

The Bible is Necessary

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[0 : 00] My name's Steve, I haven't met you before. Senior pastor here is St Paul's, and if you've just joined in, we are now partway through a series looking at the Bible, and with the hope that we would grow in confidence that what we have in front of us is God's Word, because we want confidence not just so much in God's Word, but we certainly want confidence in the God of His Word.

So we've looked at God's Word as truth in its entirety, we've looked at why we should be able to take it seriously, historically, and now we just started last week in looking at some of the attributes of the Bible, such as God's Word is enough, the sufficiency of Scripture, and today we're looking at the necessity of the Bible.

So keep your books, Bibles open, sorry, at Psalm 19. In his book, Reflections on the Psalm, C.S. Lewis declares that Psalm 19 is the greatest poem in the Psalter.

And one of the greatest lyrics in the world. And so that puts a little bit of pressure on me this morning. Thank you for that, C.S. But Psalm, I would agree, Psalm 19 is a phenomenal psalm. It's all about how God communicates to us. And this psalm breaks up beautifully, for my sake, into three parts. It tells us about the silent Word of God, the perfect and powerful Word of God, and finally, the necessity of the Word of God.

[1 : 31] That's the three steps we're taking this morning. So the first six verses in the silent Word of God are all about communication. They refer to declaring, proclaiming, speech, revealing knowledge about God and His glory.

This speech is coming from the natural world. It's from the heavens, the moon, the stars, the oceans, the mountains, the valleys, that sort of thing.

The paradox of this speech in verse 3, which says, they have no speech, they use no words, no sound is heard from them.

And yet, verse 4, their voice goes out into all the earth, the words to the ends of the world. That's the paradox in verses 3 and 4.

There is no sound, and yet there isn't a place in all creation where the knowledge of God isn't loudly heard, clearly heard.

[2 : 44] This paradox is simply a poetic way of describing non-verbal communication. There is such a thing as speechless speech.

As wordless words. That is, we can communicate through gestures, we can communicate through facial expressions.

The natural world, is what it's saying here, is sending us non-verbal information about God.

Psalm 19 is an answer to a whole set of questions, if you like. Questions like, why is it when we gaze at the ocean, or see a sunset, or an eagle soaring, or stand before a mountain peak that's capped with snow, or stand on the precipice of a huge gorge, or lay on our back in the darkness out in the country, can't do this in Chatswood, and you look up and you see the galaxies before you, why do these things captivate us?

Move us. Fill us with a sense of joy, or wonder, or grandeur, or the wow factor.

[4 : 09] Why does it do that? The answer of the Bible is nature affects us like great art, or a blockbuster movie, or a great piece of architecture, or well-written music, because that is what the created order is.

It's a masterpiece. It's a masterpiece. It is the work of God's hands. Everything in nature is declaring to us that we are not an accident, that we are a product of an artistic vision.

We're the product of design. We're the product of passion, of imagination, of purpose, of intentionality, of the greatest artist and designer that this world has ever or will ever know.

And even if our life is a entire mess, or even if we don't believe in God at all, you still can't help to be captivated by the natural world.

No matter our belief system, we can't stop the natural order speaking to us. we are not an accident. Verse 4 tells us that at some level everyone is hearing this message in the world.

[5 : 49] As John Calvin puts it in his commentary on the Psalms, there is certainly nothing so obscure or contemptible even in the smallest corners of the earth in which some marks of the power and the wisdom of God may not be seen.

There is no language nor speech where their voice is not heard. Frankly, I don't know of another view of reality that gives us a higher view of the natural world than Christianity.

Eastern religions and philosophies basically see the natural world as an illusion. The Western secular world sees the natural world as a random accident. What other view of reality gives us more reverence for the world and for others than biblical Christianity?

Now, as good as all this is, Psalm 19 cannot end at verse 6. nature by itself is not enough.

Nature doesn't tell us enough about God. It doesn't give us everything we need to know. As great as nature is in terms of revealing a divine designer, that information, that revelation, if you like, is mixed.

[7 : 24] It is unclear and non-verbal communication is always like that. You cannot communicate specifics non-verbally. You cannot say, I'll meet you at dinner at 6 o'clock tonight down at the Bavarian Beer Cafe in Chatswood and it's on this street.

You can't communicate that non-verbally. You need specifics. You need words. Non-verbal communication is always mixed.

Falling to sleep during the middle of a sermon is a form of non-verbal communication. But it's mixed communication. You may be entirely bored or you may have sleep apnea.

It's still non-verbal even if you're snoring, by the way. It's a result of many things. So does nature really point to a designer and a creative God?

Yes. But there are mixed messages because in this same created order we have natural disasters. We have all sorts of disease and decay. And Romans 1 tells us it is so easy to misinterpret and repress what nature is telling us.

[8 : 47] We need something more than God's silent word. We need his perfect and powerful word. God. The doctrine of the necessity of scripture reminds us of our predicament.

The God who we need to know the most cannot be discovered on our own. It also assures us that the solution to our predicament is in fact to create a God who has made himself known through his word.

So as the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it, although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God as to leave humanity inexcusable, yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and his will which is necessary for salvation.

The Westminster Confession goes on to say, the Bible is most necessary. Or to use a phrase again of John Calvin's, the Bible are the spectacles through which we see God, we see the world and we see ourselves.

That's Institutes Book 1 chapter 6 in case you want to look that one up. We cannot truly know God, his will or the way of salvation apart from the Bible and we see this in Psalm 19.

[10 : 22] In verses 7 to 12, King David, the author of this psalm, introduces us to the perfect word. This is the perfect necessary word of God.

The perfect necessary particular specific communication to God, from God to humanity comes to us through the scriptures, the Christian Bible. Notice again the emphasis in these verses on words, laws, statutes, precepts, commands, decrees, they are all different ways to express the same reality and that is the entire word of God, the scriptures.

They're not referring to different parts of the Bible, they are all different ways of referring to the Bible. people. And these verses tell us two things about the Bible.

Firstly, the perfection of the Bible. See the words that are used to describe the Bible in the perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, firm, precious, sweet.

They are very good and they are very strong words. Take, for instance, the word right in verse eight. It's a really important word because it literally means the straight edge.

[11 : 43] It's a straight edge by which all other things are measured. God's word is the straight edge by which all other words are measured. We cannot determine whether scripture is true or right by any other standard.

All other standards are judged by the scriptures themselves. Take also verse nine. where it says the decrees of the Lord are firm and all of them are righteous.

The word firm there means sure and certain, bedrock, foundational. This verse is saying that every single part of scripture is equally sure, equally certain, equally trustworthy, equally right, equally perfect.

All of it. The perfectionist scripture scripture is stated in the most remarkable way in this psalm. But the second thing we notice is the power of the Bible in these verses. I get this from the second line of each of the poetic statements. So for instance, verse seven, the Bible has the power to refresh the soul.

[12 : 58] I'm just going to pick up three of them. has the power to refresh the soul. The word soul there in verse seven, the original word is the word psych. The best way to translate this is that the Bible has the power to show you who you are, who you really are.

It has the power to restore who you are, to restore your true identity. Of course, this means that there is something desperately wrong with our identities.

We are out of touch with who we are, who we really are. It's an amazing claim. It's saying only the Bible can do that because when David writes in verse seven, the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul, he is in this moment contrasting the scriptures scriptures with nature.

The Bible and the Bible alone can show you and make you who you are meant to be. Nature cannot do that in itself. Even though when we're all out of sorts, nature is often the first place we escape to. please do that. I mean, it's a great thing to do, but take your Bible with you. The Bible shows us just how much we are broken, how sinful we are, how flawed, even more flawed than we're prepared to acknowledge, but also at the same time, how valued and affirmed and forgiven and accepted and loved we are, more than we'd ever possibly imagine or dream.

[14 : 54] We are far worse and far better than we ever imagined, and the Bible shows us who we truly are. The Bible has the power to refresh the soul, but it also has the power, verse 7 again, to make wise the simple.

It has the power to make us wise so that we are able to navigate God's world well. One of my favourite quotes from American humorist and author Mark Twain, in fact it's probably the only quote really, I should have clarified that, the only one that I can remember, and it's therefore my favourite one, is the one where he says he's reflecting on his life, later in life reflects on his life and he made this claim, he said, when I was 16, he said, I could not believe how ignorant my father was about the ways of the world.

he said, when I turned 25, I was astounded by how much he'd grown up. Every growing, developing, maturing person I know is able to look back on their life 15 years ago and see how foolish they were back then.

Now it's pretty obvious when you compare your 10-year-old self with your 25-year-old self. You look back on your 10-year-old self and you go, I knew nothing. But it's also true when you compare your 25-year-old self with your 40-year-old self.

Or in my case, my 55-year-old self, my 40-year-old self, and you realise, I didn't know my heart as well then as I do now. I can think back of things in that time and I view them differently.

[16 : 44] My perspective has changed. My heart and my emotions have shifted. In that time. How much has changed in 15 years? I was simple then. I'm wiser on those things now.

Of course, you realise the implications of this, don't you? So, our current selves are going to look simple and foolish to our 15 years from now selves, which means you're foolish now.

It means you're simple now. Well, me too. I mean, I'm throwing myself in that one as well. It's not an accusation. I'm throwing myself in that one as well. So, what do we do with that, with the acknowledgement that God's word is telling me that I'm simple and foolish now?

Verse 11, by them, talking about his word, your servant is warned in keeping them, there is great reward. The Bible warns us against the foolishness of life now, to get wise now.

It makes wise the simple now. Third one, the Bible also has power to delight our hearts.

[17 : 59] Verse 8, the precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. Verse 10 expands on that joy. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold.

They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. What is interesting about this is that we would normally, for the Christian person, we would normally associate the sweet words of God, attach them to his promises, his mercy and his grace.

We would not normally attach the sweetness of God's word to his law and his commands. We would not normally do that. We put up with the laws and the commands because of the sweetness of your character.

That's how we would normally respond. Verse 1 says a similar thing as this, blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, who meditates on his law day and night.

commands. You see, left to our own devices, we don't know how to obey commands except through some kind of coercion. How do we get to the point where we delight in God's commands in such a way they are sweet, they are good, they are majestic, they are beautiful, they are joyful?

[19 : 27] How do we get to that point? that requires a complete reset of the driving motivations of our lives.

How do we get to this entire reformed identity where the simple are made wise and the reset of the inner drive of our lives?

How does that come about? This is where we turn to the last section of Psalm 19 and my last point. Reading from verse 12. But who can discern their own errors?

Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight. Lord my rock and my redeemer. Now, there's a contradiction in these verses.

[20 : 36] An apparent contradiction to these verses. David starts with who can discern their own errors. It's a rhetorical question where you're meant to come up with the conclusion of well actually no one can.

No one can know their own errors. And then he adds keep your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me. Then I'll be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

He adds there that the very best he can hope for is that he might be able to at very least identify the obvious sins in his life, the willful sins in his life, the ones that he deliberately chooses to break, if you like, the laws he chooses to break.

And he says if I can avoid those, then I'll be innocent of great transgressions. He's speaking here like a moralist. If I can avoid the big things, then I'll be innocent of great transgressions, the obvious ones, the deliberate sinning, the stuff everyone sees.

But one thing he says that I cannot overcome the sins that are deep down in my heart. I can't overcome those ones.

[21 : 53] I can't overcome them because I can't even see them. It's the sin that's below the sin.

It's the driving force that gives rise to the obvious sins and the breaking of the law. The pride, the self justification, the defensiveness, the greed, the resentment, the unkindness, all the stuff that is ultimately the things that are keeping us awake and messing up our lives are the things that we cannot see.

Ironically, the sin that most dominates us, the sin that most hurts us and hurts others are the ones that we cannot see and therefore we justify.

to quote Derek Kidner on this verse, the fault may be hidden not because it is too small to see but because it is too characteristic to register.

It is so much part of our life it has become acceptable to us. it has become respectable, justifiable.

[23 : 18] David goes on to say in verse 14, may these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

the word pleasing here is crucial. It's a word that's used in every instance in the Old Testament referring to the sacrificial system.

The aroma was pleasing to God. The sacrifice was pleasing to God. And the sacrifice we know that was pleasing to God was an animal without blemish.

And so David here appears to be, if you like, confidently contradicting himself. How can he say, may these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing without blemish, without fault, without failing, in your sight, when he can't even see them.

And he can't overcome them. How can he say that? How can you say that?

[24 : 39] How can I say that? That the meditations of my heart are pleasing to God when I've got sin there that I can't even see? me? The only possible answer is the very last words of this psalm.

Lord, my rock and my redeemer. The reason why David is so confident is because he knows that God is his redeemer. And what is, if you like, a general statement for David here is a much more specific statement for the Christian now.

You see, the Bible tells us that King David was the forerunner, the shadow of a much greater king, one who delighted in the law of God completely, one who was completely pure of heart, sinless in perfection.

the New Testament declares that Jesus himself, Jesus Christ, is the king of kings. He is the great King David. And notice that at every instance, Satan and others tried to divert him to move into sinfulness himself.

Satan comes after him. And what is Jesus' response to Satan? I mean, he was already out in nature, he was out in the wilderness. What was his response to Satan?

[26 : 07] Have a look around at the moon and the stars to see the glory. No. It is written. It is written. It is written.

When the religious elite came after him, it is written. It is written. It is written. In the Garden of Gethsemane, on the way to crucifixion, the cross itself, it is written.

It is written. It is written. Scripture after scripture after scripture after scripture, in every part of his life, Jesus, you cut him and he bleeds scripture.

In every instance of life, scripture was his response. Jesus delighted in scripture. He is the only one who completely delighted in scripture.

He is the only one who ever kept every precept, every law, every command. and he dies on the cross as our substitute for our disobedience, our breaking of every command.

[27 : 34] And by his death, he has redeemed us. He's paid the price. He's brought us back into God. God. And so when we see our failure, we come to him, we trust in him, and his great reward becomes ours.

His fulfillment of all the law becomes ours. It's the great exchange, the punishment for our imperfect law keeping has gone across to him and the reward for his perfect record transfers to us.

This is the gospel. this is the good news of Christianity and it's only this that ultimately rewires the heart. It's only this that gives us a firm and confident identity regardless of the reality of our ongoing imperfections and failures and sin.

Nature, the created order in itself can never rewire the heart like that. God's solution The Bible is absolutely necessary for us to see our true predicament, God's solution and therefore the rewiring of our hearts in such a way that God's word becomes glorious, majestic, sweet, delightful, joyful.

You see, the moralistic religious person seeks to obey the word of God out of fear. The relativistic person is indifferent to the word of God. The Christian delights in God's word because Jesus, the one who delights in the word, became a curse for you and for me.

[29 : 32] He is our redeemer and because he is our redeemer, he is our rock, he is our refuge, he is our safe place and the Bible is absolutely necessary for refreshing the soul, for making wise the simple, for delighting the heart because when the Christian through the work of the spirit looks into the Bible, they see beauty, they see majesty, they see glory.

The Bible becomes the window through which we see the beauty and the majesty and the glory of everything else. That's why I appreciate a David Attenborough and some of the insights he has and the little crews that he has of filming the intricate details.

And yet I've got something more than him. I see glory when he doesn't see glory. The Bible becomes the window through which we see beauty and majesty and glory in God who redeems, the God who creates and recreates.

glory. All of us crave glory. We're designed to crave glory. We are designed by God to marvel at majesty, to have the wow factor.

glory. And every one of us at some point in life need to go beside us, you know, the sea or stare at the ocean or to look at the galaxies or whatever it might be to get that awe factor, if you like, to make us feel hopeful, to make us, give us perspective on life.

[31 : 24] And yet the necessary source of the greatest, greatest glimpses of glory we have is sitting on our bookshelves.