

The Law

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[0 : 00] And this week, the Psalms we're looking at teach us the story of the Bible. They teach us it's sort of like the broad strokes of God's big story.

Is David Lewis here this evening? David Lewis. This is David Lewis's idea. He planned this sermon series, and it's a great idea. So last week we looked at creation, and this week we're going to look at how God speaks to us.

And we have a just, it's a cracker of a psalm, Psalm 19. And in fact, so good, C.S. Lewis actually said this was his, he said this was the best psalm in the Bible.

And some of the best lyrics, he said, in the world. So there you go. Now, very helpfully for preachers, it breaks into three little sections here.

Section 1, wordless words. Section 2, the written word. And section 3, our response. So 1, wordless words.

[1 : 02] Section 2, the written word. And 3, our response. So let's jump straight into it. Section 1, wordless words. How does God speak to us? God speaks to us through his creation.

That's what verses 1 to 6 say. Now, have your Bibles open, or he can, no, if you have your Bibles open and you slide your eyes down the first six verses, it basically answers the question, why is it when I look at the night sky, or why is it when I look at the moon, or a hummingbird, or the Grand Canyon, or something like that, why is it when I look at something like that, it moves me?

And why is that? It's because it's God's handiwork. It's his great art project. It's God, and he's speaking to us.

And verse 2 says that he pours out his message continually. That word pours in verse 2, it means a bubbling spring. God continuously, it's like if his creation is this painting, each day he's adding brushstrokes to his peace.

Verse 4 tells us that this message that is going out through creation goes out to the ends of the world. The whole world, it says, and that means that hearing his voice, hearing God's message, does not depend on where you live, does not depend on your culture.

[2 : 21] Everyone gets the chance to hear it. And God's creation, his world, it says to us, there's something more. There's something behind all this.

There's something beyond all this. But there's a problem, though, isn't there? In verse 3, we read that this message is nonverbal.

It's wordless. It's not specific. This is why charades is a really tricky game. I love charades, but it's a complete debacle.

If you haven't played it for a while, you should play it. It's great. But you're sort of doing a thing, and you're like this, and people are like, you know, pineapple.

Stem cell research. Burkina Faso. And you're like, no, it's the flux capacitor, man. Come on, man.

[3 : 20] You know. Wordless communication. This is a tricky business. From God's great creation, his great work of art, this magnificent world it has given us.

We do get general implications, but not specific. And general ones are really good. Creation gives us enough to know that there is a God and that we shouldn't exploit his creation, and we shouldn't ignore him, and we shouldn't exploit each other.

But is God good? When he made this amazing thing, but is he good? I remember I like golf. I like watching golf, and a friend of mine, I was talking about my favorite golf player to a friend of mine. He goes, oh, yeah, apparently he's a real jerk. I'm like, oh, come on. Don't tell me that. One of my favorite sort of indie musicians, singer-songwriter, was sort of outed in February in the New York Times.

And he's just this beloved sort of God in the indie music. Turns out to be totally sleazy. And I really love his music. Great artists can be jerks.

[4 : 30] So creation says there's this God. Is he good? What does he want from us? How do we connect with him? We need actually more information, which is why the next section is such a blessing to us, because it tells us about the other way that God speaks to us, the more specific way God speaks to us, and that's through his written words.

So this is verses 7 to 9. Now, if you look at these verses, you actually do see a pattern. There's this pattern of the way the sentences are sort of laid out.

You just need to stick with me for 90 seconds of concentrating here, okay, because you will be tempted to zone out, okay? So in describing God's word, the psalm uses lots of synonyms, so lots of nouns.

But there's also, for every noun, there's an adjective, and for every adjective, there's a verb. Please, please stay with me. So if you look at the nouns, it'll make sense, okay?

When you look at the nouns, God's words are described as the law, and then just drop down again. God's testimony, his precepts, his commandments, the rules. So it's saying all of it.

[5 : 36] So everything God says, that's all the nouns. Everything. But what about this everything? That's when you go to the adjectives. So look along the sentence here in verses 7 to 9, these adjectives, and it describes God's words as perfect and sure and right and pure and clean and true.

Let's dig into a couple of those. What does perfect mean? It means it's flawless. There's a lot to say about that, and I'm happy to talk to you about that afterwards. We won't have time to go into it now. Sure. What does it mean that God's word's sure? It means you can trust it. Verse 8's a good one. I really like verse 8. It says, the precepts of the Lord are right.

What does right mean in verse 8? Right doesn't mean it's like not incorrect. It means the word behind that is it's referring to a straight edge. If you're into carpentry, you'll know that a straight edge is a tool.

It's a very important tool. You use it as a guide for cutting something. So it's a thing that you measure other things by. Does that make sense? It's a thing you measure other things by.

[6 : 41] So this means if God's word is right, if it's a thing you measure other things by, it means you don't judge scripture by culture. You don't look at the Bible and say, well, culture's moved on from this idea, so we can ignore this little section.

I like the lovey stuff, all the loving stuff, but this idea over here, it's, you know, distasteful. We can't ignore that stuff if it's true. See, we actually do the opposite.

You look at culture through the straight edge of God's word. And this is really important. This is really, really important because we forget that we are so powerfully spiritually formed by things other than God's word, negatively.

Just like our phones. We are so spiritually formed by our phones, by social media, by surveillance capitalism. You know, so we engage with all this technology.

And if you engage with a lot of technology, you know it collects information. And that information can be used to manipulate you in certain ways, to vote a certain way. This is not like spooky black mirror stuff.

[7 : 55] This is just what's happening right now. We're constantly being formed by algorithms written by people with bias. But to have something outside of creation, something outside of all of that, that's perfect and sure and right and pure and clean and true.

I mean, that's what we want, isn't it? That's gold. In fact, the passage here, verse 10 says, it's better than gold. It's better than the most valuable thing in the world.

And it's sweet like honey. We want to be eating this up. So we're talking about God's word here in this section.

And Psalm 19 has lots of nouns for God's word. Precepts, law, commandments. It has all these adjectives like true and pure and sure. And then it has a whole lot of verbs.

And it seems that the primary interest of this section, verses 7 to 9, is actually quite practical. The verbs listed are this.

[9 : 09] God's words, revives, makes wise, rejoices, enlightens, endures. So in nature, we have God's wordless word to us, which is fantastic, which is great.

You look at a hummingbird. You look at a canyon and at the Grand Canyon. It's fantastic. It moves you. You go to the... I really miss the southern hemisphere skies. It's different to the northern

hemisphere skies.

And I would go out late at night. We have less sort of light pollution down south because there's basically no one there. And, you know, just the hobbits. And they kind of...

They sort of do their own thing. So you have less light pollution. The southern hemisphere sky is incredible. And I'd go outside often and I'd just look at the stars. And it would move me, right? I'd be moved by it. It's beautiful. But it doesn't change me. But that's the promise of the text, actually.

[10:07] That it can change you. God's written word can actually change you. Have a look at verse 7 there. So not only is God's words perfect, verse 7 says it can revive us.

It says it can make you wise beyond your age. It says that this can be a fountain of joy. Now, each week we use a liturgy here.

This is an Anglican church. We use liturgy. And the liturgy is mostly scripture. And each week you're reminded of the gospel. And the gospel says that you are loved. And you are loved more than you can possibly imagine.

And that you're a son or a daughter of God. This is joyful stuff. Outside of that, what have you got to build your identity on? What are you going to establish your identity on?

I feel like it seems to me that people, some people, many people, rely heavily on curating this social media identity or this feed that makes you appear really sort of woke with it and about the right things.

[11:26] But it's a lie. It's vacuous. You know, if you want something to revive us, if you want something to restore your souls, you want a source of wisdom, you want to not make stupid decisions but wise decisions, you want joy and you want your minds enlightened so you can actually see the world and each other better, so you can interpret the world, you want to be enlightened.

You know, I mean, the internet is fantastic in many ways, but it promises a lot. But, I mean, don't you feel like it just leaves so many people kind of, you know, bored and lonely and pretty trapped? And this is why the Word of God is amazing. It's just outside of the stuff that we've made. Outside of all this. It's something that endures. It goes forever.

This is God's Word. We never get tired of this. This is God's Word. In the midst of our, you know, culture wars and identity politics and our constant connectedness and all of this nonsense and noise and mess, we have this thing that endures, the Word of God.

And it's a treasure. It's a treasure. And it's why each week our commitment to you is that we'll preach God's Word. Let's keep going.

[12:41] I said the psalm very helpfully has three sections. So the first section, the wordless Word, the glorious, amazing, wordless Word of God, creation. And in the second section, we have the written Word of God, the more specific Word of God.

And lastly, our response to all of this is 12 to 14. Let me remind you of that text. I'll read it to you again. Who can discern his errors, declare me innocent from hidden faults?

That's interesting. I'll come back to that. Keep back your servant from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgressions.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. It seems like as David, who's the writer of the psalm, is reflecting on creation and he's reflecting on the Word of God, and all of a sudden he starts thinking about himself.

And he's like, oh, man. He starts thinking about the stuff that's in his heart and the sin in his life. This is verse 12 and 13.

[13:52] And do you see there he thinks about, he's sort of, he's sort of a taxonomy here of two different types of sin that he thinks about. Hidden faults and presumptuous sins.

They're great phrases, aren't they? Hidden faults and presumptuous sins. So these hidden faults, what are these? These are the sins we can't see. This is the stuff that's in there that is so characteristic to us, and it's so normal.

It's not even on our radar. It's a problem. I'll give you an example. This is a male example, because this is something I know about.

In feminist theory, there is this idea of the male gaze. So in feminist theory, there's this idea of the male gaze, G-A-Z-E. And it came out of sort of analysis of film in the 70s, and where they just sort

of, this is a famous essay, and it just talked about the male gaze, how women in these movies were often portrayed as just passive objects for men to enjoy, for men to just look at.

So they didn't really sort of further the storyline much. They were just there for men to sort of look at. And this, of course, is a real thing. Of course, in fact, the male gaze is absolutely true, and it's dehumanizing.

[15:13] It's dehumanizing for the woman, and it's dehumanizing for the man. And of course, it's wider than just films. Men stare at women. And something I'll do is sometimes in a sort of like a mental experiment when I'm down the street, if there's a woman that's sort of conventionally attractive, I'll look at the men walking past her to see what happens to their eyes.

And you'll just see there is this reflexive response, just looking at the woman up and down. And it's so reflexive and so characteristic and so inbuilt that they don't even realize they're doing it.

And I don't even realize I'm doing it sometimes. It just happens. That is a great example of this hidden sin. It's in there, and it's not even on your radar as a problem.

Now, of course, it's not just that. It's self-righteousness. It's living for yourself. It's any number of things that you just are hidden from you, hidden from others, but they're not hidden from God, which is why we need the Word of God, because God can show us these sins in His Word, because God wants us to be whole.

God doesn't want us dehumanizing people or just living for ourselves. He wants us to be whole people. So these hidden sins and then these presumptuous sins, and you know what these are.

[16:34] These are the things where we willingly know we're doing wrong things. So David, the writer of the psalm, he brings this stuff up, and he says, I don't want these things to control me.

I want to be free. I want to be forgiven. Verse 13, I want to be blameless and innocent. And in verse 14, and I want my... This is the words of my heart and the meditation of... The words of my mouth and meditation of my heart passage.

He goes, I want my heart and my words to be acceptable to you, God. It's a prayer. It's a fantastic prayer. God, here's the thing. David knows he's guilty, but he wants to be declared innocent.

How's that a thing, right? How's that a thing? How is that possible? Especially when you don't know these sins exist. We'll look at the very part, the very ends of verse 14.

I'm almost finished here. David prays to... David prays to... The only way that that is possible is because he believes in a God who redeems.

[17:44] Let me finish here on that. Think about what we have in Christ for a moment. Consider Christ. The Son of God who perfectly trusts in God's Word.

And when you read the passages, constantly answers people with God's Word. Lives perfectly.

There are no hidden sins. There are no presumptuous sins in Christ.

He lives his perfect life. And we get the reward for what Christ has done. We get his reward and he gets our punishment for our failure to keep God's law.

Who would do that? A redeeming God. That's the kind of thing a redeeming God does. That's what redeeming looks like. And we get to rest in that truth.

We are Christians. We get to rest in that truth and it rewires our heart as we consider it. And as we keep coming back to it. And this is what makes God's Word so beautiful, right?

[18:49] Because it's the story of redemption. It continually points us to redemption. And unfortunately, some people look at God's Word and see it as a book of rules.

And if you view the Word of God as a book of rules, it will crush you. But if you read it knowing that it is God's grand store of redemption, it will change you.

It will lead you towards the path of wholeness. That's what makes it beautiful. Amen. Amen.