

The Way into the Human Heart

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[0 : 00] Well, good afternoon, friends. Good afternoon, and a very warm welcome to our Wednesday Bible talk. Very good to see you all here. I think some of you have been enjoying a sandwich. Others have not, but there are plenty of sandwiches left, so do stay at the end if you would like to enjoy some lunch.

Hot drinks and so on will be served as well. Well, let us together bow our heads for some moments of prayer. Indeed, we've been praying already to the Lord, asking that the music of his name might even refresh our souls in our final hours.

Refresh my soul in death. And dear God, our Father, we thank you for John Newton, the writer of these fine words. And we thank you for the way in which he was wonderfully rescued and was able to bear testimony through his long life.

Testimony to the way that you had saved him, him that he described as a wretch. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. And we think of his long ministry in the countryside in Bedfordshire and then in London for many years and the influence that he had through his hymns and his preaching and his personal counsel and friendship with many. We thank you so much for him and we thank you for so many others like him who have helped the church over the years. We thank you particularly, dear Father, for those Christian men and women who have helped us most in the course of our own lives.

[1 : 37] Pastors and preachers and Christian friends. People well known, people hardly known. People who have loved you and have cared for us. And have helped us to walk more faithfully and truly in your ways.

And we ask, dear Father, that you will help us also in our turn to be a help to others. That you'll give us words of comfort and truth to pass on to our friends and our family members and young ones. Use us, we pray, as you have used men like John Newton in the past. And we ask that as we approach your word this afternoon, it may indeed be a great refreshment to us, building us up and helping us to love you with more confidence and to be more and more determined to serve you. And we ask these things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, let's take our Bibles and turn to Psalm 19.

We're continuing in this little series on the songs of David, some of the early Psalms. And today we have Psalm 19. I've given it the title, The Way into the Human Heart.

[2 : 55] And you'll find this on page 456 in our hardback Bible. 456. 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 measuring line 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.

[4 : 09] 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.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us today. The Bible reader, which of course means every Christian, has to learn to be a kind of detective.

[5 : 21] I sometimes say to our Cornhill Training Corps students who are studying to be Bible preachers and teachers, you must learn to be a Hercule Poirot or a Sherlock Holmes.

When you're reading the Bible, you're following clues. You're tracing something out. You're trying to make sense out of what you're looking at, and therefore you have to be a detective.

Now, I don't mean that the Bible is incomprehensible or that it's written in some kind of code that has to be deciphered. What I mean is that we have to learn to follow the train of thought of the human writers of Scripture, whether we're reading Moses or David or the Apostle Paul or one of the evangelists.

After all, we can find it quite hard to follow the train of thought even of people that we know really well. Isn't that true? I think of the conversations I have with my wife.

Hardly a day passes without my saying to her, Sweetheart, when you said that, did you mean this or did you mean that? Now, I know her very well and she knows me very well, but often I find it hard to follow her train of thought.

[6 : 31] Now, if we're like that with our nearest and dearest, it's not surprising if we don't always follow the train of thought of somebody who is writing in a different language and a totally different culture two or three thousand years ago.

So with that in mind, let's turn to Psalm 19. It is one of the best known psalms in the book. But my question is, how does it all connect up? What line of thinking holds it all together?

So like Monsieur Poirot, let's get out our magnifying glasses and we'll try to follow the clues. Now, you'll see it set out in three clear sections. First of all, we have verses one to six, which are about God's magnificent handiwork in the creation, the sky and stars and sun.

Secondly, we have verses seven to 11, which are about God's word, his law, his written word, and the beneficial effects it has on those who read it.

And then thirdly, we have the section, the short section of 12, 13 and 14, which is about David's inner life, about his sins and faults and temptations. Now, the question is, what is the psalm about?

[7 : 40] What is the connection between the creation and the Bible and David's inner life? Do you see the need to be a detective? What is going on in David's mind that moves him from the creation to the written words of the Bible and then to the unseen workings of his own heart?

Well, let me suggest that the key idea here is the opening up and the purifying of David's own inner heart and life. That's where he ends up. That's where the emphasis lies.

And if you and I want to have our hearts and our inner life opened up and purified, this psalm will be a great help to us and a great help, therefore, to our growth in Christian maturity. So let's begin at the beginning with verses one to six.

It's all about the creation. It's not about what we see around us here on the earth. It's not about the plants and animals and rocks and trees and oceans. It's about what we see when we look up above into the skies.

You'll see that verse one is about the heavens, the skies above. And David says that the heavens and the sky, by their glorious nature, testify to their maker.

[8 : 51] They are saying something. Just look at the verbs there in verse one. They're making a declaration and a proclamation. The declaration is that God is glorious and the proclamation is that God is their maker.

They are his handiwork. So just as a beautiful painting proclaims the skill of the artist, so the wonderful skies shout loudly that a great and glorious God has made them.

Imagine two men who have just reached the summit of Ben Nevis. One is a Christian and his friend is not a Christian.

But up there, it's a lovely day, a day like today. And having got to the top, they can see for miles. I think you can see for, I haven't been up myself, but I think you can see for 40 or 50 miles from the top of that great mountain.

But they look up. They look up into the skies. And one says, you know, George, I'm fascinated by the effect that the southwest wind has on that bank of strato cumulus clouds. In fact, I would forecast precipitation before 5 p.m.

[9 : 56] Then the other man looks up and he says, isn't God glorious to have made such power and beauty? Now, no prize for guessing which of the two is the Christian. I don't mean for a moment that science and faith are enemies, not at all.

It's just that the atheist can't see further than the scientific aspect, whereas the Christian enjoys both the science and the truth about the creator. Johann Kepler, the great astronomer of the 17th century, said this about his astronomical observations.

He said, when I work out some of the laws of astronomy and I'm able to set them down, I am thinking God's thoughts after him. Now, verse 2 moves us from daytime to nighttime.

Verse 2, day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge. How would that be? Well, because after dark, David sees not the sun, but the moon and the stars.

And they have the same kind of message. The stars reveal more about the wonderful mind and power of their maker. Then verse 3 is phrased a little bit awkwardly in our versions.

[11 : 03] So let me read it to you in another version. What David means is that the heavens don't speak in French or Italian or Gaelic.

They don't use human language. They speak a wordless and yet powerful message. And it's a message, look at verse 4, which is not simply for Israel.

It's for the whole earth. It's a message that speeds out to the ends of the world. This is why Paul the Apostle in Romans chapter 1 speaks of God's invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature being clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

So the creation, which is visible, speaks of the God who is invisible. And the skies, although they are silent, speak a powerful message without words.

But it's at this point, at the end of verse 4, that David moves to the heavenly body that he is most wanting to talk about in Psalm 19, for reasons which we'll see in a moment.

[12 : 11] And that is the sun. Look how he describes the sun in verse 5. It's rising in the morning is like a bridegroom leaving his chamber.

Now this is not the bridegroom on the morning after his wedding night. No, this is the young man on the morning before his wedding. He leaves his home to go to his bride's home to claim her.

And that young man, you can be sure, has a smile on his face and a spring in his step. In fact, if he hasn't got that smile on his face, he shouldn't be getting married at all. And then David adds, you'll see another comparison.

Like a strong man running its course with joy. The sun is like a powerful athlete. So David is emphasizing the strength of the sun's movement across the sky from the extreme east to the extreme west.

Verse 6, it starts from the extreme eastern horizon and it crosses right over to the far west. It's unstoppable and it's powerful. And, and let's notice the last phrase in verse 6 especially, there is nothing hidden from its heat.

[13 : 20] Nothing hidden. Look across to verse 12. Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Nothing can hide from the sun.

Is it possible that the hidden depths of a human being's heart also cannot hide from the searching gaze of the sun's maker? Now we'll return to that thought a little bit later.

In verses 1 to 6 then, David moves in his thought. First of all, he declares that the creation proclaims the creator. But he ends up with this intriguing thought that the greatest heavenly body in our solar system, the sun itself, allows nothing to remain hidden.

It reveals everything. So might David be softening us up for what is to follow? Let's look on now to the second section, verses 7 to 11.

Now the reader might look at verses 7 to 11, which are clearly about the written law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, the law of the Lord. And the reader might say, what is the connection between the sun in verse 6 and the law of the Lord in verse 7?

[14 : 31] Well, the connection surely is to do with revelation. I know we don't see a great deal of the sun in our northern climate. Today is a bit of a change from normal, isn't it? But in David's Middle East, the sun was fierce, and people in Israel knew that the sun strikes everything.

And as verse 6 emphasizes, nothing can hide from it. The sun reveals everything. And isn't David saying God's law is just like that? As the sun has powerful revelatory effects physically, so the penetrating beams of God's law shine into the human heart with great effect, revealing things that will bring truth and joy and happiness to the human soul in a way that no other written words can. Look at verse 7. Mr. Skeptical might say, of course, your Bible is full of imperfections and inconsistencies. No, says David, the law of the Lord is perfect.

Then Mr. Doubtful might say, but your Bible, it is so flimsy, it's so unreliable. No, says David, the testimony of the Lord is sure. Then Mr. Modern Moralist might say, look at verse 8.

But your Bible, it's no fit guide for teaching ethics in the 21st century. We have to be ethically flexible in the contemporary world. No, says David, the precepts of the Lord are right.

[16:04] And Mr. Flexible Moralist, as flexible as an octopus, the commandment of the Lord is pure. You may turn your nose up at it, but it's pure. Verse 9.

Mr. Self-Rule says, Are you so old-fashioned as to fear the Lord and submit to his rule and his authority? To your own self be true, man.

Stand up and be your own master. But David replies, To fear the Lord is clean. A life lived that way is not grubby and defiled. And as for God's rules, they're true.

They are righteous altogether. And therefore there is great joy and happiness in submitting to them.

And let me tell you more, Mr. Skeptical, Mr. Doubtful, Mr. Moralist, and Mr. Self-Rule, and all your friends and cousins who look down your noses at the Bible.

I want you to know, verse 10, that the teaching of God's words is far better than a whole bank full of money. I would rather have one column inch of the law of Moses than all the riches of Bill Gates and Warren Buffett put together.

[17:09] And let me ask you this. Do you like honey? Honey on your toast? Oh, yes, yes, David. We're all honey lovers here in skeptic manner. Well, says David, the Bible is sweeter than honey.

And just think of a whole honeycomb with the liquid running down over your fingers. The Bible is more desirable even than that. Is it? Says Mr. Doubtful.

Of course it is, you old bat, says David. You need to try it. Now, friends, let me ask you a question. I imagine that just about everybody here has their own Bible at home.

But here's my question. Is your Bible in beautiful, pristine condition? Or is it dog-eared and falling to pieces and sellotaped up at the back? The dog-eared Bible is the Bible we need to see.

That's the Bible that is poured over frequently. And if your Bible is much poured over, you will know the lovely effects of the Bible in your life. You will know, for example, look back to verse 7, that the words of the Lord revive the soul.

[18:19] This is not about recharging your batteries with a week's holiday in Millport. This is much better. It's about reconstructing the dilapidated inner fabric of a human heart and life.

We are by nature like a building that is falling down. By nature, the beams are rotten. The floors are full of woodworm. Everything is rotting. Sin corrupts us profoundly.

But the Bible rebuilds and restores us and therefore gives us strength. It also, as verse 7 puts it, makes us wise. It enables us to see our own lives in proper perspective.

And it helps us to give wise advice to other people as well. It helps us to understand politics and history and society more clearly. It also, as verse 8 puts it, brings joy to us, joy to our hearts.

The world we live in is a joy-starved world. But the Christian has a well of joy deep inside. Remember how Jesus says, my joy will be in you and your joy will be full.

[19:25] It's the words of God which bring joy into our hearts. Also, verse 8, the Bible enlightens the eyes. In other words, it casts light on our path so that we don't stumble like people who are walking around in the dark.

Jesus said, I'm the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, stumbling about, not knowing what is right and wrong, but will have the light of life. The more dog-eared our Bibles are, the more we understand how to live, the more we learn how to distinguish right from wrong and how to relate to other people in a way that is true and loving and supportive and encouraging.

But when David reaches verse 11, suddenly his message becomes personal. Look at verse 11 with me.

Two things happen here in this verse. First of all, David speaks about himself. Moreover, by them, in other words, your rules and laws, by them is your servant warned.

Your servant means me. By them, I am warned. And then secondly, do you see he begins to speak directly to God. Moreover, by them is your servant warned.

[20 : 38] In keeping them, there is great reward. Verses 7 to 10 are not framed as a prayer. Those verses are stating to David's readers certain truths about the law of the Lord.

But at verse 11, the psalm suddenly becomes a prayer and it continues as a prayer right the way through to the end. What David is doing then is taking the truths of verses 1 to 10 and drawing out the implications of those truths for himself.

So how does his line of thought develop? I think like this. The skies are wonderful. The sun is magnificent and strong. There's no place that you can hide from it.

Nothing is hidden from its heat. And the words of the Lord, likewise, have an all-encompassing, transforming effect on those who read them. And they too, like the sun, have a penetrating effect that cannot be avoided.

What is their effect? Well, look at verse 11. Two things. Two things. The effect of the word. First, God's words warn the one who reads them.

[21 : 47] Moreover, by them is your servant warned. But secondly, they hold out to the reader a great promise of a wonderful reward. So they bring warning and promise.

And in a sense, those two words sum up the whole message of the Bible. Warning and promise. The Bible warns us. It says, don't be an atheist.

Don't be an agnostic. Don't stick to the way of skepticism and self-rule. That way ends in death and disaster. And then look at the promise of the Bible. Eternal life for all who are willing to repent, to turn from sin and self-rule, all who are willing to call Jesus their captain and to submit gladly to him. David realizes this so strongly in verse 11 and it drives him from statement to prayer. In verse 11, he bows down before the Lord, thanking him for the warnings of the Bible and for the promise it holds of a glorious future.

In keeping them, there is great reward. And then seeing all this leads David in verses 12 to 14 to pray that his own life should prove in the end by the grace of God to be innocent in God's sight.

[23 : 04] Verse 12, declare me innocent. Verse 13, then I shall be blameless and innocent. Verse 14, acceptable in your sight.

But he knows he cannot do this himself. Verse 12, he knows that he can't declare himself innocent. It must be God who does it.

Verse 13, he knows the weakness of his own moral life and that's why he prays, keep me from presumptuous sins. You'll see there are two types of sin that he writes of here, hidden faults and presumptuous sins.

Hidden faults are those sinful things which go on in our hearts which have become so much part of our personality that we can no longer see them for what they are. They're hidden from our gaze, deeply ingrained attitudes, for example, of grumbling or a critical spirit or covetousness, anything which we have lost the capacity to discern.

It's there but we can't see it. David longs to hear God's declaration that he is innocent in God's sight. But then there are presumptuous sins, sins which are not hidden from our consciousness.

[24 : 18] We know about them. We know about them all too well and yet in a high-handed fashion, we sometimes go ahead and indulge ourselves in them. Keep me from them, David pleads in verse 13.

Let them have no dominion over me. He's asking God in no uncertain terms to cleanse out his heart and to strengthen him to live a more truly godly life.

Isn't that a great thing to pray for? And verse 14 takes him on further in the same direction. He's continuing to pray here out of a sense of his own weakness and notice what he prays about.

He prays about his mouth and about his heart. You might call it the tip of the iceberg and the iceberg itself. The tip of the iceberg is what comes out of the mouth but much bigger is what goes on beneath the surface that is the meditation of his heart.

Our mouths produce words that other people can hear but our hearts chew over a thousand things which nobody hears or sees but God himself. And David is concerned not just to pray about his mouth, he's also concerned about his heart.

[25 : 30] He wants both the outpouring of his mouth and the ponderings of his heart to be acceptable in God's sight. And that word acceptable is a word from sacrificial offering language.

Remember Cain's sacrifice back in Genesis chapter 4 which was not acceptable to the Lord and Abel's sacrifice which was. Well David wants his inner and his outer life, the words of his mouth and the thoughts of his heart to be an offering that God is pleased to accept.

So the shape of the psalm is this. There is nothing that can hide from the rays of the sun. The sun reveals everything. And by analogy the words of God shine into our hearts and also reveal everything.

The effect of the Bible is to revive us and bless us and bring joy. But the Bible also warns us. It shows us our errors. And David in his sense of weakness begs the Lord to declare him innocent, to keep him back and restrain him from sin and to accept him mouth and heart.

But David lacks the power himself to bring all this about. Unless God declares him innocent he will remain guilty. Isn't that the same with us?

[26 : 49] Unless God declares us innocent we remain guilty. We're guilty by nature. But if we belong to Christ and we know the effect of his death and his resurrection we are both innocent and blameless and acceptable because he in God's sight is innocent and blameless and acceptable.

And our moral shortcomings are covered over by his offering and sacrifice. So friends let's allow the Bible to continue to revive us and to rebuild us and let's rejoice in the final phrase of the psalm that it's the Lord who is our rock and it's the Lord who redeems those who cannot redeem themselves.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Amen. how we thank you again dear heavenly father for the wonderful gospel of forgiveness how you in the person of your son Jesus Christ have taken upon yourself the infinite liabilities for our sins and you have caused those sins to be forgiven because our Lord Jesus in his death on the cross bore your righteous anger and judgment on our behalf.

Thank you dear father for the freedom that the cross and resurrection of Jesus proclaim. And our prayer is that you'll help us to walk with joyful and glad hearts knowing that we are forgiven and our prayer too is that through your words you will day by day rebuild us and bring joy ever growing joy into our hearts and lives.

And we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.