



## The Words of God

Psalm 19

Grace Church | 6.7.20

This morning we continue our sermon series in the book of Psalms, and if you remember from last week, in our introduction we hit both Psalms 1-2, showing how they both present the theme of the “two ways” or two paths. Basically, the compiler of the Psalms wants the reader to know that the most significant aspect of their Christian life is whether they listen to God’s instruction or the instruction and counsel of anyone or anything else. And we saw two primary themes in Psalms 1-2, first the theme of the Law or instruction of God and second the theme of the Kingdom or King of God. Today we look at a Psalm from the first book of the Psalter by King David where he takes up that first theme in more specific detail. His aim in this psalm is not just to express emotion but also to offer teaching. And the main question this Psalm answers is simple: how does God speak?

Psalm 19 might just be one of the most beautiful Psalms in the Psalter, and not just because it’s language. It’s beautiful in it’s structure. Today we will see in verses 1-6 that God speaks in creation, in verses 7-11 that God speaks in Scripture, and finally the psalm closes with a responsive petition and prayer in light of God’s speech. It’s such a clear structure that I don’t really have to explain it to you, just in reading it you may have picked it up already. So that is our map today: we will discover How We See God’s Glory, How We Know God’s Goodness, and How We Respond to both his glory and goodness in kind. That’s a very simple map for you, so let’s start in verse 1-6.

### How We See God’s Glory (1-6)

One of my favorite poems, if not my favorite poem, is called “Gods Grandeur” by Gerard Manely Hopkins. Now Hopkins was not known for his poetry during his life. He was a priest whose real passion was poetry, but few knew it. After he died right before the turn of the 20th century, his poems were published by a friend. Only now is he known as one of the greatest poets of the Victorian era. Hopkins was a bit of a glum man, prone to depression and loneliness. But if there was one practice that got Hopkins excited and his creative juices flowing, it was witnessing God’s creation. Few poems capture the understanding of how God speaks in nature better than “God’s Grandeur.” Let me read it to you, it’s not long.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.



It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.<sup>1</sup>

The line that has always stuck me, that haunts every hike I take or every sunset I view is “There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.” See, Hopkins’ argument in this sonnet is that no matter how ignorant man tries to wipe away the glory of God in creation, he cannot. The deeper he digs, greedily trying to destroy the more futile his effort is: nature is never spent when he is. Or rather, God’s glory and grandeur in nature is never spent. Deep down, there is a dearest freshness that will always echo the glory of God.

Here we find that Hopkins echoes David in Psalm 19. See **verse 1**. The word Glory here means “weight”. What we have in mind when we use this word is all the perfections of God wrapped up into one. That is his glory, his full weight. Look up into the sky, look out onto creation, and you cannot help but find the weight of God’s glory, the heaviness of an eternal God. We see the sweeping, mysterious nature of creation echoed in the form of verses 1-6. The images are abstract and philosophical, almost as if David is staring into the night sky while he pens this first stanza. The skies proclaim not only his weight, but his handiwork: they show that there is an architect and a creator. Only the one who acknowledges this can rightly enjoy the majesty of the created order by revelling in the majesty of the creator, getting lost in the ocean of the kind of vastness that could fashion such intricacy.

**Verse 2** tells us more. The day time sun and shadows “pour out” speech like a bubbling stream, always saying something, always talking if we would listen. Even when the night comes, knowledge is not extinguished, by the night sky and stars display gloried existence. All of creation is singing like a choir, speaking and revealing God’s glory. We find this reinforced in **verse 3-4**. Here is the paradox of creation: although day and night speak no audible words, the book of nature never ceases to sing as it shines.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur”



**Verse 5-6** give an interesting picture of how God works in creation. Even the sun, the most radiant and powerful force in our solar system, the burning glory that sustains our very life, is set on course by God himself. In the ancient near east, the bridegroom on his wedding day would set forth to claim his bride in his best and splendid clothing, bright and radiant, to receive his bride. So is the Sun, filled with radiant joy by God as it fulfills its daily duty. The sun shows the great lengths of God's glory in creation (extent) and the penetrating scope (nothing escapes from the heat).

What is all of this telling us? Well, it's a clear reminder that Creation has a purpose, and that purpose is worship. We always worship what we find glorious. There is a reason creation is magnificent and colorful and awe inspiring. There is a reason, as one pastor says, "No one stares out over the grand canyon and boasts about how much they can bench press."<sup>2</sup> The glory of creation points to the creator. It is what theologians call God's general revelation: God speaking to everyone equally his words. And what is the word creation says? It says God is big. He is not like you, he is not light and momentary but weighty and glorious. And this friends, is a significant fact that we cannot deny.

Why? Because this book of creation is not hidden from anyone. And if everyone can see it, well then when it comes to acknowledging God, we are without excuse. When God says: "how come you didn't worship me?", well, we have no excuse. We can't say: we didn't know you were there! We can't say: "God, you uneven gave us anything to worship about you!", because that's simply not true. He will say to that: "I gave you the sun and the stars in the sky, I gave you oceans and lakes and rivers and valleys and mountains and green grass and storms and all the intricacies of botany and biology and yet still, you did not worship me. This is exactly Paul's point in Romans 1, as he comments on the equal guilt of all men and women who deny God's glory:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

The purpose of creation is to reveal the glory of God, and that it does for all men in all places and at all times. And yet, creation is not enough of a word. See Creation reveals enough to condemn us, but not enough to save us. It rids us of our ignorance and excuses, but doesn't ultimately provide any answers. If all we had was creation, we would be Pantheists at best, worshiping creation as God instead of the God of creation, or we would be naturalists, believing that the only way to interpret the truth of the world is to interpret nature. The Psalmist knows that the words of God do not stop at creation. We need not only a way to perceive that there is a God, and that he is glorious, but we need to know what this God is like.

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<sup>2</sup> Matt Chandler, but I'm not sure where.



## How We Know God's Goodness (7-11)

The transition here may seem abrupt, in fact it is so abrupt that some scholars I believe wrongly conclude that this is a patchwork of two different psalms put into one. But here is why it is so natural to move from poetry expressing the glory of creation to poetry expressing the glory of the law of God. It's because if this God whose glory is clear in everything we see and perceive were to speak, wouldn't his words be just as glorious as his creation? And if in fact we believe that it was his word that sparked and created creation, then it follows logically that his words are higher than creation itself, and to move from poetry of creation to poetry of law is not a shift at all but a natural progression.

The specificity of the language and images in 7-11 show us the nature of this revelation is different than the former. This revelation of God is not general, but special, not abstract and awe-inspiring, but clear and applicable. Notice this too: in verse 1-6, God's name is used once, in verse 1, and it is the general name for deity, El. But in verses 7-11, God is mentioned six times, and the name used for him here? The specific name, *Yahweh* (the Lord). Again we mark that general revelation is enough to see the glory of the divine, but it is not enough to know the divine personally.

How do we know the character of God? He must not only speak generally, but specifically. This is what theologians call special revelation, when God breaks into the world by means of a messenger or a prophet, or at times his very own presence, and gives his words. He reveals himself, not just in the day to day natural order of the earth, but in specific ways to specific people. God has always been about speaking and revealing not simply to everyone in creation, but to his chosen people. And since the beginning, God has been speaking in this way. He spoke to Adam and Eve, he spoke to Noah, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Moses and Aaron and his priests, he spoke to his Prophets and Judges, through his laws and commands and instruction, all the while showing his people, who came to be known as Israel, exactly who he really is. And they wrote it down, preserving these very words of God throughout the ages by the Spirit. Now, we can talk later if you need about the reliability of the Scriptures we hold in our hands today, about translation and the canon and the nature of inspiration, but suffice to say that if you are searching around for the words of God specifically for the people of God by whom you belong to in Christ, you do not have to search any longer. You have it right here. And here in Psalm 19, when David speaks about the special revelation and words of God, this is what he means. Every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. This is what he means, as in Psalm 1, when he says "law". It is the Torah, the instruction, the specific revelation of God for the people of God. So what is so special about this revelation?

Notice how strong the parallelism in these verses, particularly 7-9. Each line is paralleled by the line after it, and each couplet or two lines is paralleled by the every other couplet. They all appear to be saying the same thing, but in a different way and language, strengthening and deepening the main poetic thrust of 7-9, which is simple: "the goodness of the instruction of God".



Let's break down these three verses into three categories to treat them as one parallel point. We see the nouns, the adjectives, and the verbs.<sup>3</sup> All of these will help us to grasp that David is saying about the word of God.

### **Nouns**

The *Law* of God

The total instruction of God, all of his specially revealed will

The *Testimony* of God

This instruction is given by God himself, as if it is a personal testimony

The *Precepts* of God

This instruction is general, meant to guide our life in a comprehensive sense

The *Commandment* of God

This instruction is specific too, given to us in particular statements and not vague enough to ignore or relativise

The *Fear* of God

This instruction is authoritative, not to be taken lightly but provoking healthy reverence

The *Rules* of God

Also translated as judgements, this instruction is decisive, inescapably just

### **Adjectives**

Perfect

This instruction lacks nothing, cannot be added to or taken away from

Sure

This instruction is firm and confirmed, verified in history and nature

Right

This instruction is moral, upright, not capable of guiding to evil

Pure

Psalm 12:6; this instruction is refined to the point where there is no mix of truth and error in it

Clean

Not just purified, but also outwardly clean. Pleasant to look at, to take in, shining and lustrous

True

The instruction is always to be depended upon. It is literally truth, or trustworthy, unable to fail those who truly come by faith

### **Verbs**

Revives the soul

This instruction brings spiritual renewal, a la Psalm 23:3, it's the still waters that brings spiritual nourishment and peace

Makes wise the simple

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<sup>3</sup> Indebted again to Kidner for helping to organize my thoughts in this way.



There is right understanding here, not just of the spiritual but also the natural too. This instruction helps wayward men and women like us to see God and the world rightly

Rejoices the heart

This instruction brings joy to the inmost parts of the person.

Enlightens the eyes

I once was blind, but now I see. This instruction unravels the mystery that creation leaves us with, it makes the true God truly known

Endures forever

This instruction is not just for the first hearer, or for a particular time. It is authoritative for all time in its truth, and it lasts until all time. In the glory of the new heavens and new earth, God will not contradict this word.

Is righteous altogether

This instruction is not disjointed, but “altogether” literally means “righteous every one” or “all alike righteous”. The word of God is cohesive and justly aligned.

What is left then but to comprehend the truth of verse 10-11? Nothing can eclipse this perfection. You can possess all the gold of the world, all the riches and knowledge of general revelation, but still the words of the Lord are better and more worthwhile. They are better and sweeter than the sweetest gift of creation, to be trusted and relished and enjoyed. These words bring warning and instruction and blessing and reward. How does blessing and happiness come if not by the word of the Lord?

## How We Respond To Revelation (12-14)

“The difference between the book of nature and the book of Scripture is that we read the book of nature, but the book of Scripture reads us.<sup>4</sup>” There is immense beauty not only in seeing revelation, but being revealed. A correct understanding of the instruction of the Lord does not lead to the self-righteousness of the Pharisees but the humble contrition of David. In this response we see both concession and confession.<sup>5</sup> The response of the Psalmist is a petition for searching both outwardly and inwardly. In this way, his response corresponds to creation (outward revelation) and Scripture (inward revelation). Without both, his petition is doomed.

Notice how the psalm ends. You would perhaps assume that the author, in allowing revelation to reveal his sin, to head towards an understanding of God as judge or accuser. But who does he address his plea for holiness to? Not Judge, but rock. Not accuser but redeemer (kinsman).

### **A living example of responding to revelation: how do we address the realities of racial injustice?**

What does creation say? - Where is his glory?

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<sup>4</sup> Roughly said by Sinclair Ferguson, in a sermon on Psalm 19.

<sup>5</sup> From Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*



What does Scripture say? - Where is his goodness?

“Race prejudice is contrary to every known principle of Christianity; that there is not to be found anywhere in the religion of Jesus Christ anything upon which it can stand, anything upon which it can be justified, or even extenuated.”<sup>6</sup>

What is our response? Concession, Confession, Petition

Here you might come to the end of the sermon and wonder: where is Jesus Christ and his gospel? Up to this point I have not expressed the victory of Jesus through the lens of this psalm. But take note, this is intentional. When we look at all of God’s words and revelation in time and space, there are not just two words or revelations given to us, there are three. There is first the word of creation, which is unable to fully demystify the creator God, but enough to condemn us before him. And there is a second word of scripture, clear enough to help us revel and delight in the goodness of God, and clear enough to bring us to humble confession and petition. And yet, if all we had was a dry, dusty book of law, how could we delight in it? The Israelites tried, but they failed. They were sinners just like us. But there is a third word, better than either of those words, a word physical enough to peel back the mystery of creation and clear enough to shake the dust off the word of Scripture and make it come alive to sinners who are hard of hearing. This third word is the Incarnate Word, and his name is Jesus Christ.

By becoming man, Jesus entered into creation to interpret for us the glory of creation. In coming to earth, he said loud and clear: “the God who made the heavens and Earth is not just the impersonal El but the personal Yawheh.” He is personal enough to send his very Son, truly God, to walk among the earth, to feel the heat of the sun, to drink in the light of the stars. This God is not creation, but above creation and capable of entering into creation. When we feel the sun shine, we feel in its heat not the impersonal force of God but the image of the glorious Son of God. When we see the stars shine, we see in their light not the mysterious bang of nature but the the personal voice of Jesus who holds them in place. Creation preaches the mysterious glory of God, but here on the other side of incarnation, it preaches the particular glory of Christ. It makes Jesus known. For all who repent of sin and put their trust in Jesus by faith, creation doesn’t just preach, it preaches the gospel: that by his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus the king has won.

But the special revelation of God in his word and instruction is also incomplete without a revelation of the incarnate word. When he shows up on the scene, Jesus was revealed as Christ and Messiah, the anointed and chosen of God, and his purpose was clear. He brought the clarity of the kingdom with him. When he taught, he fulfilled and revealed the very purpose of all the law and instruction of God: it’s purpose was to point to him. Don’t take my word for it, take the word of the word. What does Scripture say about Christ? Consider Hebrews 1:1-3;

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<sup>6</sup> Frances Grimke, *Sermons*



Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Jesus Christ really came to earth He really lived in full obedience to God and all of his rulings and instruction. He really went up to the Roman cross to bleed and die. He really rose from the dead. And all of it he so that he curtain would be peeled back from the mystery of God. He did it so that we could look at him and say: that's what God looks like. That how he acts, how he speaks, how he walks, how he trusts. The understanding that David has of the instruction of God is applied to him in full and final form:

He is Perfect, lacking nothing. He is sure, with an identity firm and confirmed, verified in history and nature and prophecy and apostolic witness. He is Right, not capable of sin or moral evil. He is Pure, he has no mixture of sin and holiness in him, the undefiled and white lamb in white and undefiled royal robes, he is Clean, beautiful and compelling and ruddy. He is true, not just in his words and teaching but he himself is truth, completely dependable, completely trustworthy.

He Revives the soul, he Makes wise the simple, he rejoices the heart, he Enlightens the eyes, he Endures forever, he is righteous altogether.

So How can David exclaim in this psalm that God and his word are his rock and his redeemer? Because he has faith that one day all will be revealed. The redeemer was coming, the rock, the final revelation of God. Christ the full and final revelation of God, come to be both Rock and Redeemer.

Friends, when read within the witness of Scripture, this psalm is painstakingly clear. How do we see God's glory? Through the lens of Jesus. How do we know God's goodness? Through the lens of Christ. There is no other way. And so as we consider our response, how we might take our understanding of God's glory and goodness into the world, we do it by making Jesus known. We lift him up, we represent him, we follow him, we model him. Our nation needs justice, and the answer is Jesus. This is not reductionistic. He is the comfort for the fearful, the vindication of the angry, the solace of the broken. He is not silent in protests, he is not actionless in injustice, he is not misunderstanding in difference. He became like us so that he might really *know* our every temptation and inclination and suffering. This Jesus is God's final word, our Rock and Redeemer. Pray with me.

