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Pondering Faith and the Fire

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Well, hello, and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We're having a conversation about the Word of the Lord, as it was preached to us on Sunday, and as we encounter it in our everyday lives. My name is Jack.

I'm here with the usual crew of Ben, Tristan and Jono, and today we're talking about Jono's sermon in the God Who Saved series, Faith and the Fire.

Jono, you were looking at that story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Do you want to tell us a little bit about how you went about preparing for this sermon and what its structure was?

I started off, we had the first plan was to look at Joshua and the miracle of the sun standing still. So last Monday, I wrote a sermon pretty much on that.

And it was so much about holy war and pretty yucky stuff, talking about what's on the cutting room floor.

There was a whole sermon on the cutting room floor because Ben and I were talking about it, we thought, gee, we want this to be inspiring. The series is called The God Who Saves, not The God Who Does Holy War.

So that's by and by. But so we landed on one of my most favorite stories of the Bible, the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fire. So we looked at that story.

It's an amazing story. It's quite a bit of text to get through, but really wonderful to sit in it. And the simple outline of the sermon came from the text.

The God who saves is Abel. That's what the boys say to Nebuchadnezzar when he is about to throw them into the blazing furnace.

And they also say that great line that even if he doesn't save us, he's basically worthy of our lives and our praise. And so that was the second point that the God who saves is worthy.

And then finally, it's that great moment when Nebuchadnezzar is like, I thought you put three men in there and there's four walking around, one like the son of the gods and they come out and the presence of God

has been with them. They're not singed, there's no smell of smoke on them. And it impacts Nebuchadnezzar and he makes a decree that, well, it's very positive towards Yahweh.

So, out of that, there was the hope that people would be inspired that no matter what they're going through, God is the God who saves.

And this is another iteration of the controlling narrative of the Exodus story, that he opens up Red Seas when no one thinks that they could be opened up.

And no matter what generation you live in, in history, God hasn't changed. And that's good news.

Absolutely.

Amen. Ben, Tristan, any thoughts coming off of that?

Yeah, over the three points of God being able, worthy and present, it really pointed out my impatience when it comes to just waiting for God to do something.

So that point was quite personal for me as well when we pray for a loved one to come to God for years and for years and for years and sometimes you feel like giving up praying and then you remember what he's

done for you and others in the past and that continues that like exposing on to pray even more. So that was a good time.

I've preached on the topic of power three times now at church, and I don't think it's ever gone very well, but it's a topic that I'm very interested in because I think it's important for us to understand power

and the way that the Bible talks about it. And it's interesting, reflecting on Nebuchadnezzar and the way that he uses his power. He's kind of a psycho in a way that he throws them in the fire.

And then once God saves them, he then legislates throughout the whole empire that everyone should work.

It's like power is being weirdly used, but in that story, the greatest power is faithfulness to God and sacrificing yourself and standing up for God, not in kind of using the power of the empire.

So it's kind of an interesting.

And you connected it with Pilate and Jesus, that Pilate thinks he has all the power, but there's Jesus willingly laying down his life in the demonstration of the greatest power that the world has ever seen.

Interesting.

Very interesting. I think it's interesting that, oh, the silly thing, but last week, we preached on God saving people through water, and this week, it's God saving people through fire, so. So what's next week?

Yeah, earth, air.

But to get into it, Tristan, I'm glad you mentioned your experience of praying for someone to come to believe, because it kind of links in with a question we had actually from last week submitted by Karen

Braiding, but I think it connects pretty well with Jono's first point about God being able but not always early. And so the question goes like this.

When it comes to ourselves, we can trust God and hand our lives over to him more and more. But what about believing for others? Does 11th hour faith apply in the same way?

Can we be confident of God's best for people that don't know him? Are there times when the Red Sea will not part no matter how much we ask for it? Is it up to us to keep on praying?

What do you guys think about that?

The big narrative of the Bible is important to look at for truth, I think. So the story is so important. I reflect on the thief on the cross in regard to that question.

Why do you have a guy who's at the last minute before he's dying, calling out at the heart of the Gospel?

Like the Gospel story, the whole of Desmond has been leading up to this, and just the little pieces of detail are really important, I think.

And you have this guy, a mocking person on one side at the 11th hour, but there's another one saying, Jesus, would you remember me? He's like, yeah, you'll be with me. You put faith in me last minute.

And so I, I just feel like when we pray for loved ones, we can pray into that story, I think, with confidence.

It's like, God, you gave us, you gave me that in the gospel, that last minute faith is a possibility. And I'm just praying for opportunities like that. Maybe it's at the deathbed hospital moment.

So yeah, I feel like definitely we're called to pray.

Absolutely, I totally get that. That leads to a further question which I had thought of as we were coming into this. Praying in the long term, right?

Sometimes this is gonna require prayer over a long period of time to keep praying for someone and hoping that God will come in at the 11th hour because he's able but not always early.

I have found personally that sometimes praying in the long term, it feels, well, it is repetitive. It can feel a little checkboxy like, okay, I'm wanting prayer, make sure I pray for that.

And so I guess I just wanted to ask for tips maybe on how do we pray long term? What are good ways to sort of sustain our hope and, yeah, to continually petition God for maybe years?

My main tip is that it is a checkbox and it is a petition and it feels like that.

And it's funny, when you've never prayed many, many times, dozens, hundred times for the same thing, you don't realize, but that's exactly what it feels like.

And you have a realization in the moment, the 12th time, the 15th time is like, I've prayed for this heaps of times. You know I, and you have a conversation with the Lord, you know what's on my heart.

It's, and you have this moment where everyone would do this. It's me again, Lord. It's me again, Lord.

That's not the whole entirety of your prayer. It's not like a shopping list petition only.

But you know, if you're adoration, you're starting with that and confession, and then it's coming to supplication, it's like, well, Lord, I'm still asking you for this. And that's where you write down your prayers.

It's really good to look back and go, I've been asking. And yeah, for me, the tip is there, in my experience, there's no way around what you just described. And that's fine.

It's not, it's not shameless audacity knocking. It isn't like creative and new and different, knock, knock, knock.

And I think what changes is the level of intercessory lament or intercession where you are groaning with groans from the spirit that words don't explain to you.

And I think the more that you do that knocking, the more likely you will be to have a unique experience of intercession that sort of spikes your prayer enthusiasm.

The way I've sort of had this pattern when I'm praying for or have and still praying for family that are not saved is I have this mentality that it's like a treadmill always. Like you keep going, you keep going.

And the only way I stay on that treadmill every time is when I have a moment of impatience or doubting his willingness to do so in that prayer, that long prayer is I always remember what he's done.

I said it earlier, I always remember what he's done for me, what he's done for other members of my family. That's what keeps me saying, oh, he's going to do it with absolute conviction. He's going to do it.

And that's what fuels me keep going. And it's the same thing what you were saying. There's no pattern that I follow, but it's just something I have a desire for because of my relationship with God.

And that's what fuels your prayer.

In 2 Corinthians 12, there's that story where Paul talks about the thorn in the flesh that he had. And it says, I pleaded three times with the Lord to take it away, but he said to me, my grace is sufficient.

My power is made perfect in weakness. And we looked at that passage a couple of weeks ago in the healing prayer series that we did, or the healing one-off sermon that we did.

And I was struck by studying that passage that Paul only prayed three times for this thing, and then he stopped praying.

It's like, well, aren't we supposed to keep on praying for our whole life to take away the thorn? But then one commentary that I read said that the reason Paul stopped praying is he got an answer.

God said, no, this one's going to stay, but I'll give you a sufficient grace.

And so that makes me think that when we're praying long term, we're praying for God to change the situation, and we keep asking, God, change the situation, because this is tough, I can't keep going, change this

person's heart, or change my heart and give me the grace that is sufficient to sustain me in the midst of this fire. Because that's exactly the sermon, that God is able to bring the breakthrough, and we have to

believe that. He's also worthy of following even in the midst of the breakthrough that hasn't yet come, and he's present in the middle of that.

So holding those two things at the same time is important, that God is able to save us or change the person's heart or do whatever we're praying for.

He's also more than able to give a sufficient grace to sustain us at the same time.

Moving to one of the other points you made in the sermon, Jono, about unconditional faith, I mean, you were talking about that awesome moment.

It's one of my favorite moments in Daniel where the Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego are before the king and they say, you know, we trust that God will save us, but even if he doesn't, we will not worship your God.

And I love that line. I feel like it's so defiant and it's this wholehearted commitment to God, regardless of benefit to themselves. I need to say that that's a pretty daunting thing to be able to do.

What does it take for us to get to that place of unconditional faith, where I'm committed to God, regardless of myself, regardless of whatever benefits might accrue?

I mean, we're all sort of a little bit on that way. But I think, you know, we still have very self-focused minds. So yeah, I guess this is a question, a version of a question we've asked before.

But what does it take to get to a place of unconditional faith?

Prophets says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and understanding.

So typically, it's some event, some experience, some revelation that reminds us of the fear of the Lord. And right next to that is the love of God, I think. But what happens for most people is they go stale.

Romans 12 says, don't lose your spiritual fervor. But we do. And I think of my life and the most sort of radical commitment prayers I've made, that were probably in my early 20s, where it's that reckless abandon.

But as time goes by, I think everyone sort of naturally, you don't have to, but naturally, you move from David to Saul a bit.

And you move from sort of, let me take on Goliath with my sling to, oh, we've established some good stuff here, let's protect a bit. And it's quite normal, I think, to have a different level of radical.

The words we use in our prayers are full commitment. But I just know for me, this feels different. And there is an element of just the condition, the human condition, that when something's fresh, it's just vital.

And it takes effort to keep it there, if that makes sense. And that's why chasing the glory of God is an important thing. His mercy being new every morning.

We talk about preaching the gospel to ourselves. Like, it's got to be rich and fresh today. And that's why wise people say that you have got to preach the gospel to yourself.

That's answering your question, I think.

I want to pick up on that angle. You're asking, Jack, how do we have the type of faith that says, even if he doesn't, I will still praise him. Or even if he doesn't, I will not do this thing.

The image of the athlete is helpful. That in a sense, what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have just done in saying that is peak athletic performance.

They have just, whatever your sport is, they've just hit a six or done a crazy exertion of very mature Faith. But they did not just get up out of bed and do that peak athletic exertion.

They trained for a long time. Like if I was playing cricket and I went out on the boxing day test, I would not perform as well as whoever, who's the top cricketer right now? Say Steve Smith.

And so Dallas Willards point, because his name must be mentioned in every Ponder episode is, you can't just come out and perform the deep acts of faith that Jesus, or the great heroes of faith perform, unless

you're training the way that they were training. And so you look at those three guys in the Book of Daniel, and Daniel himself as well, they were praying three times a day and fasting and seeking God and training

their faith in the small things so that when the big test came, they had the maturity to say, but even if he does not. So my big point, which I think I've not said very well is, you can't just expect to be

able to reach that peak faith performance unless you're training. So don't wake up and just expect that you're going to be able to fight off the most serious temptation unless you're putting in the hours of the

slow work of training. That's kind of what spiritual formation would say.

That's amazing to think about because we've said it twice in this series, or maybe more times, that faith is relationship. And this is what my brain is thinking.

It's amazing that when we pray for others, those prayers are filtered through our relationship with God at that moment.

Like you talk about the training, like it doesn't mean we have to be at peak performance when we pray for anything.

But it's good to know that whilst we training with our relationship with God, it builds up to a point where we can say, okay, Lord, here, I need you now, more than ever with that reckless abandonment sort of

prayer. So it's awesome that faith is relationship, but it's also relating, like the branches go wider to others based off that initial relationship that you have with God.

It's like Jesus in the wilderness facing temptation direct from the devil himself or itself.

He, Jesus can't fight that battle and win unless he has put in the hours in the secret place by himself, but he's training so that in that big temptation moment when Nebuchadnezzar is about to throw you in the

furnace, you have trained the faith muscle to be able to say, but even if he does not.

When Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego get thrown into the fire and then suddenly the king sees his fourth person wandering around with it.

Jono, you made the point that this is this idea of God's presence in the middle of the fire.

And sort of using the fire as a metaphor, obviously, we've all been through times where the pressure is high, where things are tough and it feels like suffering. And we know that God is present with us.

Jesus said, he'll always be present. We know the Holy Spirit is with us, but it doesn't feel like it.

And it, you know, we don't have necessarily a fourth person walking around with us to who looks like the sons of God. So, to signal that to us.

So I guess, how do we, how do we endure the fire and be aware of God's presence when we may not be feeling like it's with us?

I can tell you my experience when I lost a job because I stood up for my faith.

At that time, you say there wasn't a fourth person literally walking around with me, but there was the fourth person type of people around me in that moment where it's, they at the right place, at the right time

by God's design saying, oh, here, like, let me help you with this. Let me support you in this. So that's the fourth person, really. It's the community that you surround yourself with.

And I wouldn't have been able to go through that time that smoothly without the right people in place. But I think that's a tip is surround yourself in the community, in the right community.

So when you do need to rely on them, they are also willing, able and present to do so.

Yeah. God is present. We know that, but we don't always feel his presence.

That's your statement. And that's a statement of truth. That's what we should expect.

Job. Job had that, I think. That's a lot of the book.

He's not gushing with, oh, God's presence is just with me. This is so good. That is consistent with, I think, a true reflection on the Christian journey.

There are seasons where God is only present by faith that you believe he would be, he should be, but we don't feel it. And it's important for people to know that.

In the same way, you can't see God and you can't often prove his existence.

Faith, like that quote I said in the sermon, Faith is to trust in something to the degree that you are willing to act upon it as if it were true.

That means sometimes you won't feel a whole lot, but you just act in such a way that you know he's near. I was in the boat a couple of months ago, and down at Cowan Creek, which is out from Bobbinhead.

And they have lovely foggy mornings down there. And we're driving along for about a kilometer, and then it just got deeper and thicker fog until it was a complete whiteout. Complete whiteout.

We had our like a foghorn with us, we had our lights on. But the sounder is telling me how deep the water is. And so sometimes it's...

And then we've got the satellite on our GPS on our phones. And Leanne, my wife, is saying, we're coming close to the land, and I can see the sound is getting lower and lower.

It's like, whoa, okay, we should head in the different direction. But Faith is a bit like that. There are just times when the fog rolls in.

And I don't know what the metaphor is of GPS and a sounder. Maybe the metaphor is the stories of the Bible.

But, you know, there's no doubt that life has moments like that, seasons like that, that it's a whiteout, and the felt experience is fear. It's like, whoa, I hope we make it through this. You know?

It's what St.

John of the Cross called the dark night of the soul.

Yeah.

That, that season that we go through at different points in life where the presence of God feels more like His absence. And you made the point in the sermon that it's graduate Christianity.

So where is God in the midst of the fire? Where's the fourth person in the flames?

When you can't feel Him and experience His presence, He's probably doing His most profound work in graduating you, making your faith more mature.

And I think scripture paints the picture that we have seasons like that in life, but we do come through the other side when God's presence is seen and experienced again.

And when you get through on the other side, you'll have a stronger faith because of that dark night of the soul.

An interesting spin on that is the text doesn't tell us anything about the three men interacting with the fourth figure.

I mean, an interesting take is they're blinded by orange and Nebuchadnezzar is the one who has perspective and sees, hey, there's another one in there with you. But the boys don't know it until they get out.

And it's like, maybe God was with us in that. But, you know, we don't smell like smoke. Wow.

I wondered, this is a digression, I wondered if, because it says, the fourth looks like a son of the gods, was he, was the fourth blazing hot?

As in, you think of Jesus taking our place, was the fourth one experiencing the flame on behalf of the other three?

So he's like, I mean, that's just that, I mean, I'm completely speculating, so don't put any weight on this, but it's true from the gospel that Jesus takes our pain and our sin upon himself.

So maybe that was an early picture of, I don't know, God giving himself for us.

Could be.

All right, well, we have had a question come in whilst we've been chatting.

Hi there, another beautiful reminder of relationship with God. This morning, my devotion was about seeking God's presence more than answers. I'm also reminded of a song I knew growing up.

You don't need to understand, you just need to hold his hand. I believe God is sending me a clear message about just being in his presence, rather than getting caught up in the busyness of this season.

How can I be more intentional about this without neglecting my work, family or even Bible study? I always feel like I don't have enough time. Submitted by Jolene.

Thank you for that.

That's a great question that probably can't be answered comprehensively without its own Ponder episode.

But I would just direct Jolene to the story of Mary and Martha, because I think what she's describing is that story, that there was Mary just sitting at the feet of Jesus, and there was Martha worried about all

the things that had to be done. And Jesus says to Mary that she has chosen the better thing, and it won't be taken away from her.

So we have spoken in the past about having a Mary heart with a Martha spirit, trying to combine the best of both of those perspectives, because there is work to be done, good, fruitful kingdom work for the glory

of God. But that is not eclipsed by or should not overtake just being with Jesus.

And it's also worth saying, I think, I wonder if we could also think about how can we be present with Jesus, or present with God whilst we are busy, whilst we are doing things.

It's quite hard and requires sort of intentionality to think of, okay, I'm going to go do this chore. How can I be thinking about Jesus while I'm doing this? Or how can I be in His presence while?

I mean, Friar Lawrence, who wrote a book called Practicing the Presence of God, he talked about how he enjoyed being before the throne of God as he was washing the dishes or something like that.

And so there's something to be said for, okay, I'm going to be preparing this meal for my family, but I'm gonna do it as if I'm in the presence of God or before the throne of God.

And so I think that's something to be considered.

It reminds me of my first mentor, Reg Weary, who was a prisoner of war in Starlag 13, which is, you know, Hogan's Heroes. It's a funny thing that that was really where he was.

So he's a prisoner of war for four years, came back home mid-century, I suppose it was, last, in the last century, and gets radically saved and becomes a evangelist, and starts Voice of the Martyrs, and has a

lot to do with Ambassadors for Christ. But he became great mates with Richard Wormbrand. I don't know if you've ever heard of Richard Wormbrand. Look up Richard Wormbrand at some point.

He has a book called Tortured for Christ, and he was sort of, in the 1900s, the main voice of Christian persecution. Like his book, Tortured for Christ, was enormous.

Anyway, his wife Sabina and Richard would have Reg over at their house, and Reg, he said, I'll never forget walking down the hall and hearing this laughter, like Richard is laughing his head off.

And he walks past, and he's by himself in the room, and he finds out later he's having the laugh of the Lord. And it just makes me think, it's just not what you think of, that you would laugh with God. Yeah.

You're having an intimate with God moment. And let alone the guy who's known for suffering, and because he was tortured. I don't know who the bad people were, and I can't remember.

I think it might have been the Russians. But yeah, look up Richard Wormbrand, and interesting, interesting guy.

All right.

Well, I think that will bring us now to our Palette Cleanser question, again, sponsored by Patrick Ross. Thinking about being thrown into a fire, what is the scariest thing you've ever experienced?

The birth of my daughter.

I mean, I'm obviously the secondary experiential agent in the birthing suite, but a profound moment of so much loss, capacity for loss in this moment, such a kind of fragile moment hovering between life and death.

I mean, obviously we have such great medical care in this country, but that is a very significant moment that I was probably the most scared I've ever been, and also prayed the most that I've ever prayed.

Yeah, wow.

I'm pretty sure this was the case. I didn't really know much about the ocean at the time, but I was caught in a rip once out of the beach, and I didn't really know much about rips at the time.

But it was the sort of thing where I'm like trying to swim back to shore, and I just was making no progress and constantly going out, and I was starting to get tired and exhausted.

That's one of the only times in my life where I'm like, I might be about to die. Like I was getting exhausted, I was like starting to keep myself afloat.

Somehow either it spat me out, or I got back to shore in the end, obviously, because I'm alive. But I remember like praying like, God, okay, this might be it.

That was the most scary experience for me, where I was exhausted and like trying to keep my head above water, and that was pretty intense.

Mine was a quick moment of terrified, just I thought I was gone.

It was probably 11.30 at night in the game reserve, and we went to the front gate because my godfather is one of the large managers there and we just went to go answer a call.

Then I walked off from the vehicle into the bush to do what they can do when they just walk into a bush. And while I was standing there, literally probably from me to Ben, which is...

Two meters.

Two meters. There was this elephant that just walked past like this. And I just...

Just standing there so still, I was like, it's a good way to go, I mean, it's okay.

You obviously didn't wet your pants.

No, no. In context. Yeah.

So, that was terrifying because the elephant just walked, stood, and my eyes have adjusted with the light and stuff, so I can see this massive outline.

And it was probably standing there for like a minute, minute and a half, and I'm just standing there in the most vulnerable position possible, just looking at this thing. Then it just walks off.

And obviously, I can't run back to the car because then it'll spook something. So even walking back, it's like when you switch the last light off in the house and you run for your room. I couldn't run.

I walked so slowly back to that car, so that was terrifying.

I had lots of experiences surfing. I surfed a lot as a teenager and then later on in life with a different type of surfboard. But so you have lots of experiences being held down in big surf.

But the one that comes to mind is like when you surf on reefs, sometimes it's very shallow and so you hit the reef and you could get hurt.

But when you surf bomboras, which funnily enough are reefs, but I was at Long Reef Bombora at this very big surf. And like it was over double overhead, it was the size of two-story house.

And I got stacked and I went down and I was so deep, it just got darker and darker green around me. And I'm looking up and it's just this white water all around. And I feel for you Jack, what you were saying.

When you're surfing, you know you're getting close to drowning when you stop struggling and your brain says, hey Jono, let's take a breath. I think we should take a breath now.

And I was so long under water in that one. It was so dark and so deep because of the bombora out in the open ocean sort of thing. So that was it for me.

Just scary surf stacks. Yikes.

Well, scary stuff. Thank you all for coming on the pod. Thank you all for listening.

Next week will be our last week of Ponder because we'll be taking a break in December. But yes, hope you all have a very blessed week and we'll catch you later. Bye bye.