

The Speaking God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 April 2020

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] Well let me add my word of welcome to Robbie's. My name is Martin Ayres, I'm the Rector of St Silas Church and it's great to be together wherever you are just now as we do church in the best way that we can under these restrictions in this difficult time. I don't know whether you saw the picture doing the rounds on social media this week of a family back in church after the restrictions have been eased and stopped and the dad thinking to himself in the pew I'm glad we can go to church again but I really do miss being able to fast forward and mute. Hopefully you're not falling into that kind of habit and enjoying it too much and you're not tempted to mute now. Instead if you could keep your Bibles open at Psalm 19 that would be really helpful that we're going to be anchored in that Psalm as well as moving around the Bible to look at this theme and if you don't have a Bible you might find it helpful to look up Psalm 19 on BibleGateway.com that would be a good place to go. Let's ask for God's help, let's pray and I'll use that last verse, verse 14 of Psalm 19 as the basis for a prayer for us together.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen. So we're thinking about knowing God. Knowing the living God is the greatest thing for us. It's also the most intrepid adventure we could ever go on. There was a preacher, Charles Spurgeon, who said this in 1865 when he was only 20 years old. He said, There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the divinity.

It is a subject so vast that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity, so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with, in them we feel a kind of self-content and go our way with the thought, behold I am wise. But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumb line cannot sound its depth and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the solemn exclamation, I am but of yesterday and know nothing. No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind than thoughts of God. So I hope you're up for that.

I hope you're excited as I am about this series we're in as a church. But how can we know God? That's our focus this morning, that God is there and he is not silent, he is a speaking God.

We're looking at Psalm 19 and there's something deeply subversive about Psalm 19. I think it's a really rebellious song to take hold of and own for yourself today. Because all around us in our nation we're a people and a culture who really have no time for the Bible. We think it's boring, we think it's irrelevant, what would it have to say to me? We even think it's harmful and untrue. And here we have what's essentially a love song about the Bible. So in verse 10 of Psalm 19, just have a look, he says of God's words of scripture, they are more precious than gold, than much pure gold.

[3 : 2 2] They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. So he's not so much interested in arguments outside the Bible, history, archaeology, that might affirm our confidence and the reliability of the Bible, though we can look there. Rather, the writer of Psalm 19, David, is saying when you go to the Bible, what you experience is that it's like honey dripping from the honeycomb. There is a sweetness to it as God blesses you in your time in his word. You experience its goodness, it helps you to grow. But in our times, lots of us just don't feel that same kind of excitement about the Bible.

We don't sense its sweetness. What makes it possible for the psalmist to write with this kind of expressive devotion? It's because through the word of God, he has come to know the God of the word.

So our first point this morning, the word of God reveals him. The first six verses of Psalm 19 are about God's creation speaking to us about God. God speaking through what he has made. In verse 1, the heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day, they pour forth speech. Night after night, they reveal knowledge. And for lots of us, that fits with our

experience. I remember a Monroe bagger saying, I'd rather be in the mountains thinking about God than being at church thinking about the mountains. And there is something deeply wrong about that. There is something very confused and ill-judged. But what he got right is that God does speak to us through his creation. As we look at what he's made, other people, ourselves, the cosmos, nature, wildlife, we see immense, mighty power to have created all this from nothing.

We see wisdom. We see artistry. We see goodness. But the problem is, we don't always see what we're meant to see from creation. In our fallenness, with our human limitations, we don't draw the right conclusions about God from creation. So God has given us a better word. He has given us his words in scripture. To know the truth about God with confidence, we have to turn from general revelation, creation, to special revelation, his word. And that's what the writer of Psalm 19 does.

That's the journey he takes us on in the psalm. So did you see the turning point in verse 7? Verse 7, the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. He's gone from the cosmos, the mountains, the oceans, to opening the Bible. And the psalm becomes a devotional song about the Bible. So verse 7, the statutes of the Lord. Verse 8, the precepts of the Lord, the commands of the Lord.

Verse 9, the decrees of the Lord. For it's as we come to the Bible that God makes himself known. He reveals who he is, that he is the Lord. That is the name that he gives his people in his word to call him by. Because he is a great king. He's the great king over all that he's made.

[6 : 47] As he made it and he sustains it by his word. He's the Lord. He reveals that he is love. That he is a God of kindness and goodness and benevolence. That he is light. He's a God of righteousness and moral purity and uprightness. His word reveals who he is and what he is like.

And God reveals himself in his word so that we can know him personally. Jeremiah 9, 23. This is what the Lord says. Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches. But let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth. For in these I delight, declares the Lord. God calls us not just to know about him, but to know him.

When I was 19, I spent a summer working at Buckingham Palace as they open it to the public in the summer months when the Queen is staying at Balmoral. And to work in the stateroom showing people around, I had to learn a lot of facts about the Queen. So I knew what her favourite room was in the palace.

I knew what her favourite picture was in the picture gallery of her paintings. I knew lots of facts about the Queen. But even while working in her palace, I never knew the Queen. I never even met the lady herself. But when we come to the word of God, God speaks not just so that we'll know about him, but so that we can know him. That revelation gets ultimately fulfilled as we come to Jesus.

The Apostle John, who saw Jesus with his own eyes and heard Jesus with his own ears and touched Jesus with his own hands, puts it like this in John chapter 1. The word, he calls the eternal Son of God, the word of God, is the revelation of God. He says, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

[8 : 53] We have seen his glory. And there's no conflict there. There's no conflict between the word of God in the Bible and the word of God, Jesus Christ. For it's through the Bible that we see Jesus.

We don't get Jesus so we move away from the Bible. Rather, Jesus points us to the Bible as the place where we see him. And now that Jesus has come, we see God's words in the Bible in the light of him.

So we see them with a new depth and richness through which we can know God because we see that it's all about him. So we think about that in our second point. The word of God is reliable. Jesus Christ was a Bible man. He lived his life obeying scripture. He went to the cross to die in obedience to scripture.

When he was tempted in the wilderness by Satan and had to obey to pass the test that we had always failed of obeying God in righteousness. He said to Satan, he responded to Satan's temptations with the word of God. He said, it is written, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. He submitted his life to the word of God. So we're a Bible-based church at St. Silas, not because we're bookish people or Bible kind of people, but rather because our Savior, Jesus, our Lord Jesus was a Bible man. And so he calls us as his people to submit our lives to God's word as well. Now that was the Old Testament that Jesus said, he said to the Bible people in his day, you earnestly study the scriptures so that by them you may

have eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me. It's all about him. And Jesus also reassures us about the New Testament.

In John chapter 16, he speaks to the apostles and the New Testament books have the apostles as their author or their source, each book. And Jesus speaks to the apostles and he says to them, one of the most surprising things I think Jesus says in the New Testament, he says, it is for your good that I'm going away. John 16 verse 9, it is for your good that I'm going away. How can it be better for us as God's people that Jesus physically goes away? Well, it's because he promises after he goes, the spirit will come. God will send the spirit. And he says this, verse 13, have a look, John 16 verse 13, but when he, the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you, the apostles into all the truth. He will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. Jesus has ascended. The father has now sent the Holy Spirit. He sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles and they wrote down the words of the risen Jesus. Jesus had words from the father given to him and he gives those words to the spirit so that the spirit can inspire the apostles to write the New Testament and God gets what he wants in his book. So that as we come to the Bible, the written word, through it, we see and encounter Jesus, the living word. And with the help of the spirit of God, opening our eyes, opening our ears, opening our hearts, we can taste the sweetness of the word of God as we see Jesus and through him we know God. So the word of God reveals him so that we can know him. The word of God is reliable. Thirdly, the word of God is a rock. It's a foundation to build your life on. And we see that in

[12:47] Psalm 19. Just look back in Psalm 19 at verse 7. The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. So all around us today, the Bible, it's the world's bestseller that's not read, isn't it? It's gathering dust on shelves and in drawers. And how are we doing? How are we doing as a society? We're not refreshed.

It's so true, isn't it? Our souls are not refreshed. We're desperate, thirsty for refreshment for our souls. And the writer here, David, says, God gives you that through his word, through the word. He doesn't see that God's commands as a burden or restrictive because he knows the character of the God who speaks these words. That these words, their author isn't a strict schoolmaster who's out to spoil our fun, who doesn't want us to enjoy things. No, rather, he is a generous giving father who's given us all the good things that we have. And his word, his commands are an outpouring of his mercy to us, that he would condescend to give us wisdom, that we would live in the way that he wants us to live, the right way, a way that enables us to flourish and him to be glorified because that is what is right for him. So the writer in Psalm 19 verse 14 says at the end that the Lord is my rock. He calls God his rock. And Jesus says at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 7, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. He talks about storms coming and this foundation standing firm. And we're seeing all around us, aren't we, at the moment with the COVID-19 crisis, that there are lots of foundations you could choose to build your life on that actually are unstable and they can fall. They can come crashing down your life with it. It's a turbulent time. But God invites us, will you build your life instead on the unchanging rock of my word? We read elsewhere, the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.

And look at its benefits when we build our lives on it. Verse 8, the precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. It gives you a joy that your circumstances can't take away.

[15:18] Verse 8, the commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. So it's as we come to the word that it enlightens everything else. Through hearing God's word, we can understand God's world.

It enlightens us and enlightens what's around us. It's a firm foundation for our lives. Will we trust it? Will we build our lives on it? But it's as we examine our lives against that straight edge of God's word that we have all of our faults exposed. As the word of God reveals the perfection of God, it exposes our flaws. As Jesus says, be perfect therefore as your heavenly father is perfect.

And we see how far we've fallen short. So if you look further down at Psalm 19, in verse 11, he says, by them, by your word, scripture, your servant is warned. In keeping them there is great reward. But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. It's as he comes to the commands of God that he becomes aware of his need for forgiveness from God. How can we still love then what condemns us? How can we enjoy something that convicts us and demonstrates so obviously that we're not good enough for God? Well, that's our fourth point. We've heard the word

of God reveals him.

The word of God is reliable. The word of God is a rock. Fourthly, the word of God redeems. Without God's word, we could never understand the cross. As we look with the Bible through the history of God's dealings with humanity, what we find again and again is works and words. Events plus explanation equals revelation. If you don't have the words, you don't understand the works and we lack that revelation. And if we see the cross in human history without the word, what do we see? We see scandalous injustice, meaningless loss of life. But when we come to Mark 10:45 in God's word, Jesus says, the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. That he pays the redemption price at the cross so that we might go free. I don't know whether you've ever thought before that the same God who created all of this with his word, with words of sheer power, couldn't forgive us simply with a word. He couldn't just say to us, I forgive you.

It would have diminished his holiness because of our sin and his righteousness and his justice, his holiness, his perfection. The only way to forgive us was not with a word, but with silence as Jesus experienced the silence of God on the cross. As he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And he heard nothing back, no words. Jesus endured that so that he can speak words of life to us. John chapter 5 verse 24, he says, very truly I tell you, whoever he is my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life.

[18:45] And Peter says to Jesus, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And at the end of Hebrews chapter 1, we get to over here words now spoken from God the Father to God the Son, the risen Jesus. Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

Having endured the silence of God on the cross, Jesus now hears declarative words from God the Father, powerful words that exalt him and assure us Jesus is going to win and we will be with him forever.

So that like the writer of Psalm 19, as he ends in verse 14, he can say of the God he knows through the word, Lord, you are my rock and my redeemer. So friends, behold the God who speaks. His words reveal him to know him. They're reliable to trust. They're a rock, a firm foundation to build your life on and they redeem us to transform our future forever. So that the question God is asking you and me this morning is, will you devote yourself to my word, to my living, active, enduring word?

Will we taste its sweetness as a word from the Holy Spirit to us today, day by day as we read it? Sweeter than honey, more precious than gold. As we know the living God through his living word, so much else works out. Samuel Rutherford once wrote this, Tonight, as I was communing with God, he put my head on his shoulder and bid me worry no more.

Let's pray together. We praise you, Heavenly Father, that you are a speaking God. Thank you for the gift of your word. Sweeter than honey, more precious than pure gold.

[20:43] Lord, by your mercy and grace, would you enable us to experience that? Help us to immerse ourselves in your word, that we would build our lives on solid rock, that we find perfect freedom in serving you, and great joy and satisfaction in knowing you, for your glory and in Jesus' name. Amen.