

# The Speaking God

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[ 0 : 00 ] May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I'm very grateful for Andrew's kind words in introducing me this morning. It's great to be with you. Actually, Andrew didn't invite me to be here, it was Paul Barker. Andrew had no say in it.

I suppose he could have reneged, but we've known each other for 30 years and it's great to spend time with both Andrew and Heather, my wife and I, and it's great to spend time with you this morning too and to open God's Word with you.

The prayer I prayed at the beginning of the sermon is no doubt a prayer you may have heard many times in sermons and you no doubt picked that it came from the last verse of Psalm 19.

That's its origin. May the words of my lips and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer.

[ 1 : 09 ] How can your thoughts and meditations be acceptable to God? That's the burden of the psalm. How can that be?

Well, the answer is found in the final words, O Lord my Rock and my Redeemer. King David wrote this psalm and he wrote it with a view of extolling the God of glory in creation and redemption because he knew God to be his rock and his Redeemer.

The psalm begins extolling the glory of God in the heavens. The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

The wonderful thing for us as Christians is when we look at the world we see God's handiwork. Not just the heavens, of course, but the whole earth.

Indeed, even cauliflowers. We see here the resplendent majesty of God in his creation. Of course, we also know that our non-Christian friends don't see it that way.

[ 2 : 25 ] They look at the world and they don't see the glory of God. When they look at a rainbow, they don't see the covenant promises of God being manifest after the sending of rain, a promise to us that God will never flood the earth again.

No, they just see a little bit of Roy G. Viv in terms of the colours of the rainbow, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. They think of the physics of refraction and all that kind of stuff, which is all true, but they don't see the big picture.

They don't see the glory of God. A scientist can look at a tree and know all about the xylem and the phloem, investigate the bark properties and the foliage and the flowers, but they really can't see the wood for the trees.

They can't see the glory of God being manifested in that workmanship. But we do. We do.

Because God has given us eyes to see. God has given us ears to hear. What does the psalmist say? Day to day pours forth speech and night to night declares knowledge.

[ 3 : 38 ] God is a speaking God in creation. God manifests himself in creation. The apostle Paul, interestingly, says it in Romans 1, that the invisible deity is clearly seen in creation.

Isn't it an extraordinary mixing of metaphors? How can an invisible deity be clearly seen? But God, who is, of course, invisible, manifests his glory in what he has created.

Everything is resplendent of his glory. And do you know what the acme of his creation is? Do you know what the high point of his creation is?

It's you. You're image bearers of God. God made you in his image. Six days of creation came to a climax and an apex in the creation of humankind, male and female, man and woman, in the image of God.

There was no doubt in Genesis 1 and 2 that God made the world. There was no doubt the resplendent character of God was made manifest in all that was made.

[ 5 : 00 ]     There was no doubt for the image bearer who understood and was in relationship with God and saw the world that he'd been given by God's munificence, by his grace.

He had no need to make man and woman. It was sovereign joy of his to make man and woman in his image. Well, that, of course, was to last for Genesis 1 and 2.

In Genesis 3, we saw the fall where Adam and Eve break covenant with God, break relationship and fellowship with their creator and their king.

And yet they still retain the image of God in themselves. And the world, though now subject to decay and bondage, a world now tainted with sin because of humankind's rebellion, still manifests the glory of God.

Yes, as much as we might spend our time in the mirror, we'll see the bondage to decay is evident more and more so every day.

[ 6 : 13 ]     But you're still an image bearer. Tainted though you may be with sin, and the world, though locked in bondage, waiting for the redemption of the world, as well as the sons and daughters of the king, still manifests God's glory.

For David writes this psalm, not just reflecting Genesis 1 and 2, but reflecting a fallen world in the year 1000 BC. And he says, here is God's glory.

The heavens are telling the glory of God. Day to day pours forth speech. Night to night declares knowledge. Yes, Richard Dawkins can't see it.

And neither did Bertrand Russell see it beforehand. In fact, Bertrand Russell was asked the question once, what happens after you die and you meet God? What will you say?

And Bertrand Russell's impious answer was, there wasn't enough evidence. There's plenty of evidence.

[ 7 : 22 ]     There's all the evidence you need. I remember when I was at university, and we had a well-known speaker come to our Christian union group, and it was an evangelistic occasion, and the man said, there is a 99% probability that God exists.

I thought as a mathematician, that was a fairly high percentage. But as I reflected upon it, does that mean there's a 1% possibility God does not exist?

In actual fact, I think the speaker was wrong. It's 100% certainty that God exists. The evidence is there.

It's the perception that is the problem. You see, the world has got, because of sin, rose-coloured glasses cemented to their face. They can't see the world for what it is.

It's tainted. It's not clear. And therefore, they don't see things exactly as they are. If I was to bring for you a photograph of my grade one class, when I was six years of age, and I was to show you, and I said, look, look at this person here.

[ 8 : 38 ]     That's me. And you might say, look, I can't see any bishop in that photograph. I see a very handsome young man, you know, you're six, but that couldn't possibly be you.

And of course, as you look at this photograph, you see little boys, but you can't see me, because you haven't got eyes to see, because you didn't know me, when I was six years of age.

It's not the lack of evidence, it's the lack of ability to perceive properly. Day to day pours forth speech. Night to night declares knowledge.

But then, the psalmist says, there is no speech, nor are there words. Their voice is not heard. It could mean, of course, that the psalmist is speaking of, if you go and listen to a tree, you won't hear anything, unless there are termites.

It's not as if the world is speaking audibly to you, it's not as if Hebrew is cascading down from the stars, hitting your audible area, so you can hear it, perhaps not understand it.

[ 9 : 48 ] But it's much more likely, the psalmist is saying, yes, that speaking God is speaking, but he's not always heard. Those not in a relationship with God do not hear those words.

There is no speech. There are no words. Their voice is not heard. The hearers, the listeners, the listeners, are not able to tune in, because they see the world from their own centered person.

They see the world without God, and their sin prevents them from actually seeing the world as what it truly is. But David goes on, though their voice is not heard, yet their voice goes throughout all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

God has given us sufficient evidence of his existence and of his glory.

We, who have the spirit of God within us, are able to hear those words. One of the very interesting aspects of the spirit of God is that the spirit is a listener.

[ 11 : 06 ] I don't know if you've ever noticed that in John chapter 16, where Jesus says, The spirit will listen to my words, and he will take what is mine, and deliver them to you.

All that the father has is mine, and he will take it and give it to you. The spirit is a listener. The spirit listens to the word of God, and brings that word to us.

It's the spirit of God who enables you to listen to the voice, of creation, to see the glory of God in all its resplendence.

For when God speaks in creation, he speaks by his word, his son. God said, Let there be light, and there was light.

The breath of God the Father takes the word of God the Son and brings it into existence. And the world begins.

[ 12 : 13 ] That same breath brings that same word to us, that we might see and believe. And so as the sun moves from the east to the west, like a bridegroom from his chamber, looking at all that is below, nothing is hid from its heat.

God looks upon this world, and sees it, and wonders, as a world is in rebellion against him.

And yet, those who have believed his word, those who have heard him speaking, enabled by the spirit of God, bring forth joy at this glory.

It's interesting. You've often been to, no doubt, missionary services, commissions of missionaries.

And often Romans chapter 10 is a great place where missionaries use, as a place. It talks about the gospel going forth, how can a person hear unless they're sent, and then talks about blessed are those, are the feet of those who bring good news.

[ 13 : 21 ] And then the apostle says, so faith comes from hearing and from what is heard. And what is heard comes through the word of Christ. But I ask you, have they not heard?

Indeed they have. For their voice has gone out through all the earth and their words to the ends of the world. There, the apostle Paul quotes Psalm 19.

As if to say, no man can claim that they are not responsible for believing in God. Everyone is responsible because God has declared it.

We send out missionaries to explain God's word in the world and of course God's word in Christ. For God in his grace and mercy did not just leave his speaking in terms of creation.

But he sent his written word through the prophets. And so the psalmist comes to speak of the law. Having looked at the glory of God in the spoken word of creation, he says, the law of the Lord is perfect.

[ 14 : 34 ] Hear God's written word, his spoken word in scripture. Pre-eminently in, of course, the Ten Commandments as we had read to us this morning, but in his word.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes, and the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. Three couplets expounding God's law.

You know, as Australians, law keeping is sort of not iniquable to us. We often like to find ways of getting around the law. And we often find many laws are very foolish laws or very frustrating laws.

You know, like when you have a tie, you've got to wait a week before you resolve it rather than having extra time in any other normal sport. So yes, rules are there and they can be frustrating.

[ 15 : 43 ] I mean, the policeman catches you because you've been going over the speed limit and you explain, oh yes, we're a policeman. I've been going under the speed limit quite a lot this morning. So on average, I actually haven't broken the law at all.

The average is always below the speed limit. Somehow that's not convincing, is it? And we find it irritating with regard to laws. I mean, when you do your tax return, do you look at the Australian tax law and say, ah, Australian law revives the soul.

It's perfect, makes wise the simple, so easy to understand, isn't it, you know? The commandment of the taxation department is clear, enlightening the eyes.

Only if you get a refund. So here you, but law you see for us, we find law is something you want to fight against. That's part of our sinful nature.

In fact, some preachers have often said that the law was given to entice sin, to provoke sin. And there's a sense in which that is kind of right, isn't it?

[ 16 : 48 ] You know, you're walking along a park and you see, keep off the grass. You know, you had no intention of walking on that grass until you saw that sign. Keep off the grass is almost like an invitation to walk on the grass.

I love the sign, this door should, must always be kept closed. I thought, well, why bother putting a door there in the first place? Just put a wall there. I, there was once a billboard in the city in Sydney and it had, and it had a hole, you know, those peeping holes and it had, do not look through this hole.

There's a queue of people lining up to look through this hole. And sometimes we find that. But God's law is different. God's law is a delight to the eyes.

For those of you who are married, the law not to commit adultery is a law that you rejoice in and delight in because it's a protection for your marriage.

It's not that the law you shall not commit adultery suddenly says, oh, I hadn't thought of that. What a good idea. I might try that. Likewise, the law of stealing.

[ 18 : 04 ] If, for example, after you went to morning tea this morning and you saw a purse or a wallet on one of the seats, what would you do? You'd go and pick up that purse or wallet and the first thing you do is to find out who it belongs to so you could return it.

You might be tempted to look in to see how much money's there before you see who it belongs to. You might be tempted but if you're a Christian, your desire is to get that back to the person to whom it belongs because you love them and the law not to steal is for your good.

Many years ago, my wife and I lived in a house which had a pretty awful driveway. You know, broken concrete, you could easily trip and it was a real OH&S; disaster.

And my wife was saying, look, you really ought to fix that up, you know, as if she was speaking to a concreter and that really ought to be done. And one day she was going to be out all day and I thought I'd surprise her and I'd get the path redone.

Freshly laid concrete, beautiful wet cement, just great. And I knew when she came home she'd get out of the car and she might be tempted to step on it and ruin it. So I thought, I put a sign up, wet cement, don't walk here.

[ 19 : 30 ] So she comes home. And she says, I don't believe it. He's finally done it. But she sees the sign and she's grateful for the sign because without that sign she might easily have walked in the wet cement.

And that cement was for her good. And the sign was for her good. So she wanted to obey that sign, don't walk here, because she knew the sign was for her good, for her benefit.

That sign didn't provoke her to go dancing in the wet cement because she knew and she was in relationship with the lawgiver, the sign maker.

Therefore, she wanted to keep that. There's an eight-year-old boy who lives next door. He's just moved in.

He's got no relationship with me. He sees wet cement and wow, what can I draw? I'm not really an artist but who cares?

[ 20 : 43 ] It'll be there forever. So he starts drawing in that wet cement because the law has become an invitation to break it because he's not in relationship with the lawgiver.

The Ten Commandments often spoken of in our society as a very negative set of commandments. And even Bishop Spong thinks they're the worst set of commandments ever written as if he would know.

They're God's word for God's people. They're a delight to our eyes. Unbelievers will see them and it will easily provoke them to sin.

But for those who belong to God they're a joy and a delight. Notice how the Ten Commandments begin. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of slavery.

Therefore you shall have no other gods but me. Notice God didn't say to the Israelites in Egypt now here's a Ten Checklist Commandments for you.

[ 21 : 50 ] If you keep them I'll release you from slavery. Have a crack at it. See how you go. No. God's commandments with their sanctions come at Sinai after he has released them.

After he has redeemed them. after he has saved them. The difference for us with the commandments is that we keep the commandments not to get into relationship with God but because we are in relationship with God.

The commandments don't carry God's favour. The commandments are a response to grace. That's the covenant dynamic.

God's grace human response. We respond to God's word. More to be desired are they than gold. Yes, much fine gold.

Sweeter also than the honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Such is the delight for God's people to keep his laws. But there's a problem isn't there?

[ 22 : 59 ] The problem is that you know that neither you nor I can keep God's laws perfectly. Even as redeemed people, even as saints in God's family, we fail.

And David recognises this. He says, by them your servant is warned. In keeping them there is great reward, but who can detect their errors?

Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant from the insolent or from presumptuous thoughts. David recognises that he needs a redeemer.

David recognises that he can't keep that law. The law will also warn him and yes, rebuke him and challenge him and remind him that he is not keeping those laws as he might.

It's interesting isn't it? We had that collect for the day and it says, grant me such a measure of your grace that running in the way of your commandments we may obtain your gracious promises.

[ 24 : 19 ] Notice how the commandments is the way, the way in which we run but we recognise we run in that way because we are already saved.

Keep back your servant from the insolent. Do not let them have dominion over me and then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression. sin. The wonderful thing about the law is the law has in it a provision for forgiveness.

I don't know if you ever thought about this in the Old Testament there were sacrifices for sin. You know the sacrifices weren't optional. It wasn't if you come to the temple and say oh they haven't sinned this week I don't need those sacrifices thanks very much.

I won't bother bringing my bulls and sheep. No the sacrifices were compulsory. Why? Because the law presupposes sin.

The law has embedded in it a provision for forgiveness because God knows in a fallen world that we will sin.

[ 25 : 31 ] That we do sin. Therefore he knows he needs to make provision for our sins. A mechanism for forgiveness.

A place for restoration. And that's why God sent his son Jesus. From the speaking God the word of God written in the law of God now comes in fleshed as the incarnate word.

And what does Jesus do? He lives the life that neither you nor I could live. He keeps the commandments perfectly, sinlessly, righteously.

he not only lives the life we cannot live, he dies the death that we deserve. As we come to this table this morning, we'll take the bread and drink the cup.

Have you ever thought why there were two elements in the Lord's Supper? Baptism is not soap and water, it's just water. Why does the communion have bread and wine?

[ 26 : 46 ] Jesus said he's the bread of life, he didn't say he was the wine of life. The wine represents his death poured out, his sacrifice for our sins.

But the bread represents his perfect life, his life in place of your life and his death in place of your death.

That commemoration of Jesus' life and death is what takes place as we eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For we, as the redeemed, have the penalty of the law removed from us because Jesus has taken that penalty upon him.

Let me just show you interestingly in 1 Timothy, the first reading we had, which you'll find on page 963. It's interesting because Paul in writing to Timothy seems to say contradictory remarks.

He says, we know that the law is good if one uses it legitimately. This means understand that the law is laid down not for the righteous but for the unrighteous, not for the innocent but for the lawless and the disobedient.

[ 28 : 05 ] And you scratch your head and you say, he's just said the law is good if it's used lawfully and then he says the law is not laid down for the saints but for sinners.

What does that mean? What Paul means of course by that is, and it's not easily seen in the translation laid down, he says the law does not come with its sanctions against the righteous but it comes with sanctions against the unrighteous.

For Jesus has taken the penalty of the law for us. it doesn't mean we don't keep the law, we still delight in keeping the law and that list there in 1 Timothy with regard to honouring parents, honouring marriage, not stealing, not committing adultery or murder, all that list is still relevant to us but for us we now live no longer under the judgment of God because God has removed that judgment in Christ but he's done so for us.

Unless a person puts their faith in Jesus they stand under the judgment of God and his law so the law is laid down with sanctions against the lawless and the unrighteous but for those who are in Christ that penalty has been removed.

It's because of that grace that our hearts respond all the more willingly all the more joyfully to run in the way of his commandments to honour him by our lives to keep his law not to carry favour but to thank him for what he has done.

[ 30 : 04 ] Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression for Jesus has saved me from my sins.

Thus King David finishes his psalm. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you.

How? O Lord you are my rock and my redeemer. We who live on this side of the cross have all the more reason to respond by faith and obedience to God's gracious invitation for Jesus is our rock and our redeemer and has won for us the prize and the victory of sins forgiven and inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Amen.