

# OpenTheo

## Jordan Peterson and Evangelical Christianity

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Jordan Peterson recently spoke at Liberty University (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDepoPI1oEM>) and was interviewed afterwards (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afSQZweYDts>). Within this video, I give some of my impressions.

Read Esther O'Reilly's piece on the incident with the distressed student that occurred during the convocation here:

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/youngfogey/2019/03/jordan-peterson-at-liberty-and-a-cry-for-help/>.

My blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>. You can see transcripts of my videos here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/list-of-videos-and-podcasts/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

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## Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, would you please give your analysis of Jordan Peterson at Liberty University, both his onstage interview and the following one last question interview. He directly engages with some Christian ideas and it is difficult to discern what the significant similarities and differences are.

Thank you. Yes, the discussion at the convocation and then the later interview, they're both absolutely fascinating, not least in the episode that occurs midway through the convocation where a student goes up on stage asking for help and desperate calling out for help and just the way that situation was handled and how it changed the discussion. That's fascinating in itself.

I'd highly recommend that people read Esther O'Reilly's piece on that. She has a very thoughtful piece on that particular exchange. More generally, I was struck by some of the cultural exchange that was going on.

Jordan Peterson is not the sort of person that you might generally find within that context of evangelicalism, I think. I think there is a cultural contrast, but then there's also some significant cultural similarities. I think partly because Peterson comes from the frozen north, there's something about his personality that bears the mark of that.

He has many of the traits of warmth and compassion and seriousness that you can find in people from a liberty context, but there is a different flavour to his character than one would typically find in that context and I think that is interesting in itself. Contemporary evangelicalism, and I think liberty would be representative of this, has a sort of romantic aesthetic. So it's very much about giving your heart to Jesus, about a personal relationship, not religion, about the yearning of spiritual desire, falling in love with Christ, being on fire for Christ.

These sorts of images of passion, commitment, love, affection, romance, and at its worst it can be a very tacky sort of Jesus my boyfriend type thing and something that's very shallow feelings that are whipped up by mass spectacle. But at its best it can be something quite remarkable. It can be seen in a particular warmth and compassion for other people.

The sort of evangelical that I find most admirable is someone with a very open heart. Someone who's not just wearing the heart on their sleeve in every single respect, but someone who can truly and openly show compassion for people, who has a deep life of the affections that is ordered towards Christ, that is ordered towards other people. It can be seen in a liveliness of heart and a profound commitment and engagement of the affections and a deep loving and joyful attachment to Christ.

There's a sort of joy that you encounter in some evangelical circles that you just don't see anywhere else quite like that. There's a sense of joy, a sense of love, a sense of affection, and there is something beautiful and wonderful about that. And that's something that you don't see in quite the same flavour in Peterson.

Peterson has a different sort of aesthetic as it were to his emotional expression and I'll get into that in a moment. There's also within that context very much a genuine desire that other people would come to know Christ. And partly in some contexts it can be a

misguided thing, the way it's expressed, but at its best it's a sense of just how much Christ has transformed people's lives.

Their deep love for him and their desire to share that with others, that they just want other people to see what they've seen. And evangelicalism has been characterised by a sort of joy that is often expressed in traditions of song. Evangelicals have song very much at the heart of their worship.

Now at points that can just be emotionally whipping people up, but at other, the deeper strains of the evangelical tradition, I think what you see is an engagement of the affections, an opening up of the heart into the world, and a transformation of people through a sort of love, transformation through love. When you think about the way that love transforms people, it really does transform people. People can shine as it were when they experience love.

They open up, the cynicism and other things wash away from their face and there is a sense of seeing something that transforms you. And when we see beauty it has that effect on us. It is something that we know it's something outside of us and as we are wrapped by that image, caught by that, transfixed by it, we are changed.

And evangelicalism has very much been about, at its best, getting people looking at Christ, being transfixed by his glory, his beauty, his loveliness, and then being changed in the way that they behave. And the way that Peterson describes the Liberty students is being remarkably lacking in the cynicism that you see in many contexts. That is characteristic, I think, of evangelicalism, for good and bad in some cases.

There's a certain naivety that can come with that, an openness that is an uncritical openness, an emotional exposure that is not a sign of a well-ordered emotional life, and is not necessarily able to deal with some of the difficulties that life throws in your direction. That if you're completely throwing your heart wide in every single respect, you're not braced for things. That we are walking through a valley of the shadow of death and often evangelicalism has not been good at dealing with that.

But that openness and that sense of being transformed by love is very much at the heart of evangelical faith. The idea of Christ as the object of love, and as we are drawn to him our lives are changed. We want to live in a way that's pleasing to him.

And the very act of being transfixed by that, the beauty of Christ, and that beauty is an ideal. It's something that we see and we think it's not just we're attracted to Christ as a person, but also we're attracted to everything about him and we want to become like that. And within the first epistle of Saint John you have that sense that when we see him we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

And so as you see the ideal in Christ, as you see Christ as the embodiment of all these

beautiful and good and lovely things, and as you reflect upon that, as you are wrapped by that image, you start to reflect that yourself. You start to take into yourself through your openness to Christ those traits. And that's very much been a focus within evangelical practice.

Evangelical thought has given articulation to this, but I think it's most clearly seen in the best of evangelical practice. And so that can maybe give you a sense of where the best of that instinct, religious instinct, that you're seeing at Liberty comes from. I think there are weaknesses to that sort of approach in many of its contemporary forms.

The emphasis upon the emotions can often be detached from a deep ordering of the heart and the affections and a sense of the difference between different sorts of emotional ordering. So you can have passions that are very easily whipped up or you can have emotions that are just fluctuating and you can have deep affections that are rooted and ordered and they aren't just about the feelings of the moment but they're settled feelings that are warm but not just a wildfire of emotions. And that failure to discern between the different type of religious affections has been something that's vexed evangelical contexts.

Where often, since you can whip up emotion fairly easily using a lively worship service and deep, bringing together a large mass of people and whipping up a sense of the transcendent just through mass psychology, that's often been something that evangelicalism has fallen into. The other thing is evangelicalism has always had that danger of losing what is characteristic of its joy and turning that into a sort of perma-smile and you see that within certain contexts like someone like Joel Osteen or someone like that where you have the idea of evangelicalism has this very positive thinking, this vision of evangelical faith as something that puts a smile on your face and you're smiling all the time but it's just a shallow happiness and that happiness is not able to deal with the reality of suffering and people often struggle when they face the reality of pain and suffering and the difficulty of the world. It's the danger of mistaking true joy for being upbeat.

Now within the New Testament there's a lot of emphasis upon joy. There's a lot of emphasis upon joy in suffering and that joy is not in contradistinction to that suffering. The joy belongs in the suffering and we can discover that as we approach that suffering in a different way.

Now that's not something that's characteristic of Peterson's approach. Peterson talks about facing up to your suffering directly and these sorts of things but the sense of joy in suffering I don't think is something that comes out very clearly within his thought or his practice. There's certainly a sense of exposure and emotional openness that can persevere even through suffering but a deep joy maybe not so much and so I think that's a difference that evangelicalism has been very much about that joy.

Peterson on the other hand I think speaks a rather different sort of language just as his psychological work and his more philosophical approach to that it is using a different language but it has a different sort of religious aesthetic as well. It's one of the reasons why I think he's more attracted to something like Eastern Orthodoxy. Eastern Orthodoxy does have a number of these themes that you would find in evangelicalism.

Even Eastern Orthodoxy has a strong sense of the importance of beauty, of the importance of transformation of theosis and divinization, these sorts of things. The way that we are transformed by the image of Christ, by his beauty, these sorts of things, those are present within Eastern Orthodoxy as a sense of something like the importance of the desire that we see in a book like the Song of Songs and how that shapes a religious life but there is within that context a greater sense of majesty, weightiness, glory, gravitas and that enables you to include elements that evangelicalism has struggled to include. Whereas evangelicalism has really had that emphasis upon the heart, the affections, joy, things like that, it's often struggled to have a sense of the majesty of Christ and it's interesting that Peterson would appeal to Christ's Pantocrator or something like that as an image that sums up for him in many ways what Christ is for him.

That Christ is the image of the ideal, Christ is the almighty, Christ is the one who represents the raising up of this ideal, the fullness of the ideal that we should look towards and to something associated with judgment, with the command upon our lives, responsibility, with life and death, this is something that is a religion of the chest, not just a religion of the heart or the head. Now the chest is somewhere that integrates, in your chest you integrate matters of the head with matters of the heart so when you think about your chest it's the seat of virtue in many respects, it's the seat of fortitude, faithfulness, commitment, loyalty, it's the site of a sense of long-suffering, of patience, these sorts of traits that often an evangelicalism can be situated in the more shallow feelings of the heart. There's always been a danger for it and to abandon the head, I mean people have talked about the scandal of the mind being the fact that evangelicals do not have a mind, they have not developed deep thought.

Now I think that's a bit unfair, at its best evangelicalism or certainly the evangelical denominations more generally, maybe not evangelicalism as a mass popular movement today but the evangelical churches, if you think about Lutheranism, if you think about Presbyterianism and if you think about the best of Baptist thought, these contexts have developed a far more rigorous way of approaching the Christian faith in terms of the head and in terms of the heart and they've sought to integrate those and at the best you've really seen a religion of the chest emerge. But I think Peterson has that ability to speak to people in a way that engages their chest, in a way that gets their feelings and their heads engaged together and calls the full person out into engagement in the world, in responsibility, in the claim of the ideal upon your life, these sorts of things. I think there are other ways that for this reason I think this particularly resonates with young

men, that there is something about young men that, and men more generally, that men find their identity very much in agency.

Now the religion of evangelicalism has often resonated especially with young women because it's a religion of romance of the heart and these sorts of things of love and it's very positive in that sense but it's often so emphasized those elements that it's lost other dimensions, that other traditions of the Christian faith have been far more effective at highlighting. I think one of the reasons why Peterson really hits many evangelical young men is that it enables them to make a connection between things that they've known in the context of the church and something deep within them, that they recognize that this is how these things can connect, that there are ways in which God's command to me can be a means of grace, that God can give me a word as if a light in a dark place and I can grasp hold of that and act in terms of that and I can find a sense of self-control, self-mastery, a sense of what I am called to do, of how I can live a meaningful life in the world, of how I can not just have a sense of love for Christ but follow him, take up my cross and walk after him. Now within certain traditions of evangelicalism there has been this, there's been a sense of Christ's call upon your life and there's been often this more military flavor in that sort of faith, a more martial flavor, so there's the mixing of the martial and the romantic dimensions of faith so you have a sense of Christ calling upon your life, your duty to him but also a sense of deep affection and love that drives you in that duty, that that duty is not a matter of just slavish obedience, it's a matter of fervent loyalty, it's a matter of giving up your life for Christ because he's above everything else and that sense of Christ's calling upon your life is something that I think certainly for me has been profoundly important for my faith that that's where it hits the road for me and in many evangelical contexts I've just felt alienated, that isn't my, that isn't the sort of aesthetic of my faith, my faith is very much more about Christ has laid down his life for me and he calls me to follow after him and that is a sense of profound grace that Christ has called me, that Christ has made his mark upon, laid his claim upon my life, that he's done this for me and now I need to give my, there's nothing that I can give that can return what he has done for me but in love and in loyalty I will walk after him and I'll go wherever he goes.

Now there's a sense of the deep insufficiency of myself as I face that and a sense of just the wealth of his forgiveness, his grace, his mercy, all these sorts of things but it's a different aesthetic from just the romantic one and I think that that element has often been lost within evangelical thought and it's one of the reasons why someone like Peterson can really find many ready ears among young men in evangelical circles who haven't heard this but yet this is there in our tradition, it's not something that should be foreign to us, we should have heard this and yet many churches I think have a more shallow romantic understanding that loses a lot of this and so I think Peterson in some respects is hearkening back to earlier forms for people who are hearing him in evangelical context, he may be heard to hearken back to earlier forms of evangelicalism

where the emphasis upon courage, truth and calling were more pronounced than the more romantic elements that are foregrounded in the current context. Now those elements of courage, truth and calling had a sense of love to them, that you're driven by love but it's a different sort of love than just the romantic love so for instance it's the love that you might have for someone who's your commander in battle who gives, who sacrifices for you, who puts himself ahead of you and he'll lay down his life for you. Now it's a very poor image of what Christ does because Christ does so much more but you get the idea that there's a sense of love in that relationship of that you're bound to each other in brotherhood and you're bound to that one who has given himself for you in this profound loyalty and this sense of he owns your life, that your life is about him from and that isn't just a romantic affection, it's a sense of it gives order to you, everything you do and it gives you a sense of direction, it gives you a sense of who you are and that you want to be like this one, you want to emulate him, you want to be someone who walks in his steps.

Now I think both Peterson and Liberty folk believe in truth but Peterson's truth is in some respects you could say it's more transcendent, it's a transcendent which does not have a concrete focus or manifestation and so Christ in some ways stands in for that but the transcendence is very much it's distinct whereas for the Liberty folk it's in Christ that's where we encounter truth and often that identification of truth with Christ can be in a way that makes it too immediate to us and there's a sense of we can maybe say that there's over-realized eschatology, that we don't realise just how much is yet to be done and that we're still not in complete possession of the truth, there are many ways in which we're still grappling and we're still groping in darkness and we see this one and it's Christ dawning in our hearts and in our world but there is a great fumbling towards the light, we don't yet arrive at it in its fullness and so I think Peterson maybe sees it too far off and maybe the Liberty folk it's too immediate and that I think leads to one other issue which is the way many evangelicals when they're engaging with Peterson they want to fit him into a familiar evangelical framework and they're very concerned with his conversion, now that's a natural thing to be concerned about, we want his well-being and we believe that in Jesus Christ that's the place where we find that, that Christ is needed not just as our ideal but as the one who saves us, who delivers us, who rescues us and I'll get into that a bit more in later on in this but that concern to fit Peterson into a familiar evangelical framework is one of the concerns that I have in many of these conversations, it on the one hand makes it very difficult for us to when people see the differences of Peterson from common evangelical thought they can easily reject him, on the other hand when they see his similarities they're trying to over assimilate him to try and bring him completely into the fold and not recognise how different he is and grapple with those differences in a way that we might learn from as well and that's always been a concern for me in these conversations that we don't just domesticate him and have a Peterson that's very friendly to us and just in our side and as a result often what happens at that point you've got this friendly person on your side and they're saying all these

clever things and then you stop listening to them because they're just in your camp and so they're just affirming everything that you already believe as it were, they're on the right side and so you don't have to listen anymore, you don't have to be challenged, there's less of a sense of being pushed in a common engagement towards the truth and so I've always wanted to listen to Peterson on his own terms, recognising how different he is, engage in persuasion and that sort of conversation but allow that distance to exist and explore that distance and that difference and within that difference and distance I think we'll see a greater understanding of the truth emerge, a truth that is not straightforwardly possessed by one side or the other, although I believe that very strongly that Christ is the truth, what it means to claim that there are many questions that remain and often our belief that Christ is the answer to all these questions fails to recognise that in many ways Christ can come to us as the question, as the question that forces us to ask and investigate reality with a new urgency and with a new openness to the world, we know the one who is holding all things together but that throws everything else into an openness to question and that I think has been an important aspect of my faith that you need to be open to things, you need to recognise that the world is God's, you don't have to be scared of exploring these strange ideas, you don't have to be afraid of going out there and going into a conversation preparing to be changed and that openness to things is something that evangelicalism hasn't always been that good at and Peterson seems to speak to these sorts of evangelical approaches to non-believers somewhat elliptically but I think he is speaking to that particular issue where he says you can lead people but you can't remake them and the danger of, I think he talks about making people the puppets of your desire and then he goes on to talk about the importance of hearing where people are and evangelicals aren't always very good at that, they don't, they presume that they have the answer to everything and that you just throw Christ at someone and remake them into as it were a clone of every other evangelical and then everything's okay and that's a caricature but at its worst evangelicals have done that and I think that Peterson speaks into that problem where he talks about the need to be attentive to people, the need to listen to people, I think that starts with listening to the person in front of you being Jordan Peterson, if he's having a conversation with evangelicals listen to him and see what he's saying and try and deal with him on his own terms rather than just speaking to him out of your own framework as if you didn't have to understand where he was coming from and so that importance of listening to people, that importance of leading people but not remaking them and the importance of working towards the truth in conversation with other people and not presuming our complete possession of that and recognising any conversation that we go into, even a conversation where we're calling upon people to come to Christ that every single one of these contexts we are to be transformed ourselves, we are to be open to change. Peterson I think in that context he clearly saw a number of things that he found appealing, he commented as I noted earlier on the lack of cynicism and the openness that people had and I've always loved that about evangelical circles, that certain contexts that can be an over a sort of naive openness, an openness that's just a



Pollyanna attitude towards the world that is just upbeat without having a sense of the weightiness of the world, the tragedy of the world, the suffering of the world but yet experiencing joy in that but when you see genuine evangelical joy there is nothing like that, there's something remarkable about evangelical joy and it's one of the things that has always been a source of encouragement and challenge to me, seeing that in evangelicals, that sense of a deep joy in suffering and the ability to stand in difficult and painful places not denying their difficulty and their pain, being able to speak and lament and declare the struggle and the depth that people are experiencing but yet even in those darkest moments the fact that joy can break through, that is remarkable and there is a way in which we see that within the New Testament on many occasions, particularly in the teaching of Paul perhaps, where he talks about joy and suffering and the joy in our struggles and our difficulties that Christ is there with us, that we are walking with him and in those moments even in those moments where we might feel we're being torn apart, those Gethsemane moments where we have this pain that is not being relieved or the struggle that God is not taking away, all those senses and those moments God can still speak into those moments, my grace is sufficient for you and God's strength being made perfect in our weakness, that is something that has a different flavour from what Peterson is talking about, it's not unrelated but there is a different flavour to that and the sense of God's presence in evangelical practice is profound and to express that merely in psychological terms is to lose something that is at the very heart of our experience, that we're not just experiencing psychological phenomena, there's a sense of God himself being present, we're not just talking about the ideal, we're not just talking about this great symbol with a capital S, we're not just talking about the transcendent, we're talking about one who though all of those things is present to us and we know his presence and in his presence that is where we find joy, that's where we find a lot of these things that seem to be missing from Peterson's approach despite the commonalities. On the other hand I think as I mentioned the danger of an over-realised eschatology, of the eschatology being study of the future, an over-realised being that you don't recognise the degree to which the future has not yet arrived, that Christ is coming again, Christ will restore all things but he hasn't yet and at this moment we are still in the valley of the shadow of death, there's still a need to talk about suffering and to be honest about suffering and certain forms of evangelicalism as I've commented have not done that well.

Peterson talks about the need to be sustained by meaning through the suffering of existence and he talks about suffering as symbolised by the cross and if you don't have that sustaining meaning there's always that danger of being caught into a cycle of vengefulness or something like that, bitterness. On the other hand you can't find meaning and you can't just be sustained by happiness but you need responsibility, something that calls upon you to engage your agency, to act in a way that you're not just passive and you're not just a sufferer, you're someone who's persevering in that. There is a lot of truth in what he's saying there and I think Christians recognise

similarities here and commonalities just as they recognised commonalities on these sorts of subjects with pagan philosophers, that suffering, when people speak honestly about the human condition and they speak about suffering, we recognise that because suffering is common to all of us and yet so few people do speak honestly about that within our current context and world and the fact that Peterson has spoken so honestly and forthrightly about suffering I think is one of the reasons for his appeal, that people hear that and they know it's true, they know it down in their gut that this is true, that suffering is real and that suffering is something that can, it's a life and death thing, not just a matter of physical life and death but it matters for you as a person how you respond to suffering.

Are you able to rise to suffering and become fortified through the challenges of suffering that buffets you but you grow through that or is suffering something that's going to make you bitter and twisted and someone who's just resentful and the idea of suffering forming people is very much a central theme of the New Testament, that we are made, that we mature through suffering but the cross is not just about suffering as such, it's not just a symbol of suffering as such, it's a particular event, it's not just something that's projected into the ether of the realm of symbols and the absolute and the transcendent, it is something that happened in history and it's something that happened to a particular person and it happened in a way that implicates humanity as a whole. Now that is something that, that relationship is something that I think Peterson isn't really exploring in the same way, the fact that the suffering of the particular person of Jesus Christ in this particular point in history changed things and that we live in terms of a historical event, not just a symbol that happened to appear on the pages of history but this is an actual event that has implications for us. So living in terms of the cross is a recognition in Christ of the ideal, of the symbol, of the absolute, of the transcendent but it's something more than that.

We're not saved by suffering as such and it's not just that suffering as such can be conformed into meaning, rather suffering, our suffering is redeemed by the cross of Christ as we suffer with him and it's not suffering as such that is redemptive, it's not suffering as such that we can find meaning in, rather it's suffering that comes under the species as it were of Christ's suffering. As we enter into Christ's suffering, as we become people who are walking in his steps and as our lives are transformed and ordered towards his existence then that becomes something that transforms our suffering into something that's charged with meaning, that we are suffering with him, that we are suffering for him, that we are suffering in him and in these ways our suffering is not just our suffering but it's an entrance into his suffering and it's the spirit as it were groaning within us as well and it's this entrance into a more cosmic reality but something that is present in the reality of history and that gets into another area of difference. Some of the deeper areas of difference with Peterson really come into the way that the ideal, the symbol, all these sorts of things engage with the concrete world and Christianity is not just faith about

these ideals that transforms the way that we exist but it's a very mythic reality.

Christianity at its heart says these things happened in time and space and history and as they happened in time and space and history this realm is charged with a meaning that would not be otherwise. It's not just that we are working towards a horizon that is necessary to project for meaningful existence, rather this realm itself, the existence that we are present in, this horizon is present within our existence, it's there. It's not just something that we must necessarily project to lead meaningful lives.

Christ has come into history and in his suffering our suffering can be redeemed. In his suffering as we enter into that we can enter into something that's cosmic and something that is the birth pangs of the new creation just as Christ's suffering was struggling to give birth as it were and that image of birth is used in the New Testament. Christ is the firstborn of the dead that we are going to be raised again on that great day and we suffer now in light of that.

Now if that did not in fact take place, the apostle Paul talks about the fact that if the resurrection did not occur then our faith is in vain and we are of all people the most miserable. That if this did not actually happen in time and space and history then we've got a great ideal but it's fairly futile. We believe that suffering is meaningful because we believe that our suffering can be redeemed in Christ's suffering, that we are walking in his footsteps.

We don't just take up our cross voluntarily because we believe taking up crosses is the sort of thing that within the universe leads to good results. We're quite aware that taking up your cross is something that can lead to gruesome death but yet we believe it's something that Christ as we take up our crosses we can be transformed and we can become like his glorious body as we are taken up by that. It's one of the things that I think you see when you have that real horizon that you're working towards, not just the ideal, not just the transcendent but this person in history, in time and space and this person that we're relating to not just as an ideal or a symbol but as an actual person who incarnates that, who is the symbol, then we can live in a very different sort of way.

I think one of the things that it naturally leads to is a sense of dependence and that you're relating to the ideal not just as something that you're aspiring to and that ideal needs to be projected and aspired to, the movement coming from your direction but rather the ideal has come to meet us in Jesus Christ. It's come to meet us in those most difficult and painful realities of human existence. The ideal in Christ has come to meet us in suffering.

It's come to meet us in those dark points in our lives, that sense of guilt and shame. It's come to meet us in the reality of death and it, he, has come to our condition and to come to reach out to us, to grasp hold of us and to lift us up. Now Peterson's ideal is something that is great and it can be elevating in certain respects as you aspire to this

but it's not an ideal that saves you and that sense of salvation is, I mean it's absolutely at the heart of evangelical thought.

That sense of what Christ has done for us that we could never repay. The idea, this is not the action of an ideal, it's not the idea, it's not a conceptual reality that has reached out into our lives and changed us. It is a person and that sense of love, that sense of joy, that sense of gratitude, all these sorts of things that are very much at the focus of evangelical experience are dependent upon it being a real person who has acted towards us and that is something that when evangelicals hear Jordan Peterson they don't hear that.

They don't hear, for instance, a sense of the ideal in terms of grace. Now what does grace mean? Grace is something that in one respect is most clearly seen against the backdrop and sharpest relief against the backdrop of the blackness and unworthiness of our characters. Our deep acquaintance with our sinfulness and sin is not just our failure to match up.

Our sin is not just a matter of our little habits and vices and these things that maybe we should get on at some point and sort out. It's a sense of our deep unworthiness and how we compare to God's glory and as we see yourself in the light of God's glory, that transfixing image is something that gives us a sense of how black we are by comparison. As we look at ourselves we see nothing good within ourselves and that sense of nothing goodness, no goodness, is within the evangelical experience not something that's crushing.

Sometimes when it's wrongly experienced it can be but ultimately it's not crushing because it's as we see the light that we see the darkness and as we see the light we recognise that that light has shone into our hearts to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That this is something that is bringing life and light in a place where there was formerly darkness and that light shows up the darkness and then the response to that is the warmth of gratitude. The warmth of gratitude towards what God has done towards us that God has acted into our situation unworthy though we are.

We have no sense of our worthiness this is not something that we've attained to by ourselves. Within protestant thought this has been particularly stressed in the idea of salvation by grace alone, by faith alone. Now faith alone is it's about the fact that we come to God with empty hands we're not bringing some worthiness towards him.

God we are loved by God we are loved by God as his creation we're loved by God as those he wants to redeem but we don't come to God with a sense of our worthiness we come to God with a profound sense of his mercy towards us and the gratitude that is characteristic of evangelicals the fact that evangelicalism is so most profoundly seen perhaps in song is an expression of that that evangelicalism bubbles up in joy and gratitude for grace because we all know that sense of what it means to have betrayed

someone what it means to have done something that has damaged things beyond seemingly beyond repair. We know just the darkness that can exist within us we know the way that we have hurt people we know the way that when we see who God is and we look at our own lives we can see just how much we have fallen short all those things that we have not done that we could have done when we think about our lives and think how do we lived in terms of that ideal what would our lives be like and then we look at our actual lives and we just see how poor and meager our works are and how unworthy even in their best form even the greatest things that we do we can see that they're tainted by sin and a sense of rebellion and resistance and a willfulness and the egotism all these sorts of things that rebel against the good that we should be pursuing. We look at that good and I mean you have this experience many days you'll go through the day and you'll realize that you feel some sort of aversion to doing the right thing that whether it's and one some senses it's temptation that temptation deeply attracts you that you're attracted to doing the wrong thing you're attracted to harboring bitterness you're attracted to lust you're attracted to greed you're attracted to pride and you see that within yourself and you may not be very sensitive to it but the more that you come in contact with the glory of God and a sense of the ideal and the holiness that he represents that he is the more you realize just how unworthy you are and what you need for him to do in your life.

Now Peterson's approach has a sense of our moving towards the ideal of our rising up towards that and changing things and transforming our but yet can it sustain a deep sense of our unworthiness and our need for forgiveness when we have done something catastrophically bad is there any way that we can be lifted up by that ideal or is that ideal something that comes down upon us and crushes us? Now in Christ we believe that God has come into our situation to lift us up to rescue us to transform us and to make us like himself so it's not just a matter of we're saved therefore it doesn't really matter what we do or what we've done it means that we're called to be transformed but we're transformed by something outside of ourselves we're transformed by beauty we're transformed by the light of God in the face of Jesus Christ that acts upon us to transform us and that's why the work of the Holy Spirit our eyes are open so that we see that and the more that we're exposed to it there is something that the conversion experience as evangelicals very much at the centre of evangelical thought the conversion experience it's like falling in love it's like this epiphany and for most people it's not always many people experience it differently but the emphasis upon the conversion experience is this epiphany of the beauty of Christ of his love of his grace and then in the light of that a new sense of who you are and then bringing those two things together as you see Christ as you see yourself and then as you see Christ towards yourself you want to live towards him and you're drawn towards him in a new way not just in that version of you see the light and you see the way that that exposes how black you are it's not a matter of shrinking away from that in a sense of condemnation but it's a matter of coming towards that as you are warmed by that light as you're attracted to it as you recognize that this is

life-giving this is truth this is everything that will transform us and make us who we should be. Peterson takes pain and suffering seriously but the cross does not lead to resurrection like cause to effect. I think that's one thing that's missing in his approach he talks about the resurrection as a sticking point and wrestling with that question and with God's existence more generally talks about the infinite depth of the biblical stories and how it's difficult to understand that from a mere materialist perspective and how difficult it is to understand what the resurrection means and he talks about more general themes that the resurrection can represent as the sort of archetypal form of something that's more typically true of human life so the idea of things being born as something new and what would it mean to live fully in terms of the highest good and what is the limit of transformation in those conditions.

He's trying to work up to the resurrection from below and that's not really possible because we believe that the resurrection is an eruption of God into history within human history now God is active within history throughout but in the resurrection there is God acting to raise his son from the dead and that is not just the inherent potential of living according to the ideal and there's something more to it than that because the ideal is not just an ideal in a very abstract sense just something projected that needs to be believed in to have a meaningful horizon for human existence rather it's personal because the ideal is not just a concept it's not just a transcendent horizon that we're living towards it is God himself and so living in terms of the ideal is not living in terms of this ideal image that projects the horizon of what you could be under certain circumstances it's living towards God. You relate towards a person very differently than you relate towards just an ideal you can personify an ideal in some respects but we're not talking about personified ideal we're talking about living towards God a personal God and that involves many of the things that we talk about the idea of grace the idea of the ideal is something that relates to you in terms of grace in terms of forgiveness in terms of mercy and our response being one of gratitude and love and joy these things don't really fit if the ideal is an impersonal one or the ideal is just a conceptual one that is necessary. He talks about the need to face your problems voluntarily and take up your cross voluntarily your unavoidable burden in life and how there's more light in us than we realize the Logos being about courage and truth and how that's similar to God's relationship to the original act of creation and the world when confronted by courage and truth can be made it makes what could be what is and you should do these things because it's the right thing to do not just an exercise in ego.

Now all of that is well and good but again evangelicals and I think Christians more generally would hear something missing here that when we're talking about the Logos when we're talking about the cross these are not just generic symbols they are singular reality they're actual realities and as such they work in a different way than symbols or ideals would if they were just mere symbols or ideals when we take up our cross voluntarily and take up our burden in life it can't just be a matter of living in terms of the

universe as it were from below just as this thing in itself as the given of reality that we're working in terms of that it's recognizing that there is one outside of us the creator and as we live towards him we're drawn towards him in love in faith in hope and that is what transforms us that is what gives us the capacity to act in a new way so it's not just acting from the inherent potential of human existence as framed by the ideal it's recognizing that the ideal is personal and real and that changes the dynamics of many of these things very interesting section was when he talked about the idea of a sort of prayer and he talks about some thinking about something that you're doing wrong that you could fix but you aren't fixing and prayer almost as this matter of interrogating yourself and talks about that in terms of Jesus teaching in the sermon on the mount and asking it shall be given to you knocking it shall be opened seeking you shall find and the way that modern people i think it was carl young that he quotes i'm trying to remember what he said um modern people can't see god because they won't look low enough or something like that and the need to find out those things that are lacking in yourself and work upon those incrementally and as we do that it's not something that you're wanting to share with other people much of the time because those things that are needing work within yourself are not things to be proud of they're your vices they're your bad habits they're the sins that you've committed that you have not yet dealt with and those relationships that have been broken that you have not yet been reconciled with other people over all these sorts of things and those aren't things that you necessarily feel proud about but um they can be approached in a sort of prayerful attitude but that prayer is almost self-directed it's directed um maybe it's directed towards your super ego or something like that or projected father figure that you're no longer relating to your specific father figure but you're relating to the transcendent image of the father in yourself and as you relate to that then you start to act in terms of that in a healthier way now there's a way in which that's very good and there are positive dimensions to that but prayer is a relationship not just to something within yourself and also christians believe that we've experienced the fact that prayers are answered not just in sense of internal transformation as we live in a new way but god actually does things in the world and he answers prayer in that way it's not just a matter of doing things in our heart and or changing our personalities and characters it's providing for needs it's dealing with crises it's um providing security all these sorts of things that god deals with our situations in very practical ways and that's again something that evangelicals have very much at the heart of their faith that we believe god is a personal god who is interested in our lives and who answers prayer and christians more generally believe that but this is something that is particularly pronounced i think with evangelical thought and practice and maybe even more so within charismatic or pentecostal practice where there's a profound sense of god's concern with people's individual lives and his the actions of spiritual forces within the realm of our quotidian existence that's something that is important now prayer in that context is characterized by yearning it's characterized by calling upon god to act in our situation it's called characterized by deep gratitude and affection for god being drawn out towards god it's characterized by love it's characterized by loyalty it's

characterized by a lot of different directions you call upon god to help you to deal with your sin or to help you in a particular situation that you will do the right thing that you'll be given the words to say that you'll be given the wisdom or the fortitude to stand in a tough time whatever it is or you provide for god to or you pray for god to provide for your very material needs for a particular venture that you're and god answers those prayers and i think christians generally experience this as answers to prayer not just in um in ways that could be attributed to ourselves but in remarkable ways where god provides very specifically for needs that we have in remarkable and surprising manner and that sense of a personal relationship with god although it can often be misused in a way that sidelines the church in a way that sidelines religious ritual elements these sorts of things which i'm all about these things are very important to my faith but these things can be the context in which a rich personal relationship with god can be known personal in the sense that it engages my personhood it calls me out the virtues of the chest but the virtues of the heart and also the mind as well and we love the lord our god with all our heart soul mind and and strength that every single part of our being is engaged in this on the other hand it's personal in the sense that god is personal that god is not just this idea god is not just the transcendent god is not just the nameless deity inscrutable being that's far distant from us but god is someone who's come into our situation and revealed himself to be one of deep remarkable compassion and jesus christ we see someone who's not just distant from us but someone who's who's close to us even while he is so much removed from us in his holiness and that holiness is present within our human existence and that is a remarkable conjunction as it were that is something that christian faith is constantly wrestling with it's at the very heart of what it means to be a christian to recognize how far above us god is how transcendent he is but yet how near to us that god is nearer to us than we are to ourselves and in jesus christ he has come to us the transcendent in mercy and grace that he's spoken into situations where we feel we can't act we're unworthy but the transcendent that we might have just confined to the heavens to this absolute horizon that may may or may not hide something real behind it that wall has been broken through and god has come into our situation and spoken to us and acted towards us in grace and that's what evangelical faith is all about i think in the engagement within with nasser and peterson i think you saw some of that taking place um nasser trying to help peterson to understand um that evangelical perspective to call him to a personal faith and say it's just all these things you're saying are important but there's so much more and if and it leads to a different way of life it leads to a transformed way of life that is addresses many of the same issues but in a different sort of way so i think talking about all of this if there were one thing that were the main takeaway it would be the difference between this conceptual ideal a symbol of the transcendent these sorts of things that may or may not be real and what it means to relate to those things as personal as embodied not just in someone who is happens to be the symbol of the ideal but the one who comes to us as the ideal as the one who is that person personified and not just personified of an abstraction but personally he is that and when we meet christ that is what we're we're dealing with and that's why there's



such a sense of an affinity with what peterson is saying but also that sense of a distance that there's a difference here that can't just be eradicated you can't paper over it because there's a profound difference there even within all those similarities i hope this helps and gives some insight into where the differences lie i highly recommend that people look at watch the convocation talk and also the interview afterwards there's lots of interesting material to look at that there are many ways in which i think evangelicals can learn things about themselves by looking at themselves through the eyes of others and realizing we have a number of faults that are quite glaring when you look at them from the outside but also i think to rediscover what it is about evangelicalism and the evangelical faith that is such a positive and necessary thing now i am a more liturgical christian now in my practice although i'm attending an evangelical church at the moment but evangelical faith was the context in which i was formed and it continues to be absolutely essential to how i understand what it means to be a christian these things have not gone away because i've moved into a liturgical context in many ways they've been transformed and given a deeper embeddedness and i think as you talk to christians across different traditions often you'll see these trends or these same characteristics being expressed and i think that's because when you relate to the ideal as it were as personal when you relate to the ideal as something that has acted towards you in tremendous incomparable grace and mercy and goodness and kindness there's no other thing that you can do than respond in that way and it draws you out in love it draws you out in joy it draws you out in a sense of gratitude and so those things have always been at the heart of the evangelical faith thank you very much for listening lord willing i'll be back again tomorrow with more on my series on the story of abraham if you have any questions please leave them in my curious cat account if you would like to support this and other videos like it please do so using my patreon or paypal accounts god bless and thank you very much for listening