

Psalms 19

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Date: 15 February 2015

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[0 : 00] In 2008, Nigel Tom convinced a publisher to print his novel, which stretched for 23 volumes. Now you imagine somebody that's written a novel at such length, obviously he's got a lot to say, there'll be insights to offer, you'd expect, wouldn't you, good character development, and a well-developed plot with surprises and tragedy along the way.

And if that is your assumption, then you've never obviously come across Nigel Tom. His novel was indeed a work of great ambition, but the ambition was to write an 11.3 million word story without actually saying anything at all.

Tom called his novel the Blah Story. And you'll understand why as I read this short excerpt from volume 16. As no one was Blah, any Blah to Blah, and no one Blah needed Blah, Blah quietly Blah Blah away to where the little Blah were.

And again, Blah, great Blah and Blah, when they saw the little old Blah press Blah to Blah something and Blah agreed. 23 volumes of that. I could go on, couldn't I? But you've got the gist of it.

The publisher was hoping to get people to buy the book. So here's how the publisher marketed the Blah story. Overwhelmingly creative Nigel Tom demolishes the barrier of words and meaning, giving vitality and expressive strength to the pattern of his most exclusive novel, the Blah story.

[1 : 31] It's a new way of conceiving text that frees the imagination, allowing you to personalise each and every word by your own creativity.

Well that is one way of putting it, isn't it? But apparently the publishers didn't get the payoff, as readers didn't seem very excited about having to write the whole story for themselves, and as a result, all 23 volumes are out of print.

And Nigel Tom is not the only person in recent years to poke fun that words and speech have meaning. Entire world rings claim that words are not much more than a game.

And you and I, we simply invest every word that we read or hear with whatever meaning we desire. So that it's really a matter of, well, blah, blah, blah.

And we fill in the Blahs with, well, whatever we prefer. But categorically that is not how the Bible approaches words and language.

[2 : 31] From the opening chapter of the Bible, words are hugely important to God. The God who made the universe, who spoke the universe into being.

The God who by his word created all things. If you look through the Bible, you see the book of Isaiah, and God contrasts himself with the false gods and the idols, in part by the fact that he can speak and they cannot.

The God of the Bible sets himself apart as utterly unique, utterly worthy of our worship. And one of the most important reasons the Bible gives you to worship God, is because he is there and he is not silent.

He speaks. Now as we've looked back on this series of worship, you've probably not remembered.

But we've looked at the things of why we do what we do. Why do we have a call to worship?

Why do we read the scriptures? Why do we confess our sins? But one of the things that we begin to realise together, is that when we come to worship, it's not really the things that we do, but what God is doing in us.

[3 : 34] That as we gather to worship Sunday by Sunday, he is shaping us by these habits. He's moulding what we love. He's crafting our identity as we weekly reenact the gospel together.

And this week we're thinking of the reading of scripture and the sermon, and how in gathered worship, God speaks to us through his words. And what I hope we'll see is that there is something distinct about the preaching of God's word.

And that this preaching is not merely the preacher's talk about God, that it is God's talk. The kind of talk that produces transformed people.

Preaching is not merely the preacher's talk about God, but it is God's talk. The kind of talk that produces transformed people.

And what I mean by that is preaching is not merely a lecture of instruction, where you come and you kind of download the information from me, where you take notes from my notes over what I've studied.

[4 : 40] Rather, preaching is a redemptive act, by which God convicts our hearts, and renews our minds, and strengthens our wills. And to do that I want to look at Psalm 19.

So verses 1 to 4, can you see the wordless revelation of God? The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims its handiwork. Day to day he pours out speech, and night to night he reveals knowledge.

There's 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. God has revealed to himself in creation.

You know that. You stand on the mountaintop, and you look out at the vista, and you say, surely there is a God. You see the roaring waves of the seaside.

You breathe in the sea air. You look at the sky. You say, surely there is a creator. You drive along the M4. You come around the corner by Port Talbot. And you see that wonderful view of Swansea Bay, and you say, surely there is a God.

[5 : 47] That is how God has created this world. This world is a revelation of his glory. And the creation is beautiful, precisely because a creator is beautiful.

What he makes reflects how he is. And the psalmist draws our attention to this revelation of God in creation.

The splendour of the sun. And the heavens. But he points out that God reveals himself in creation without words. The creation pulls forth speech, but he uses no words.

And the eloquence of that silent creation is staggering. It is an amazing creation that he has given, which reflects back on him. And yet this silent creation leaves us with so many unanswered questions, doesn't it?

Who exactly is the God who made this wonderful world? Well, he's obviously powerful, isn't he? But how are you to relate to him? If all you had was nature to discern who this God is, well, somebody looking at a bubbling brook in an idyllic mountainside would have a very different view of God, wouldn't they, than somebody clinging to a raft in the middle of a tsunami.

[7 : 06] So the wordless revelation of God, it declares his glory, but it's short on specifics, isn't it, of who God is. So David says to you and I, look at the marvel of creation, get out this afternoon and have a walk.

Isn't the sun in the sky splendid in February? Look how they reveal the glory of God. And then he says to you and I, you ain't seen nothing yet.

There is a greater, and there is a fuller, and there is a more glorious revelation that God has given us in creation, and it is the one he has given to us in words. So look at verses 7 to 9, and you see the written revelation of God.

The written revelation of God. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is true, making wise and 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. So you see, he quickly moves from describing God's world to God's words.

[8 : 14] And as he does, I don't know if you notice, he actually changes how he refers to God. Can you see that? The psalmist uses all these nouns to describe God's written revelation.

Laws, statutes, precepts, and so forth. But notice, who do they all belong to? Who do they all belong to? They are all of the Lord, aren't they? The Lord, the Lord, the Lord.

But look back to verses 1 to 6. And God is referred to in verses 1 to 6 simply as God. But in verse 7, there is a change.

He is now referred to as the Lord. The covenant, the promise-keeping name of God. The name by which he's revealed himself. The I am who I am.

That he spoke to Moses at the burning bush. I am Yahweh. I am the Lord of the covenant. I am the Lord who is keeping his people in a relationship with himself.

[9 : 11] And if you are going to go into a relationship with someone, you are pretty much committing to speak with that someone, aren't you? One of the signs of a relationship that has gone wrong is when people don't talk.

But in our relationship with God, God talks. I mean, it's exactly what God has done. Creation reveals that there is this God of glory, but the word is spoken by the Lord God who calls us into a relationship.

That covenantally binding relationship that we rejoice and celebrate in at the Lord's Supper. And God says, I am going to speak to you. I'm going to reveal myself to you in words.

The written revelation of God. Run your rights now. Through the nouns. Look at the nouns. How is God's word described? God's written revelation.

The law. Statutes. Precepts. Commandments. Fear of the Lord. Which is really more of an effect or a product of the word than a description of the word itself.

[10 : 13] And decrees. But together, the nouns show you the practical purpose of God's revelation. That God desires His will to bear on our lives so that we would respond to Him with reverence and with trust and obedience.

Look at the adjectives. Look at the descriptions of God's word. Look at the descriptions of the Bible. Look what it says. Look at verse 19. It's perfect. It's trustworthy.

It's right. It's radiant. It's pure. It's firm. It's perfect. We're talking about this book.

If people come and see little Phoebe afterwards and say, what's she like? You say, ah, she's just perfect. Well, she's not. No baby is, is it? No baby is. For any terms about the Bible, it's not saying, oh, it's adorable and really cute.

It is perfect. It's without blemish. It is without error. It is the inerrant. It is the infallible word of God. It is trustworthy and right and radiant and pure.

[11 : 24] And then look what the psalmist tells us that the Bible does. What does it do? It refreshes the soul. It revives the soul. It makes it simple. Wise. It gives joy to the heart and it gives light to the eyes. And so on.

And many of us, we read this and we say, really? The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. And you might think, surely the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, he says that the law brings wrath, that the law brings death.

The letter kills. How can the law revive my soul? Well, thankfully C.S. Lewis struggled with this same problem. And here's what he writes. He says, this description was to me at first very mysterious.

Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery. I can understand that a man can and must respect these thatchets and try to obey them, but it is very hard to find out how they could be so to speak delicious.

How could they exhilarate? Surely it would be more apt to compare it to the dentist's forceps or the front line into anything enjoyable and sweet. And yet Lewis concludes like this.

[12 : 32] He says, this language is not scrupulosity, it is the language of a man ravished by a moral beauty. And if we cannot all share his experience, we shall be the losers.

Here's what Lewis realised, that the psalmist, he could see the stunning beauty of creation and how it reveals the beauty of the creator. But creation cannot come anywhere close to the word in revealing the beauty and the glory of the Lord.

That God has written his word, God has written his word, he has told us truths that you would never guess in a million years from just looking at creation. So when the psalmist says that the law revives, he's referring to the law as a wonderfully comprehensive term.

He's meaning everything that God wants us to know by himself. And he says you and I, we are spiritual corpses without this word.

The word revives. The word resuscitates. It restores us. It gives us joy. It gives us light. There is nothing like it. And that is why the psalmist can see that astounding verse 10.

[13 : 45] Do you notice? Can you see it? Just look down with me. He says this. He says, if I had a choice between the word of God and gold, the psalmist says I'd choose the word of God.

If I had a choice between the word of God and much gold, I'd choose the word of God. But if I had a choice between the word of God and much fine gold, do you know what?

I'd choose the word of God. How can the psalmist make such an incredible statement how can he say this word revives his soul that it brings joy to his heart because in the word the psalmist knows

that he encounters the Lord of the word now those of you who might have been paying attention you might be thinking Paul is speaking about the word in general about the Bible in general yes what the psalmist says applies to preaching but wouldn't it also apply to the word in house groups one to ones quiet times Bible reading why I like preaching than those other encounters with the word it's a good question there's a huge amount of applies to those other ways we study God's word we want a highly value don't we Bible study and Bible reading and studying the scripture but I want to say to you that preaching on a Sunday sets the pace preaching on a Sunday sets the pace that how the preacher handles the Bible has a huge effect on the congregation it has a huge effect on how the congregation will handle the Bible during the week

Alistair Berg writes speaking of America but it applies equally to this city to this borough he says this the expositor of scripture in this country has been eclipsed by pastors who see themselves more as cheerleaders storytellers entertainers and psychologists that instead of bringing us into an encounter with the living God through his word sermons have become little more than a weekly chicken soup for the soul pep talks to rally the masses or guilt inducing talks to make people try harder and do more so what does it look like?

what does it look like for you and I to keep our confidence in God's word Sunday by Sunday in the preaching of the word it means this it means that preaching is not merely the preacher's talk about God it is God's talk and that is the kind of talk which leads to transformed lives but this talk is not just to give you information on a Sunday morning this is not a download of information that as you come with the people of God to worship the living God to hear if I can use the word that the pastoral epistles the man of God preach the living God you encounter God so that you are brought to renewed repentance and renewed faith and so here in Psalm 19 the psalmist isn't just receiving information about God's law you can read a book about that if you want it he is encountering the Lord of the word and he is brought to response thirdly first of all a warning that leads to repentance in his life look at the warning that leads to repentance in life look at the verses of the land of 13 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 number one keep me back keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins number two let them not have dominion over me then I will be blameless and innocent of great transgression number three one of the reasons that God has given you the Bible is as a warning against sin and one of the benefits of sitting in a place like this on a Sunday morning though you may not feel like it you might not feel like it's a benefit at the time is that God has you here doesn't he as a captive audience

[18:04] I am not here on your iPad where you can hit pause or stop or dare I say even delete for most of you now you are receiving the word of God from someone who knows you relatively well and certainly someone who knows you far better than the preachers that you might listen to on the internet during the week you also right now do not have the freedom that you might be flicking through your Bible you don't have the same freedom as you do at home to think I don't really like this passage and I'm going to flick to something else that isn't as convicting and you're also listening to a message in the company of Christian brothers and sisters the covenant community you are listening to the same message thinking about the same message and they are brothers and sisters to whom you are accountable to as church families and when you factor in all those things it has to affect the way that we receive this word in this encounter with God it never ceases to amaze me how the spirit works through the preached word regardless of the preacher and so it is not uncommon for people to say to me after the service or during the week were you following me this week or were you watching through my window that's not an accusation that I'm stalking but it means that the sermon spoke directly into my life that was for me this morning

I know that that was for me it was as if that written sermon it was just for me and then there are those weeks aren't there where more than one person says that well how can one sermon just be written for you and for another person as well because it is not just a talk about God it is God talking and as God talks to you and to me through his word one of the things he's doing is he's warning us for our benefit and someone says to you there are countless churches in this country there are countless churches in this city that never warn anyone of anything they never warn they never get under the skin they never they never get you where it hurts but the preaching of the gospel will always warn notice the progression in verses 12 and 13 it's not so clear in the ESV but verse 12 talks about hidden faults doesn't it and then it talks about verse 13 presumptuous sins that should be willful sins and then at the end of verse 13 it talks about the great transgression and what he's

doing here is there's a progression the Lord has given us his word like a firewall you know a firewall keeps the viruses away a firewall in our lives to protect us against those types of sins so there's hidden sins in our lives that other people can see but you and I actually can't see them clearly in ourselves and if they are left unchecked do you know what happens to those hidden sins well they can become willful presumptuous sins sins that we know that we are doing and there are some of us here today and we are engaging in willful sins right now

I'm guessing that from the amount of people that are here and we know it's wrong and we know it's displeasing to God and so you are receiving a warning from God to repent and here the reason the psalmist gives for his need of repentance is if willful sins are left unchecked it leads to transgression and transgression is simply a reference to the sin of unbelief which will bring ultimate judgment and so the psalmist prays doesn't he please forgive me and protect me through your words that he's encountering the Lord and his word and he finds a warning that leads him to repentance that will lead him to life so the word is a warning but secondly David encounters the word and he finds good news good news that produces transformation in his life look at verse 14 that the words of my mouth and the malation of my heart be acceptable in your sight

O Lord my rock and my redeemer that something has brought the psalmist to a point where he longs for nothing more in his life than that his life would be utterly pleasing to God that is his highest goal what has brought him to that point well it's that he's realised again hasn't he that God has revealed himself to be his rock and his redeemer that he is the one who is 100% dependable he is the one who is trustworthy he is the one who is solid no matter what is going on in his life God is the rock but he also says God is my redeemer and that one word puts the whole of the psalm into context doesn't it because in one word that one word redeemer David reminds us that at the heart of the scriptures at the heart of the word of God is not a command to do it's not a command that you would somehow earn

God's approval and salvation but it is gospel it says done redemption a redeemer the word of God the psalmist is saying is ultimately good news and so when Moses received the law of God the precepts and the statutes it came not it came after isn't it not only after God revealed himself as Yahweh to Moses at the burning bush but after he'd redeemed his people from Israel I am the Lord your God who brought you up from out of Egypt and that is the defining moment for the people of Israel from that point on in the history of the Old Testament as we've seen countless times before that redemption where they are brought out of Egypt is a picture of the redemption that is to be found of the one in the line of David the Lord Jesus Christ who came into this world as glorious as the law and the testimony and the precepts and the commandments and the statutes are you and I have kept them and you and I by nature at heart are rebellious with souls that need to be revived because we've disobeyed the laws and the statutes because the apostle says we are dead in our sins and we need a redeemer so in the written word we are told that the living word became flesh and he kept the law for us and he was obedient to the law in our place and he died in our place for all our transgressions of the law all the broken precepts and the statutes and the forgiveness that Jesus speaks of in this psalm can be yours and mine it is in this gospel of Jesus Christ performed from the beginning to the end of scripture our redeemer that you and I find a beauty that far surpasses anything that you can find in creation because it is the beauty of a God who loves us in spite of who we are and what we've done and beauty of his life is love that he gave up his life and suffered hell so that you and I do not have to and I'm sorry that people say to me well actually [25 : 44] I play golf on a Sunday or I go out for a walk on a Sunday or I go sailing on a Sunday that's where I meet God there but they will not hear the warning will they they will not hear the warning and they will not hear the good news that will transform them and the psalmist says the glory of the gospel is more desirable than gold if you understand it's sweeter than honey which is why you and I need to keep our nerve and hold on to our confidence in this word Sunday by Sunday and if I ever get off it you need to fire me you really do and if that's not to convince you of the importance of preaching in your life get this wake up if you're asleep wake up so a few weeks ago we saw that Jesus was the singing saviour do you remember that?

that when we gather to sing and you sit there like standing like wet fish Jesus is singing transforms our singing he's a singing saviour but that isn't his only role is it in gathered worship so in Ephesians 3 he's writing about the implications of the gospel he says in Ephesians 3 we have a redeemer he describes that Jesus is our peace and that he's made peace between us and God by dying for our sins and he now enables Christians from all different backgrounds whatever their difference is

we've been reconciled by the cross and here's what Paul says Jesus did next Ephesians 2 verse 17 he came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near but the question you've got to ask in Ephesians 2 verse 17 is when did Jesus ever preach in Ephesus Jesus never went to Ephesus Jesus never been to Ephesus so when did

Jesus ever preach peace in Ephesus there's nothing in the gospels or the book of Acts so when did he preach peace to the Ephesians he did it every time someone proclaimed the gospel every time somebody proclaims the gospel Jesus Christ is preaching so Jesus does it every time somebody preaches the gospel at IPC Ealing or in Bangkok or in Sydney or in Istanbul or wherever you are because Jesus is not only the singing saviour he is the preaching saviour proclaiming through his messages the good news of salvation through his death and resurrection preaching is not just the preacher's talk about God it is God's talk and we learn here it is Jesus talk and that brings transformation let me give you two implications first of all this transformation happens in your life and my life it happens best not through a random series of sermon fixes but a regular diet of feasting on God's word

Sunday by Sunday so when the sermon feels like it's done absolutely nothing for you and maybe today is one of those days and there will be those days it leaves you totally flat and you think oh I'm fed up in this I'm full stuff by next week a bit more lively I'm not getting much out of the preaching you see just because you don't feel anything right now it does not mean that God is not at work in your life through the preaching of the word I've always appreciated and the letter of a faithful church member he wrote to the editor of a newspaper and he complained that it no longer made any sense to him to go to church every Sunday he wrote this dear sir I've gone to church for 30 years now and in that time I've heard something like 3,000 sermons but for the life of me I can't remember a single one of them so I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs and it went on for several weeks until somebody wrote this

I'd been married for 30 years and in that time my wife has cooked 32,000 meals but for the life of me I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals but I do know this it all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work if my wife hadn't given me those meals I would be physically dead today likewise if I had not gone to church for nourishment I would be spiritually dead today can you remember what you ate last Wednesday I can't but I know I did it did me good kept me going can I remember the sermon from last Sunday no but it did me good kept me going transformation happens in your life not through a random series of sermon fixes but through regular weekly diet of feasting and God's word together and lastly please please please concentrate on the message and not the messenger and every time you and I listen to a sermon we need to have an attitude of humbly sitting under the word but that's not what most of us do is it we actually tend to sit in judgment on the preacher so we'll judge the sermon we'll talk about the sermon afterwards not on the message whether the preacher went on too long or too short whether he was too serious or too jokey whether he was eloquent or his speech was stumbling and I confess that those of us who are preachers we are the worst at this so I go on holiday and I listen to other preachers we are the worst at critiquing others on introductions or illustrations did they understand the text correctly so this is as much to me as it is to you we need to concentrate on the message and not the messenger don't look first at the source but ask is the message true some of you will recall in the Old

[32 : 04] Testament there is the account of a prophet called Balaam and Balaam was going on a journey and God intends to confront him and Balaam is on a journey he's riding on an ass or a donkey and God speaks to him through an ass and he prophesies to him through a donkey do you see the application he may have an ass before you but asses prophesy and so it might be still God's word so the question every Sunday is not is he an ass but is he right and whatever you think of the preacher the thought in your mind should not be about the messenger but about the message how does God intend to shape me differently because of what I've heard even if it's just one thing and this is a confession of every preacher in the world we are all to one degree or another asses we are anything but perfect we are sinners like you we struggle exactly in the same ways that you do but the reason that I stand here

Sunday by Sunday I plan to for the rest of my life is because the law of the Lord is perfect and it revives souls and it gives sheer joy and it brings light and it is more precious than gold than much fine gold and it is sweeter than honey than honey from the honeycomb and so friends will you taste it will you taste it and see how good the Lord is let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray