

Knowing Jesus

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[0 : 00] So, Psalm 19. The skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech.

Night after night they dispeach all language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth. Their words to the end of his pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his corner of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other.

Nothing is hidden from its heat. The law of the Lord is perfect. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold.

They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned. In keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors?

[1 : 12] Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

May God bless this reading of his word. Okay, we're going to sing. Everybody. And thank you for all coming tonight. I hope we don't disappoint you.

I'm sure if you trust the Lord, there'll be something for everybody tonight. I want to thank Gerald for leading tonight and for your prayers. Our government here and down in Westminster, our nation needs our prayers more than ever before.

I just want to thank Karen for the prayers this morning as well. We're doing our bit, aren't we, when we seek the Lord on behalf of the nation. And of course, thanks to the musicians and the choir, both of you.

[2 : 23] And Daniel at the back. Well done, young man. And let's just give a wee word of prayer before we start. Heavenly Father, we just thank you this evening that we have this amazing privilege to be children of God.

That, Lord, you have set your love upon us. And, Lord, for many of us here tonight, we've been Christians for a very long time. We've had our ups and our downs.

We've been close to you. We've been far away from you. And yet, Lord, we realize that through it all, you've held on to us. You've never let us go.

And we just, we want to thank you for that, Lord, because we can't trust ourselves. We trust you.

And so we just pray, as we consider this psalm tonight, that you'll just bless what's being said.

And that each person will go away with something to take home with them from your word. For Jesus' sake we ask this. Amen. Well, I've got a slight cold, so don't get too close.

[3 : 34] A few years back, I traveled with some of my family to Ballyhoolish on the west coast of Scotland to attend a wedding. Late at night, after the festivities were over, I staggered out.

No, I, sorry. I stepped out of the back door of the house where we were staying in the hope of catching a view of the night sky, clear of the light pollution that affects the Edinburgh and the Central Belt.

And, you know, I wasn't disappointed. It was wintertime. The air was cold and crisp and the night incredibly dark.

Scotland has some of the best so-called dark skies in Europe for viewing the stars. It wasn't the cold that took my breath away, but the magnificence of the sky that night, with its thousands of stars

twinkling like diamonds scattered across a black velvet cloth.

The constellation stood out bright and clear, and the gossamer ribbon of the Milky Way, as it stretched from one end of the heavens to the other, was mesmerizing.

[4 : 44] It's not only David that can do poetry. It was a truly awe-inspiring sight. It was nights like that when David was a young shepherd boy, watching over his father's sheep alone at night in the hills around Bethlehem, that may well have inspired him to write the opening section of this psalm.

The heavens declare the glory of God. The sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

Their sound has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. This beautiful poetry in the opening lines, and in the psalm as a whole, is no doubt the reason that C.S. Lewis said that Psalm 19 is the greatest poem in the Psalter, and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.

He was not alone in his admiration of the psalm, for apart from the fact that it appears regularly in the liturgy of Jewish synagogues and Christian churches, it has inspired composers such as Bach, Haydn, Beethoven, and others to set it, or parts of it, to music.

Handel's Messiah, for instance, features a setting of the fourth verse of the psalm in a chorus that repeats the refrain, their sound is gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.

[6 : 12] Now, following on from these words in verse 4, David turns his attention from the night to the day. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other. Nothing is hidden from its heat. Here the sun is personified in masculine terms.

It's like a young man in his prime, full of vigor and purpose. But unlike the Egyptians and the other nations who worship the sun as a god, powerful and awesome as it is, for David, it is just a part of God's creation.

It is he who has placed it in the heavens. And like the voice of the heavens reaches to the ends of the world, similarly, nothing escapes the heat of the sun.

Unless, of course, you live in Scotland. These opening verses form the first part of the psalm, which is in three parts. The first part, which we've just read, refers to the general knowledge of God that can be inferred from creation.

[7 : 26] The second part, verses 7 to 11, refers to a special knowledge of God which comes to us through his written word. The third part, verse 12 to 14, is David's response to God's word.

The message in this opening section is that the natural world is not silent, but speaks loudly, clearly, and unambiguously of its creator. Arguably, the greatest theologian of the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas, held that a pagan living alone on a remote island without recourse to religion, could nevertheless, by unaided reason alone, come to know the truth that God exists.

And certainly, even in the ancient world, philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero reasoned that there must be some kind of supreme God.

Aristotle, for instance, rejected entirely the gods of the Greek pantheon with all their capriciousness. God, for him, was the prime mover, the uncaused cause.

Ask a person today if they believe in God, and the answer is often, no, I believe in science. As if the two were mutually exclusive. Yet many of the modern pioneers of science, like Galileo, Copernicus, Newton, and more recently, Max Planck, Schrodinger, and their own Scottish, James Clark Maxwell, and many others were believers.

[9 : 02] In fact, it was science that compelled Francis Collins, the geneticist, who headed up the Human Genome Project from 1993 to 2003 to abandon his atheism, later to become a committed Christian.

He cited four reasons for his change of mind. The fine tuning of the universe, and the fact that it had a beginning, the unreasonableness of mathematics that explains so much, and the fact that there is something instead of nothing.

People may, through ignorance or willfulness, reject belief in God, but the testimony of the heavens goes into all the world, and as with the heat of the sun, there is nowhere to hide from it.

Everywhere we look, we see God's handiwork in all that exists. So the Apostle Paul could write to the Romans and boldly declare, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

[10:28] You don't have to be a genius to know that God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature are evidenced by creation. Now, although Thomas Aquinas stated that the existence of God could be inferred by reason alone, he asserted that reason had limitations.

Anything beyond this, he stressed, could only come through revelation. Thus, the knowledge, for instance, that men and women are made in the image of God, that God is a trinity, or that Christ will return to judge the living and the dead, can only be known by man if it was revealed to us by God. That's why Judaism and Christianity are called revealed religions. For David, revelation from God came primarily through his written word.

And for him, the source of that word was the Torah or Pentateuch. The five books of Moses.

Because, of course, in David's day, the rest of the Bible had not yet been written.

The Torah was given by God through Moses to Israel, the people chosen and set apart by him to know him. And through obedience to his laws delivered to them on Mount Sinai, they were to display to a fallen world not the glory of his creation, but the glory of his moral nature.

[11:59] So David now turns his attention to God's word. But the sudden change in subject matter and the mark change in style from verse 7 through 11, even the change in the divine name itself, has led some scholars to speculate that the two sections were at one time two separate Psalms that have become fused together sometime in the past.

But for the rabbis, despite the abrupt change, there was an obvious connection. Just as the sun lights up the natural world, so the law of God is the source of spiritual light.

Verse 8, the commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. In this section, David speaks of God's law, statutes, precepts, commands, and decrees.

They are in themselves trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, and firm. But they are for our benefit. If we pay heed to them, they will refresh the soul, give joy to the heart, light to the eyes.

They even have the power to imbue a simple person like myself with wisdom. The Apostle Paul in Romans 1 speaks of those who refuse to acknowledge God, that although they claim to be wise, they became fools.

[13:21] A perfect example of that inner day and generation, I think that Gerald touched upon, is the astonishing way that supposedly intelligent, even university educated people can be taken in by gender ideology and actually believe that there are dozens of genders.

When the simplest believer, as long as you can count to two, knows from scripture that God made us male and female. G.K. Chesterton rightly remarked that when men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything.

Think about that one, that's very true. For David, the value of God's word was inestimable. It is more precious than gold. Currently, something like \$2,380 an ounce.

1900 pound sterling. Just thought, you know that. I've just got to keep an eye on my stash, you see. Yeah, so, I was saying it's more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

A sentiment shared by many to this day. From the time of the apostles onward, men and women have risked their lives to take God's word to a needy world. To date, the full Bible has been translated into more than 700 languages and the New Testament into more than 1,500 and there are many more partial translations.

[14:56] In some parts of the world, it has been known for people to walk many miles just to receive a copy of the Bible. I remember reading in a little tract once in the 1800s, a young Welsh girl who lived in the north only spoke Welsh, travelled all when she heard about some Bibles being in Cardiff.

She walked barefoot from the top of Wales to the south just to get a copy of the Bible. John Locke, the noted 17th century English philosopher, wrote, the Bible is one of the greatest blessings bestowed by God on the children of men.

Abraham Lincoln said, in regard to this great book, the Bible, I have but to say it is the best gift God has given to man. And a Google search will throw up dozens and dozens of similar quotes.

So now we come to the third section of the Psalms, which we'll go over quickly. David's response to God's word, 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.

[16:12] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. God's word not only tells us about God, it also tells us about ourselves.

Someone once said, when we read the Bible, the Bible reads us. How true that is. Maybe that's why Mark Twain, the American author, said that it wasn't the parts of the Bible that he understood, that he didn't understand that bothered him, it was the parts that he did understand that bothered him.

So the third section is David's response to God's command, in which he acknowledges his failure, seeks forgiveness of his sins, and help to enable him to live a right.

So we know of God's existence through creation, and we know of his nature, and the requirements he places on us through his word. But ultimately, God is known most fully through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So when we come to the New Testament, we find that although David lived centuries before Christ, he, like all the prophets, anticipated the coming of a Messiah, who would be in himself the ultimate revelation of God to mankind.

[17:39] Peter reminds us in his first epistle, chapter 1, verse 21, for prophecy never had its origins in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

So writing to the first century Jewish believers, the author of the New Testament epistle to the Hebrews begins his letter with these words. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom also he made the universe.

The son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful words.

Paul, writing predominantly to the Gentile Christians of Rome, begins his epistle, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus was no mere man, nor was he only a prophet like Moses and Elijah as Muslims would have us believe. He was and is the son of God through whom and for whom all things exist.

[19:24] Now neither Paul nor the author of Hebrews were making, when they wrote these words, for he made the same claims about himself when he was on earth. In John 14, 6 he says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. In Matthew 11, 27 he says, no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

And in John 17, 3, John records how at the last supper Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. it's not enough to know of God or to know about God or even to believe in him. James 2, 19 in the Living Translation says this, you believe that there is one God, good for you.

[20:40] Even the demons believe and they tremble. Jesus himself says in Matthew 7, 21, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. Jesus gives eternal life, not to those who know of him, but to those who know him.

Someone living in the 18th century could visit the newly completed St. Paul's Cathedral in London and marvel at its grandeur without having any knowledge of the architect whatsoever.

He might, however, know that the architect was Sir Christopher Wren. He might, because he was famous, even know a great deal about him without ever knowing him personally.

[21 : 56] Now, it just so happens that my daughter, who's here tonight, thanks for coming, my daughter and her husband have had plans approved for an extension to their house.

I've seen the plans, and I know who the architect is, but more than that, I know the architect. I know him personally. I've met with him and talked with him on a number of occasions.

Christianity is about more than believing certain truths or following a set of rules. More than that, it's about knowing God, having a personal relationship with him that affects our lives as we saw it affected David's life.

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. That's faith. faith. But Romans 5.5 says, God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

That's experience. As the old Scots woman once said, it's better felt than felt. Most of us here tonight would say that we know the Lord, but there are degrees of knowing.

[23 : 09] I know my daughter's architect quite well, but his friends whom he meets with on a weekly basis at the pub know him better than I do. His children better still and his wife best of all.

But to those of us who do know the Lord, and I include myself here, I want to ask, how well do you know him? And how well do you want to know him?

Jesus had 12 disciples. Later, he chose another 70. The 70 did not know him as well as the 12, but of the 12 there were three, Peter, James, and John, who were especially close to him.

It was only these three who were given the inestimable privilege of witnessing the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop while the others remained at its foot.

Of the women that followed Jesus and who, from a distance, witnessed Christ's crucifixion, it was Mary Magdalene who loved Jesus deeply and who came very early in the morning to the tomb, who was the first of all his disciples to see the risen Christ.

[24 : 22] And the apostle Paul who had encountered that same risen Lord on the Damascus road and came to know him better than most never lost his first love. Years later, writing to the church in Philippi, he confessed, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering becoming like him in his death.

We might already know the Lord, but we can know him better if we want to, if we are willing to pay the price of closer union with him. There is a passage in Ezekiel that perfectly illustrates the differing degrees of knowing Jesus.

Ezekiel is given a vision from God of a future temple yet to be fulfilled. In the vision he is taken on a tour of the temple by an angel who measures out its dimensions.

Although this vision has a future fulfillment, yet there is a lesson here for those of us who know the Lord. So let me read from Ezekiel chapter 47 for you, beginning at verse 1.

The man, that is the angel, brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple, and the water was trickling from the south side.

[25 : 46] As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits, and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. He measured off another thousand cubits, and led me through water that was knee-deep.

He measured off another thousand cubits, and led me through water that was up to the waist. He measured off another thousand, and now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in, a river that no one could cross.

He asked me, Son of man, do you see this? Do you see this? This is a great illustration of our relationship with the Lord.

Jesus said, whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. But for some Christians, sin and the cares of this world have reduced the river to a trickle.

The fountain needs to be unblocked to flow again. For others, they're happy to paddle in the shallows, unwilling or afraid to venture deeper.

[27 : 07] But why be content with the shallows when we can venture out until the water is past our knees and our waist and there is water to swim in?

When it comes to the knowledge and the love of God in Christ, there is water to swim in, a river that cannot be plumbed and that is too wide to cross.

As Charles Wesley writes in the hymn, and can it be, tis mystery all, the immortal dies, who can explore his strange design?

In vain, the firstborn seraph tries to sound the depths of love divine. Tis mercy all, let earth adore, let angel minds inquire no more.

Don't be content with the shallows. amen. Now, we're singing our next hymn, are we?

[28 : 08] I can't remember which one it is. Did you get that? Okay, good. praise.■ The deep deep love of Jesus Has not measured on the street