

The God who creates, speaks and saves

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Preacher: James Clark

- [0 : 0 0] Tonight's reading is Psalm 19, it's page 552 in the Church Bible in front of you. Psalm 19.
- 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.
- They have no speech, they use no words. No sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth. Their words to the end of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
- It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. 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 deprived of its warmth. The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
- [1 : 1 1] The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commandments of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
- The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold. They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.
- By them your servant is warned. In keeping them there is great reward. 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.
- Ford zum- Gary 149-500 Oh yeah, definitely.
- [2 : 3 2] Please bear with me. Amen. Okay. Okay, there we go.
- This is what Taylor Swift must feel like. You happy, Martin? Well, if Martin's happy, I'm happy.
- I'd like to claim, I don't know about you, but I'd like to claim this is a new year, so it's a new me, but I'm undeniably heavier than I was last year, and it's only one weekend. I'm still sleepy, probably sleepier than I was last year, and I still forget to put the lid on the toothpaste.
- There's plenty, though, at this time of year to tell me how I can begin to do that sort of thing a bit better, what I really need to think myself happy or cook myself healthy, 17 exercises to get the abs I still don't have, or 22 steps to read the guilt-inducing pile of books that still sits by my bed and stares at me.
- And all that stuff that you see, mainly from my guilty pleasure at the mail online, all feels, frankly, just quite exhausting, doesn't it? It feels like do more, do more, do more, do more, do more.
- [4 : 0 0] But our psalm this evening, I hope, will show us that we don't need to cook better, we don't need 17 steps, we might not even need abs. At the start of a new year, we don't need to look within or without.

Instead, our psalmist, who, in this instance, is King David, reminds us of constant truths that will sustain us day in and day out for the year ahead, and the year after that, and the year after that.

I've got three just really simple takeaway points this evening. Firstly, from verses 1 to 6, that God creates and sustains. Secondly, in verses 7 to 11, that God speaks.

And then finally, in verses 12 through to 14, that God saves. God creates and sustains. God speaks. God saves.

Those are our three headings that we're going to think about this psalm under this evening. But before we do that, let's pray and ask for God's help. Lord Jesus, we thank you so much that we have before us tonight your word, and that through it, by your Spirit, we might meet with you and know you better.

[5 : 16] Lord Jesus, we love you. We need your help tonight that we might reflect you. So would you graciously, by your Spirit, be at work in our hearts that we might leave here tonight changed.

And all these things we ask in your name. Amen. Amen. So firstly, God creates and sustains. So that's the first six verses of our psalm, if you still have that open in front of you this evening just now.

And I think they're a pretty refreshing dose of perspective at the start of a new year. Three things, it's always three things, I'd like to draw out from this first section.

Firstly, how David does hit home that theme of God creating and sustaining. It's difficult to pinpoint with this psalm just when in the life of David it was written.

It's not impossible to imagine David still on the run from Saul, waking up one morning outside of his cave or tent where he was staying, and just seeing something of the beauty of creation before him in the morning, the small slice of the wilderness that he could see.

[6 : 27] Or alternatively, perhaps, David later in his life, now enthroned in Jerusalem, coming out of his chambers onto his balcony and looking out over the city, perhaps it's at night and the sun is setting, perhaps it's dawn and the birds are singing.

Regardless of when it is in the life of David, something of the immensity of what David sees as he looks out on creation causes this poetry, this beautiful expression of who God is to flow out from him.

He's describing how the very earth itself, silent but speaking, cries out. Because of the beauty of what he sees, it cries out from head to foot something of God's beauty, God's glory, God's craftsmanship as he looks out over creation.

I read that first verse and thought, well, David's clearly never lived in Glasgow. Look with me then again just at that first verse then, the heavens declaring the glory of God.

God is named here by David as the creator of the universe, isn't he? The sky is proclaiming the work of his hands. Everything around us in the world with God's fingerprints on it.

[7 : 39] And then later in the second half of verse 4, the sustainer of all that he has made. The example is given by David of a place provided for the sun and what he has made and placed there, the sun sustaining it and ordering it.

Again, through the illustration of the sun, its daily beautiful business of rising and setting and rising and setting from the right place back to the right place, just as he made it, just as he sustains it and orders it.

It's a beautiful description, isn't it? God's work like a bridegroom, resplendent and glorious, coming out each day, or like an athletic champion ready to run the race.

And these are large terms that David is using for God, creator and sustainer. And David also makes it clear that God makes no secret about it, does he?

This revelation of God in creation seems to be completely unmissable. Look again at verses 1 and 2 and the language that David uses. He describes the heavens declaring, proclaiming, things pouring forth.

- [8 : 52] It's unmissable and it's constant. Verse 2, day after day, night after night. And not only is it unmissable, not only is his revelation constant through creation, it's also, says David in verse 4, indiscriminate.

All the earth, all the way to the ends of the earth, not one corner, not one corner does not have God's fingerprints all over it. Or in verse 6, nothing is deprived of what God has made, the warmth of the sun, touching every inch of what God has created.

His glory, his craftsmanship, plain all the time, to everyone. It's a truly immense picture. And there is great comfort in that, I think, at the start of the year.

That little glimpse of God's immensity. To know that our lives rest in the hands of the God who has breathed life into everything and who hasn't kept it a secret.

God is not selfish. He is selfless. He pours out his glory generously in the heavens for all to see. There's a lot in 2025 that is unknown to many of us.

- [10 : 09] Andy shared a little bit about that with us this morning as we looked at Matthew's gospel. And we thought about how it can feel a bit daunting. I don't know about you, but if you're thinking of going back to work on Monday, maybe the thought of an inbox that is just piling up is already beginning to get you down.

Or maybe it's the study that you've got ahead with you. Or relationships. Or family life. Or health. What does 2025 hold in store? No idea. Not a clue.

But one thing was certain for David, for sure, and for us, that we are in the hands of none other than the creator and sustainer of the whole universe.

And there is no better place to be because if God is sufficient for all these grand things that he has made, from the heavens and the skies and the sun, well, how much more then is he able to care for us?

And isn't that what the Lord Jesus himself says? Picking up a similar theme in the Gospels. Except Jesus doesn't say, look up to the heavens. He says, look down at the fields.

- [11 : 25] Consider these. Consider the lilies. Look at their splendor. Or in some translations, look at their glory. How beautiful they are.

And if God can create and speak into life these sorts of things in this way and care for them, well, how much more can he care for you this year? Whatever it might hold.

Consider the heavens and its glory. Consider the sun and its ordered pattern. How much more then can this same God care for you?

And does he care for you? So that was our first little point for verses one to six. One of three. The second thing I want to draw to our attention is this, that these opening verses are penned by a theist.

David believed in the Lord God. And what he wrote at the time would have been received by fellow theists, both in the nation Israel, where David lived, and in the nations around him, given where we are in human history.

- [12 : 34] And so the psalm is not principally, then I don't think, here to convince an audience or a reader that there is a God that we can reason our way to because the beauty of creation points to there being a creator.

I think David might be writing more pointedly than that. Rather, David emphatically sets out that the God of Israel is the true and only God.

The purpose of these verses is not as an apologetic to persuade us, but it's a truth to confront us, isn't it? Whether you like it or not, whether you believe it or not, whether you want to know it or not, God is the creator and sustainer of the universe.

The heavens display his glory and it's unmistakable. Not an apologetic to persuade us, but a truth to confront us. And maybe that's new for you this evening or still something you're getting familiar with.

And if that is the case, then what I'd really like to do is commend to you the life course that Martin spoke about earlier. It's due to start up shortly. If you've got questions about what the Bible is saying about who God is and revealing himself to be and what this world is like, then do speak to Martin about coming along to the life course.

[13 : 49] Equally, if you're sitting here tonight thinking, well, James, be that as it may, it seems to me that there's pretty little about this world that is either ordered or well sustained so far as I can see it.

And that is a fair question, isn't it? Sometimes I wonder that. I just have to flick through the news. I hope you've come to see, though, that if you did attend the life course, the Bible has plenty by way of good and fair answers to questions like that.

So if that's you tonight, please do grab Martin after the service. So that was the second point, that it's not necessarily an apologetic, but a real truth to confront us about who God is.

And the third and final thing I'd like to draw to these verses is just, again, about that same idea of glory at the start of the psalm. Verse 1, the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Now, David is, what David is doing here is really important. He's describing what the heavens are shouting out about and crying out about. And is it David's glory as king? No.

[14 : 59] Is it Israel's glory as a nation? No. Rather, it's God's glory. That is, the very work of the heavens reveals something of God's character, of his awesomeness, of his perfection.

And it's fitting that we should come to a verse like this just so soon after the Christmas period, isn't it? Nowhere, nowhere more fully, more fully even than in the heavens themselves, is the glory of God seen other than in the Lord Jesus himself.

I can't imagine the sort of psalm that David would write were he to behold the glory of God not only pasted across the heavens as it is, but also wrapped in swaddling cloths in a dirty manger in Bethlehem.

What would David say were he to see that? of Jesus, Paul writes to the Corinthian church that he is the image and glory of God.

And in his gospel, John writes that glory and Jesus are two things that are entirely inseparable. That in taking on flesh, the very glory of God, John writes, is revealed to human people.

[16 : 18] God dwelt among us in Jesus. His glory dwelt among us in Jesus. And so what a wonder and privilege to know that as Christians this year, we have known and seen the glory of God more fully than even King David himself could have imagined it.

Not just up there in the heavens, but fully veiled in human flesh in the Lord Jesus. So those are some things to think about in verses 1 through to 6 and that was God creating and sustaining and if that's what verses 1 to 6 show us, then verses 7 to 11 show us what this creating and sustaining God is like.

He is a good God who speaks. I have a daughter, we have a daughter, Lily. Now you may not have seen Lily, probably heard her in the minute silence.

And she is in a phase of her life, she's about one years old, where she has lots to say, but she can't quite get the words out, at least not in a way that is discernible.

Sometimes she tries and it's still not discernible. And quite often interpreting what Lily has to say can be hit and miss. Often it's a kind of flap of the arms.

[17 : 35] It might mean she wants picked up. Could mean she's trying to be a goose. We don't know. Sometimes she screams at Jane and I when we have a hug.

It might mean she wants to be included. It could mean she's mortified at her parents' PDA, even at this young stage of her life.

These days, it's typically a loud babble, one word, ba, and a point at the table. Could mean she's thirsty.

she wants a drink. Might mean she wants to eat the candlestick. We don't know. Hard to tell. Hard to interpret. Sometimes, smooth transition, we could take a similar approach to God.

We think creator of heaven and earth, surrounded in mystery, all-powerful, totally immense. how on earth could we begin to guess at what he wants from us?

[18 : 44] In fact, perhaps all we can do is simply guess his will, his desire for our life. How often as Christians do we pray that? What is it you want from me, God? How should I live today, tomorrow?

We play this guessing game, not unlike I do, with our daughter, Lily. The good news is, though, that God has not only revealed who he is as creator and sustainer, but he's also revealed what he's like and the best way for his people to live.

And the revealed will of God, his words to his people, is named by David in different ways in verses 7 through to 11. He calls it the law. He calls it statutes, precepts, commands, decrees.

We can summarize all these words, really with the one word, word. It's God's word to his people in different ways and types. All of it, though, is God speaking his words to his people. God's will, then, is comprehensible because God has revealed to us who he is through his words, through the prophets for David then and through Christ for us now, ultimately.

And David, as God's chosen king, plainly treasures, doesn't he, what God says? That's the language he's used describing that so clearly. The very law David delights in, and this is good news for his readers, is the same law that David, as king, requires to know back to front.

[20 : 09] That's what Deuteronomy says. If you want a king, he's got to know this. Inside out, back to front, every day, his own copy. He's got to know the law of the Lord.

Why? So that he will live humbly and in reverence for God. And so David's description of God's law in these verses makes it clear that David is being God's good king, that he's doing just as God's king ought to do.

He's studying the scriptures. Just look at the way that David describes both the nature, firstly, of God's word, and secondly, the impact that it has. In terms of the law's nature, just cashed your eye down in those verses, how did he describe it?

He says it's perfect, it's trustworthy, it's right, radiant, pure, firm, more precious than gold, sweeter than honey. And these descriptions of something that is spoken to us are really quite remarkable and ought to pique our interest because what on earth could be comparable?

Not our current political discourse or parliamentary output, not the majority of what is posted on social media networks or in the news, not even the grand vision and value statements of our workplaces.

[21 : 21] Compared to the sweet and precious words of the Lord, all else is, as Jesus describes it, sinking sand. You want substance?

You want beauty? You want wisdom? You want something that's purer than gold? Well, come here, says David. Come to the word of the Lord.

And if that's its nature, well, the impact of the law as described by David is just as significant. Look again through those verses as you cast your eye down.

What does he say? He says, it brings refreshment. It brings wisdom. It brings joy and light. In verse 11, by listening to what God says and doing what he requires, that is, we are being told by David we are on the best path.

If we're doing those things, we're on the best path, we are warned, we're going the right way. And he also describes there being great reward, the delight of our heavenly father. And it's worth noting that how David describes the impact of the law is true many years later for the Lord Jesus Christ who obeyed, amplified, fulfilled the law.

[22 : 40] Not only that, but Jesus, just like David, says that joy, and that's an impact of the law there in verse 8, it's giving joy to the heart. That joy then comes from what?

Loving him and keeping his commandments. It's true for David. It's true for Christ. If you love me, says Jesus, obey my word.

Obey my commandments. You want to comprehend God's will? You want to know what he wants from you for this year ahead? You want to get wisdom? Well, says David, the law of the Lord is where you'll find it.

Wisdom, joy, light, refreshment, all here, all given to us to enjoy. And that really is the same thing that God wants from us year in, year out. This year, last year, next year.

The wonderful thing isn't it that there's not really much mystery about it. There's not lots of guesswork required because God's desires are revealed to us in his word. And it is his desire that we walk in his way by obeying his commands so that we too, like David, may know the sweetness of what God says.

[23 : 52] That we might know the richness of what God says. That's ordinary stuff digging into the word of God. But it does lead to spectacular growth.

And Andy said something about that too this morning, didn't he? Ordinary stuff, but leading to spectacular growth. Now, if you find that hard to sustain, I know I do.

I think I've read the first chapter of Matthew so many times over the Advent period because I kept forgetting where I'd got to. If you do find that hard to sustain, then, this is my second plug for the evening, then why not consider joining a growth group or Roots or the Women's Bible Study on a Monday?

Those are at least three ways where you can carve out the time in your week to come to God's word and to listen to what he's saying through it. It's better than nothing. It's much better than nothing.

And the people there are generally normal. So that's a bonus. So God creates and sustains. God speaks. And finally, God saves.

[24 : 59] And that's verses 12 to 14. Now, if you know your Bible, if you know your books of 1 and 2 Samuel, if you love 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, who doesn't gritty stuff, then you might be wondering, as I did, how can it be that David who wrote this psalm can at once describe the delight he has in the law of God and yet at the same time be the David who sees another man's wife bathing on the rooftop thinks, I want her, takes her, murders her husband and denies that he ever had anything to do with it.

How can that same David speak these words? Doesn't sound like the conduct of a man who says God's word is sweeter than honey, purer than gold, that it gives light to the eyes.

How can such a man king or not bear to approach or describe these things in front of an immensely powerful creator and sustainer God? How can he come before him with a heart like that?

How can I? How can any of us? Well, there are two principles that David gives us in the final verses of the psalm to help us with those questions.

And the first principle is this, David recognises that he is a man in need of God's help because of his sin. In verses 12 and 13, David acknowledges that he is in need of God's help because the law of God, which he has so beautifully described in the preceding verses, has done its work.

[26 : 51] It's revealed David's heart. And the diagnosis isn't good inside and out. Intentionally and otherwise, sin has sought to rule over David. That's the phrase that he uses.

Look at that again in verse 13. Keep your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me. Now there is an echo here. This could be a long shot, but bear with me.

There is an echo here, I think, of a similar ruling over incident that took place in Genesis chapter 4. You may remember two brothers, Cain and Abel. And Cain is jealous of Abel, murderously so.

And sin just bubbles up in his heart and it gnaws away at him again and again and again. And God speaks to Cain and he says, Cain, sin is crouching at your door.

And it wants to rule over you. Those are the words in the NIV. rule over you. He wants to have you. But you must overcome it. Cain lets sin rule and the consequences were devastating for his family, for God's people.

[28 : 10] But David, here in this psalm, indicates a better way, a wiser way. The same turn of phrase, but something different with it. He asks that God might keep him so that sin will not rule over him.

He heeds God's warnings and cries out for help. So that's principle one, recognizing that David recognizes that he needs the help of God. The second principle is this.

David recognizes that God is full of grace and mercy. in verse 12, he seeks forgiveness. He says, forgive my hidden faults.

In verse 13, he asks God that God would keep him so that he would be blameless and innocent of great transgression. Now, that David can make these requests of God demonstrates that he understands not only who God is, creator, sustainer, lawgiver, immensely powerful, completely holy, but also, verse 14, his Lord, his rock, his redeemer, a gracious God who can take even the broken heart of a sinful man like David and wash it clean, completely clean, so that even David can say, I am innocent of great transgression, that sin has no rule here, not anymore.

And so too for us, the principles are no different. We sing that all the time, not all the time, often here at St. Silas, I am the Lord and I do not change, or words to that effect.

[29 : 53] But that is true in the song and it is true in scripture too, isn't it? God does not change. Yesterday, today, forever, always the same, always the same. We too are in need of God's help as much at the start of the year as we were at the end of last year.

And we too, ultimately, because of the Lord Jesus, can seek his forgiveness and be declared blameless. The same God whose glory is revealed ceaselessly by the heavens is the one who redeems us each day and we do and we will fail, knowingly or otherwise, to keep the perfect law that David has described for us.

And nowhere do we see that grace and mercy more beautifully demonstrated than when the Lord Jesus, the glory of God, went to the cross to die.

No more clearly can we see it more visibly now in many ways than in the meal we're going to share together tonight as God's family.

A broken body, blood poured out, bread and wine, so that we, like David, if we trust in Jesus, can say, I am innocent.

[31 : 11] I am innocent of great transgression. And maybe more than anything else tonight, we need to hear that. As we start this new year, we are in the world of grace.

We always have been and we always will be that Jesus is our redeemer and rock and Lord last year and this year. And that like David, because of him, tonight, tomorrow, we can say we are innocent of great transgression and that sin has no rule here.

So there we are, three things at the start of the year. God creates and sustains, God speaks and God saves. A God full of mercy and grace who forgives time and again so that we might enjoy his rule rather than that of sin.

And the end of the psalm, David's end of the psalm and it's our end this evening could not be more appropriate I don't think for us at the start of the year. Maybe these are words that we can commit even just this week before we forget to do it the week after.

Maybe these are words that we can pray for ourselves each day in the week ahead. It's a very ordinary prayer. It's a picture of everyday discipleship.

[32 : 34] David is saying, in light of what I've said, Lord, in light of what we have learned tonight, Lord, may we please you today because we need your help. Lord, may we remember you today and who you are because we are forgetful.

And that is the way of wisdom and light and joy and it's the way of a life that is built on the rock and the redeemer.

I'm going to pray for us and then we're going to sing. Lord Jesus, thank you that the heavens each day, day in, day out, declare your glory and that the skies proclaim the work of your hands.

That day after day they pour forth speech and night after night they reveal knowledge. Lord Jesus, thank you that your law is perfect and refreshing, that your statutes are trustworthy and they bring wisdom.

Thank you that your precepts are right and they give joy to the heart and that your commands are radiant and give light to the eyes. Thank you, Father, that we, sinful people, can come before you and ask with David that you might forgive us and that you might keep us, Lord, from sins, willful and otherwise, that we might ask you boldly that sin would not rule over us, not tonight, not in the week ahead, so that we might be blameless and innocent of great transgression.

[34 : 21] Lord Jesus, may these words of our mouths and our meditations and our hearts be pleasing in your sights our Lord, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.