

Better Than Gold. Sweeter Than Honey

Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.

Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;

the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;

the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;

the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;

the rules of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can discern his errors?
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!

Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

The New Year can be both a blessing and a drag to many of us. We can use the flip of the calendar to put some things behind us or to renew something that has been lacking in our lives. Or it can be a reminder that time keeps on rolling by and nothing really changes. Same old problems. Same old struggles. Same old me.

Last week Steve preached a sermon that called us to take our eyes off of our self-made resolutions and instead look to Jesus and by doing so realize that in Jesus we already have life and security and hope and peace.

But, if you're anything like me, you live in a world of distractions and competing interests. Here is just a subset of my list: work, marriage, family, staying active, serving at church, dogs, social media and getting older. You can add or delete from these to match your own experience. The point is this: both internal and external forces are continually striving to keep you and me from doing what Steve put in front of us last week.

So, how is it going? Really, how's it going? Are we actually putting away the rules and the regulations. Are we truly submitting ourselves to the wonder and authority of Jesus? Are we honestly finding all of our satisfaction in Christ? Since we're in church, can we be honest with each other for a moment? I'm not doing so well at this and I'm guessing you're not either.

What's the way forward? How would God, by his Spirit, seek to move us away from the distractions and the self-made rules and the striving that puts us at the center of everything? Are there one or two things we can turn to that will help us both look to Jesus more often and to find our satisfaction in him more fully? My answer: definitely yes!

Those two things? They are the word of God and prayer. The word of God because there is no truth that ultimately doesn't trace back to the word of God. Said conversely, if something doesn't ultimately tie back to the word it is not true. And prayer because it is our direct line of communication with God, our Father, our Savior and our Advocate. Without God's word, we can't know him. Without prayer we can't love him or serve him.

Back on Nov 24, Dan preached a sermon on prayer titled "In the name of Jesus". This was a helpful primer on prayer, especially on the aspect of prayer called supplication or asking God for what we need. So today I want to spend the remainder of our time considering God's word and why diving into it will be important in 2020.

Psalms 19 is a wonderful passage that highlights the beauty of God's word, the power of God's word, the impact of God's word and the call of God's word. While no passage is sufficient to encompass the entirety of God's word, Psalm 19 may be the closest to providing a comprehensive summary.

As we consider God's word and the need we have to not only know about it but to own it and be exposed to its call in our lives, I would like to divide this psalm into 4 sections. First, in verses 1-6, is the setting or the overview. The psalmist is setting our minds on things above. Next, in verses 7-11, we are shown the power God's word has on us and on the world around us. As the author of Hebrews would say: "It is living and active". After this, in verses 12-13, we have the impact of God's word. This is the "so what" of the passage, why does this really matter. Finally, in verse 14, we have the "what's next". What should we do with what we've been given. What is God calling us to do with his word?

Before we dive in, let's talk about Biblical genres for a moment. Knowing which genre of literature we are reading is crucial to understanding what the author is saying and how he is expressing himself. God uses various genres to convey the same information in different ways in order to get the points to sink into our heads and our hearts. The letters in the New Testament are different than the historical narratives in the Old, which are slightly different than the gospels which are different than prophecy which are different than poetry. They all speak the truth, they just do it in different ways.

Let me give you a Non biblical example from my own life. Over the last decade there are two series of video productions that I've watched and come to enjoy and respect. Each of them convey both the necessity and the horrors of war. Each discuss the politics and poor decisions that can lead to deadly conflict. Each show that heroism can exist right alongside cowardice and that redemption is available right to end. One is a documentary series by Ken Burns on the Civil War. The other is the movie trilogy the Lord of the Rings. Two different genres, interpreted two different ways but both teaching a very similar lesson.

The psalms are poetry. How we read them and understand them is different than Romans or John. Their language is often expansive, colorful and pictorial. Statements can be made in first person or third person, even shifting within the psalm. Objects themselves can be personified. Metaphors abound. God is often addressed directly and sometimes in unfiltered and direct language.

Let's take a look at the first 6 verses of Psalm 19. Notice the imagery. The heavens, the sky, day, night, all the earth, the ends of the world, the circuit of the sun, the ends of the heavens. What pops into your head as you hear these words? Expansive? Unlimited? Majestic? Glorious? I'm confident there are other adjectives (the beauty and power of poetry). My mind goes to the night sky viewed from the Grand Canyon. Boundless, Limitless. The point is that David, as the author of this particular psalm, is really setting the stage for the power and beauty and majesty of the word of God.

Think of it this way, David is sitting at the center of a circle and is looking out toward the edge. The heavens, day and night, the sky, the sun, everything emanates from the center. He is taking us from what we can see with our eyes and feel with our other senses to what we can only know and sense through revelation.

There are two ideas, two seeds that God plants here that carry forward into the rest of the psalm and also into how we view all of God's word. First, look at verses 2-3. Day and night, everything is speaking the truth of God. Nothing is hidden. God's voice is clearly heard. If this sounds familiar take a look at Romans 1:20 **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.**

But David is also setting the stage for sufficiency of God's word. God has expressed himself. He has not held anything back. Is God's word big? Yes. Is it majestic? Yes. Is it complete? Yes. But is it hidden? Not even close. Foolish to some? Maybe? But not hidden.

Along with this is the comprehensive nature of God's word. As David used language like the ends of the earth and the ends of the heavens and nothing being hidden, he is reminding us and reassuring us that there is no additional truth. There is no second book. Everything we know and believe to be true, ultimately comes from God. And if it is from God, it will align with and derive from his word.

Broad, general truths are great and helpful in many respects, but specifics are also good. Why is God's word better than reading Shakespeare or the U.S. Constitution? Why should we know more of what the Bible says than what C.S. Lewis says or what John Piper says?

The next 5 verses (7-11) give us insights into answering these questions. The author's approach here is interesting. In true poetic fashion, David pairs unique descriptors of God's word with the powerful effects the truth has on our lives.

Listen first to the descriptors:

- The law of the Lord is perfect,
- the testimony of the Lord is sure,
- the precepts of the Lord are right,
- the commandment of the Lord is pure,
- the fear of the Lord is clean,
- the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

We could pick each one of these elements apart and I've heard sermons on just these few verses. But today I would ask you close your eyes and ask the Spirit to help you know that:

- The law of the Lord is perfect,
- the testimony of the Lord is sure,
- the precepts of the Lord are right,
- the commandment of the Lord is pure,
- the fear of the Lord is clean,
- the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

You see until we are convinced that these things are true of the word of God, we will approach it like any other book. A really good and important book. Maybe the best book. No, the Bible is more than that. It is God's self disclosure to his children. And, as Jesus would say in John 5:39 **You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,**

Ask yourself, why is it important that God's word is perfect? What good would it be if it had flaws? Why is it necessary that what the word teaches is right? How could we align our lives if it allowed for sin? Why must it reveal what is pure? Is there any other way to measure ourselves to know if meet God's holy standard and see our need for a savior?

But this is only half the impact of these verses. Now listen to the effects of God's word:

- It revives the soul;
- It makes wise the simple;
- It rejoices the heart;
- It enlightenes the eyes;
- It endures forever;
- It is more desirable than gold,
- It is sweeter than honey
- by them is your servant warned;
- in keeping them there is great reward.

Consider your own walk with Christ. Whether you've been at it 2 weeks, 2 years or 2 decades, don't we yearn for these impacts in our lives? Who among us doesn't long for their soul to be revived? Which of you would turn down more wisdom or joy? Don't we all pray that we want to see Jesus more clearly and know God's will more fully?

Even though we desire these things, we seem to come up short don't we? Why is that? Perhaps we've forgotten the significance of God's word. Perhaps we've relegated the Bible and all it contains to one option among many or it has become our alternative of last resort.

Instead, I would ask us each to consider the breadth and depth of what God is saying about his word. It is his word that "wakes us up". It is his word that gives us wisdom. It is his word that gives us joy. Think of the deepest ache in your heart. What God is saying right here, right now is that the answer you seek is in his word.

How can I say that? First because God says it. Right here and throughout the rest of the Bible. I already mentioned Jn 5:39, but there's also Lk 24:25-32, Heb 4:12 and 2 Tim 3:16-17.

But I also know this though experience. Early on in my walk with Christ I was challenged to read through the Bible in a year. Admittedly, I started with some legalism in my heart and I had to deal with some self righteousness along the way. But about 3/4 of the way through the year, I came to 2 Corinthians and I was struck by a verse I had never fully grasped before. 2 Corinthians 1:20 **"For all the promises of God find their Yes in Christ. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory."** Which promises? All promises? All anchored and guaranteed by Christ? Everything terminates on Jesus? It was that verse, at that moment when the Spirit convinced me God's word is better than gold and it is sweeter than honey.

I think it's interesting (and helpful) that David doesn't just leave us with ideas. Don't get me wrong, ideas are good and necessary. But, at the end of the day, most of us are pragmatists. More often than not, we will ask the question: So what? And rightly so. God's word should prepare us both for heaven and for tomorrow. Jesus calls us to love both God and our neighbor.

With that said, what are the “take aways” God has for us here? First consider v11: By God’s word your servant is warned. Initially when I read this, I thought “that’s not what I would have lead with” But when we take in the breadth of Bible, both Old and New Testaments, what is the inevitable trajectory of the human heart? Down and away from God. Heb 2:1 sums it up: **“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”** What we need, as we look to Christ, is the truth of Jeremiah 17:9 **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”**

You see, we all need the protection and guidance and wisdom that only the word of God can provide. It is like the road signs telling us to reduce our speed before we get to the curve in the road. And it is like the notice at a trailhead that a bridge is out. God is for us and his warnings are for our good.

But there is also encouragement. If your heart is deceitful, how do you know if you’ve plumbed the depth of your sin? Have you confessed everything to Jesus? The encouragement from v12 is our strong reminder we have been declared not guilty, as we lean fully on the forgiveness that only Christ can provide. Do I have sins beneath my sins that I’m unaware of? Absolutely. But I’m here today to say Jesus paid it all. Every sin, whether I’m conscious of it or not, has been paid for by the blood of Christ. And that will be true tomorrow and throughout 2020 and beyond.

And then there is holiness. Jesus takes us as we are. It is ok to not be ok. But he graciously takes from where we are to where we need to be. The Holy Spirit, as Dan mentioned in John 16, convicts us of our sin. For confession? Yes, but also to put them away. To kill them. To become more innocent and blameless. To live more and more like Jesus. Paul would say it this way in Philippians 3:12-14 **“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”**

There it is, a brief defense of the power and importance of God’s word. And if we are not careful, we will simply leave here with a little more information. But verse 14 calls us to something deeper. How can the words of our mouth and the meditations of heart be pleasing in God’s sight if we don’t open his book? How will any of us grow in our relationship with Jesus if we don’t know who he is, what he said or what he promised? If we want the Spirit to be active in our lives, why would we close ourselves to his main source of wisdom and guidance and conviction?

Here’s my humble request of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. Would you join me in regularly reading the Bible throughout the year? This is not a legalistic appeal. There will be no brownie points. But there is a promise. Isa 55:11 shows that as God’s word goes out it accomplishes exactly what God intends for it.

How do we start? Honestly there is a multitude of ways. Here at LEFC we will have a 2020 reading plan on our website very soon. If you read Our Daily Bread, they also have a reading plan as does The Gospel Coalition. Most Bible apps have a variety of plans. The bottom-line is this: pick one and prayerfully dive in. And, as a dear, long-time brother in Christ once told me: it really doesn’t matter why you open the Bible, just don’t close it until God speaks his truth to you. Even one chapter a day, with prayerful mediation will yield tremendous fruit in our lives

All of this leads us back to verse 14. In 15 minutes or so we will all walk out of here. And while I hope that you remember every nuance of this sermon, I know that you won’t. And while I’m trusting the Spirit to anchor most, if not all of Psalm 19 in your hearts and minds, I know some of us need a sound bite to bring the rest of the truth of the psalm back to us.

That is the beauty of the prayer in verse 14. It is an invitation, a declaration and a cry of desperation. It’s an invitation for God to take, not just the preceding 13 verses, but really all of his word, and sink it deep into our souls. It’s a declaration that we will proclaim the truth of God and meditate on it to the point it becomes part of our identity. It’s a cry of desperation because we can’t do any of this on our own. Only God can make the words of our mouths and the meditations of our heart pleasing in his sight. And securing it all is Jesus, our rock and our redeemer.

2020 is here. God's is inviting us into his word. Will we heed the call?

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.