.

I did mention that in talking to people, leading up, a woman said, I've tried all my life to be strong when I was sort of raised to be weak in a way, and I found my voice and I don't really want to be

weak. And I was like, yeah, that's a really good point. Some people that have been suppressed and oppressed, it's like, are they meant to be weak, to be strong?

The other thing I didn't look at much at all until the last point, but it wasn't really long, is 2 Corinthians talks heaps about spiritual warfare.

If you have a pen and you just wander through it, it's just chapter after chapter after chapter. So we didn't touch on that that much.

But I guess the main idea, which I think is very provocative, is God wants you weak as a thesis from 2 Corinthians, and why, and I suggested to comfort others, to give him the glory, to receive encouragement,

and to live in the victory of the cross and the resurrection in a spiritual way.

Any reflections, Ben, Tristan, coming off of that, Simon?

It was a really powerful time.

After the sermon, we had some stories, people sharing their own weakness in the way that they've seen God's power. And I kind of had a respect for those stories.

I didn't put them in the podcast, and I trimmed them out of the live stream.

But for those who were there in the room, it was such a powerful application of exactly what you were talking about, that God wants us weak because he can do stuff in us.

And then here were four or five people who shared real life stories of just intense suffering or persecution or trial and the things that they learned and what God did through them and in them in that time.

It was like the most perfect application and illustration of the point.

Yeah, that was last night was probably one of the old timers for me in terms of sermons. It was disarmed me from the beginning and allowed me to really get to grips with what's going on. It just felt pointed.

I say this a lot of the times, but this one felt very pointed to either what I've gone through or what I've been called to do. And yeah, just a great passage. Great sermon.

To start us off with, I had this question and we were chatting a little bit about it before the pod, so we'll see where it goes.

About how do we display vulnerability? I was going to say safely, but I think part of what vulnerability is, is you're putting yourself in a slightly unsafe space.

But how do we, I guess, display vulnerability appropriately? I mean, I think you were, it was very inspiring, the way that you were willing to be vulnerable on the pulpit in front of a lot of people.

But yeah, how do we be vulnerable in a way? Yeah. Appropriately, safely.

Sometimes you don't choose to.

I mean, I was being vulnerable in sharing some of my struggles, but when I feel emotional, I wasn't choosing that. I never choose that, which just sort of happens.

Vulnerability is shared safely in the context of relationship and trust. So you got to have people that you have invited into your life who get to know what you're going through.

And in a good relationship, there's sharing both ways, and you get to every now and then say, I'm not doing so well. Stuff's pretty hard.

So it's being intentional, having relationships that are trust worthy, and that tends to provide a environment where you could be honest. You still got to make that choice. I'm going to invest and risk.

Risk the relationship, risk the truth. It's weird.

I have two very different responses when it comes to being vulnerable and what that looks like when I am vulnerable, because I could be in the most safe space with people that I've known for a long time, and I

trust, and I won't show it, just because ever since I was small, I won't cry out in public, and I'll go cry by myself later. But on the other hand, it's just visceral. Once it starts, it's on.

So I think the way my brain, and the way I've always chosen to do it is be open to being vulnerable, yes, but for some reason, I tried and I can't explain why. I fight it off.

This is interesting because we were just before the podcast, we were talking about this question and how it assumes a level of control we have, Jono, you are making the point that sometimes when we're vulnerable,

we can't control when that happens.

I think that's the real challenge of this question.

God wants you weak. It's not typically in life. Okay, so I'm coming to worship Him, and instead of raising my hands, I'm just going to be weak.

So I'll be a bit weak for a bit. Weakness takes you out, like it overwhelms you, like it's very scary. It's the tightest situation of this book, Conflict from Without, Fears Within.

Paul himself, he's getting beaten up, not just shipwrecked and, you know, drowning in rivers, but like flogged multiple times. He suffered for the name of Jesus. And so he's reflecting on a lot of that stuff.

But yeah, so my point being, weak is not tame and contained and sort of safe. It produces anxiety in you because you don't know when it's finishing. And out of all of that mess, we're called to faith.

We're called to revelation and invited to, you know, all those things that I talked about in The Points. The good stuff. When I'm weak, I'm strong.

Really? Okay. That's what the Bible says.

Contrasted with the weakness and those who are feeling weak, one of the things you talked about was Titus as sort of the encourager for the weak.

And sometimes those of us who were in that position, you mentioned, have been in that place of weakness ourselves.

And that sometimes that is why God brings upon this weakness, so that when you, you told that great story, I can't remember the guy's name, but when he goes down and he feels like he's hit the bottom, and then

he looks around and he sees as a community of people down here. I love that image.

For those who are in the position or who have been given that task of, okay, my job is to encourage, I guess, I'm looking for tips for how do they do that?

What was a good place to start about thinking intentionally about how can I, A, use my experiences or B, look for those who are undergoing an experience of weakness, and B, an aid to them, be an encouragement to

them.

It starts, I think, with presence.

Before you say any words, or did I steal your point? Yeah, just, there's a power in being with somebody in suffering that is deeper than the words that you could say. So that's where I would start.

I think your presence allows you to be open to a lot of people, but I think a big part, or at least what I've found, is to be discerning in who you're going to encourage as well, because there's a lot of

different context and backgrounds for relationships with different people, and you might not be helpful in that situation. So I think a lot of discernment is also required through praying about it, and yeah.

I think the Book of Job teaches us how not to comfort those in suffering.

Job's friends sort of try and answer his problems and point fingers and try and find easy solutions, which in Job's case is not what he needs. And so when you start with presence, you continue with discernment.

Not trying to offer solutions or give reasons or say too many words is helpful, but lamenting with the person can be a way of encouraging them.

When you look at the Psalms of lament, all of them by one end with hope. But you have to go through the lament to get to the hope on the other side.

And so when we're encouraging people, we walk with them through the lament until light breaks on their situation.

There's a lot to be said for what it means to be a good friend. And that's what I was sort of really talking about. What would a good friend do?

They protect and they listen, and they understand, they get to know. Find out help out is one of our core values, and over time, that's something you want to do.

I had a fellow pastor once say to me that he was on holidays, and he was having a time with the Lord, and he was reading that passage, and he said, I feel like the Lord told me to be Titus to you.

So when you're attacked from the outside, I'll be there for you to protect and to help. And when you have fears from within, I'll be there to help there. I thought, oh, it's a nice thing to say.

I had a funny story that popped into my head last night when you were telling the Titus story.

It was my first mission trip. I was in youth. As a youth, we went to this place.

And one of the guys, because of his very strong accent, he mispronounced my name to Titus. And the whole trip, he was like, oh, Titus, Titus, Titus.

I was like, it's probably circumstance that I'm now in a position where I'm called to be a version of Titus. But I was like, that is just wild. That's so cool.

Classic.

The church is substantially stronger when people live out of Titus Calling. And they have eyes to see. They are present physically, but they're also present mentally.

And spiritually, and they're listening, listening to the Holy Spirit and being guided and using words to build up. Because the opposite is the big fear in 2 Corinthians is that they would lose heart.

Like lose heart is just a simple idea, but it's like in the Bible, that's a really bad thing. Paul's like, we don't want to lose heart. And he says, we would almost lost heart.

What does that mean? You're giving up. Your core is just so knocked around.

And so if we can encourage, put courage in people as Titus style people, that's a good thing to do.

I was thinking, Titus, the way he encourages Paul is he brings news of how things are going in Corinth and they're going well.

And I had this, I'm reminded back to the verse in Isaiah, which says blessed are the feet that bring good news. And that's also associated with the gospel.

There's a certain element of running to spread the good news and running to bring the encouragement of God. And those who get to encourage others play a part in that.

They're carrying elements of the gospel to people who need it.

For my next question, I think, you obviously talked about this idea of weakness.

That's one of these provocative elements of Christianity, I think, that in some ways, we are called to a weakness to lay down our lives for others.

We're called to worship a crucified Messiah who was born as a baby in poverty and became a refugee. And I mean, we're not, in many ways, we're a religion of weakness that embraces weakness.

And that's very sort of counter-cultural.

But there is also an element in the Bible of strength, where there are certain points where you are called to step up and show strength, to be strong and courageous, as it's said to Joshua.

There's a Greek word used in the New Testament called andrizomai, which it literally means to be a man. But it's used in the context of having courage, to have a courage and embrace yourself.

And I just, I guess I wonder, if there's a time for weakness and a time of strength, how do we sort of know, when do we need to step up and say, you know, make it, you know, thump our hands on the pulpit

and say, no, this is true and I'm going to stand strong here. And when do we say, yeah, I'm weak and I'm embracing my weakness to the glory of God?

The most obvious answer to me is to love your enemies is the most courageous, brave, insanely strong thing a human can do. To love back. I know there's something that's just purely pacifism, pacifist responses.

But for yourself, you're not acting on behalf of a country or the government. On the whole, our guide is love your enemies. And that's full on.

This classic Martin Luther King Jr. speech I've used in sermons over the years, it's just so stark. It's like when you come with your hooded perpetrators of violence, we will not give in.

We will not respond in violence, and we will win you over by love. It's like it's the Christian way. It's full on.

So, I would say, strong is cross. Strong is love your enemies.

Yeah, it's a subversive kind of strength. Yeah, it requires you to act in a way that almost no other human would normally act in response to a stimulus.

Yeah, like Jesus just picks a couple of simple little ideas when he's unpacking it in the Sermon on the Mount, doesn't he? Turn the other cheek, walk another mile, hand over the jumper.

Yeah, it's the Christian, it's legitimate Christianity graduate level is what strength looks like.

It's interesting that when Jesus went into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and 40 nights, it says in Luke's version that he came out of the wilderness full of the Holy Spirit and power, which is the paradox

that he went voluntarily to the place of total weakness and found in that place total strength. And so weakness in the kingdom is strength, even for Jesus himself.

The profound truth, I think, is it's not just that God is weird when he says weak is strong. What if that's the actual truth?

Like when you respond in love, you're tapping into something that is the opposite of violent, power-mongering, suppressing power.

That there is a genuine source of power that is found in servanthood, in humility, in yielding.

The spiritual discipline of silence, because we haven't mentioned Dallas' name, Dallas Willard, it used to say, in a conversation, that's a little bit dialogue conflict-y, he says, let the other person have the last

word. Just let that last word sit. And it's the most simple, practical, western idea of what conflict and grace and love look like. It's like, that sounds like a good spot to finish our conversation.

I don't have to have the last word. And in a way, that what that is doing, is like my handing outcomes over to God. Yeah.

And it's like, you try that in an argument. Just go, let the other person just have more and more space. And you realize, oh, wow, there's strength in silence.

There's strength in silence. Who would have thought? The other person just stumbles over their words and starts realizing, I don't know what I'm saying.

I'm getting caught up in all the negative and the sin of the situation.

Yeah. Paul says that in loving our enemies and doing good to those who persecute us, we're poor burning culls on their head. Which is funny, because you're like, hang on, that's violent.

Are we not called... Hang on, that's violent. But his point is that it is the non-violent way, which is actually so impactful for the other person.

It's interesting.

This is one of my many flaws about when it's arguments. Yes, I stay silent a lot of the times, but it leads me to that trap of internalizing everything.

And sometimes I go to a point of surrender and say, love my enemy.

But a lot of the time, the natural human side comes in and it's like, I would have done this, this, this, this, this in my head the whole time.

And I think it's, it's almost, it's you not in control in that moment when you are giving it up. That's all God saying, okay, just rein it in. This is, we're in control here.

It's remembering what he's done.

That last point about the victory of the cross and the resurrection, it's good to point out that that is exactly what we're talking about.

It's the victory of the cross over the evil one who would not have expected that the win came through weakness.

And so, we find our most spiritual power, we are empowered the most, when we walk in the cross-shaped life.

And Paul says in Philippians, I long to know the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. And so, the two go together. And that's the whole thesis, I think, Paul's two letters.

The world thinks the cross is foolish, but it's through the cross that we find the power, and ultimately, we put our trust in the one who raises the dead.

Amen.

Well, I think that'll do it for our main discussion. A great place to end. Move to a palate cleanse question now.

We've had just a very serious discussion, so maybe time for something light. I was wandering through Hornsby Westfield the other day, and I noticed the Christmas carols are playing. The decorations are up.

So I want to get your opinions. Christmas carols in November. Yes or no?

It's an emphatic yes for me.

I've been known to do Christmas carols in July. Wow. And have had some feedback come back.

You know who you are.

Yeah, no problem. No problem, obviously, in the shops, it's a retail purpose. But, you know, it reminds people of what Christmas is about in a subtle way.

All good.

Beginning of November, outside of church, fine. You can start bringing carols into church services, like, towards the end of November.

Yeah, fair point.

Wow.

OK, I was afraid I was going to be alone and be condemned by all the sort of strict Decemberists.

But July is crazy, though.

That's July is a little bit crazy. I know Christmas in July, but then like.

They're just great songs.

They are great songs. I know some people who go who are driven mad by Christmas carols, but I love them.

They're so gospel. Yes.

Yeah.

Great.

We're all agreed. Everyone, get out your Christmas tunes. Wear your Santa hats.

Two months. Well, maybe not. Maybe not your Santa hats.

Yeah. Give an extra month to celebrate our Lord's incarnation. All right.

We'll leave it there. Thank you all very much for listening. Thank you guys for coming on the pod and chatting.

And I hope you have a very blessed week. Bye bye.