

It's God's Covenant Revelation to Us

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now this morning to our Bible reading and we are beginning a new series this morning which is really thinking about the Bible. And we're in two passages this morning, so perhaps you would turn to Hebrews chapter 1 first.

Hebrews chapter 1, put your finger there, keep that there, and then we're going to go to Psalm 19. So once you've found Hebrews, flick back to Psalm 19 and we'll read from Psalm 19 first.

So Psalm 19, we're reading the first ten verses together.

To the choir master, a psalm of David. 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.

[1 : 1 0] 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.

Well, let's turn now to Hebrews in the New Testament, and looking at the first four verses. Hebrews chapter 1. Long ago, many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

[2 : 4 1] But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

He is the radiance of the glory of God, and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Amen. This is God's word, and may he bless it to us this morning. Well, you might like to turn up in your Bibles, the beginning of the book of Hebrews, chapter 1.

We are beginning a new series this morning on why we treasure the Bible. Not focusing specifically on a part of the Bible and expanding it.

That's a normal pattern. But rather, we're going to be looking for the next few weeks on the nature of the Bible itself. And that's why my title is, Why We Treasure the Bible.

[4 : 0 0] Because as evangelical Christians, that is our great distinctive. We are people of the book, of the Bible. Of course, that doesn't mean, as some foolish people today want to say, that does not mean that we worship the book.

That's simply ridiculous. We are not bibliolaters like that. Nor do we set the word of God written above the word of God incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Some people accuse us of that as well. as though we depersonalize the faith by honoring scripture so highly. But that also is just quite absurd.

In fact, it contradicts, doesn't it, the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus said, These are the scriptures that speak of me. You can't know or experience the real Christ of faith without hearing his voice, without hearing his true voice, the real Jesus of history.

Through the scriptures, that speak of him and lead us to him. That's why we treasure the Bible. Because they do that. But of course, it is important for us to think through with care and in some detail what we mean by that so that we know why we treasure the Bible and how to properly treasure it and what that really means.

[5 : 30] Because of course, even many atheists treasure the Bible. You might remember back in 2011, wasn't it, when we had the anniversary of the authorized version, the so-called King James version of the Bible of 1611.

And there were lots of celebrations. And the broadcaster, Melvin Bragg, actually wrote a book, didn't he, called *Book of Books*, the radical impact of the King James Bible. And there were events that were held.

One important event in London had as a guest speaker the atheist historian, Neil Ferguson. He's a Glaswegian. Teaches in Harvard and Oxford.

And he paid tribute to the King James version of the Bible and the vast influence that it's had on the language and the culture of the English-speaking world. He does the same thing in his book on Western civilization.

But he's an atheist. Even Richard Dawkins, perhaps the most famous of our contemporary atheists and anti-religionists, at that time, he made a YouTube video extolling the King James Bible.

[6 : 34] He quoted, rattled off lots of the phrases that have come into our language through the King James Bible, beating swords into plowshares, things falling on stony ground, and so on.

When you start to think about it, you could go on and on and on. There are so many phrases that we use every day in our lives that come to us from the Bible. A broken heart, a labor of love, a two-edged sword, a wolf in sheep's clothing, the skin of your teeth, seeing eye to eye, the twinkling of an eye, the letter of the law, the thorn in the flesh, a fly in the ointment, the powers that be. You could go on and on and on. Even Richard Dawkins, that arch-atheist, treasures the Bible in a way. But what he says, and I quote, is this, it's important that religion should not be allowed to hijack this cultural resource.

He treasures the Bible, so he just has a cultural resource, not as a religious one, nothing more. As, I think, did Clive James, you know, the clever writer and the broadcaster who died just recently, actually, in his magnum opus, his book called *Cultural Amnesia*, he wrote that the Bible for a Western civilization, wrote, that the Bible for a Western civilization is the common good of believers and non-believers ought to be obvious.

But for some reason, he says, it's a truth hard to see, except when that civilization is at the point of collapse. It's actually the same kind of point that Neil Ferguson makes in his book on the decline of Western civilization, because he sees that it's the rejection of Christianity that has led to the loss of the West's identity and the loss of the West's influence.

[8 : 29] As, indeed, does Douglas Murray, the spectator writer who's also another atheist. And all of these rue that, you see. So in that sense, these men treasure the Bible.

But all that they seem to lament is the loss of what you might call the Christian capital of the past and its inherited influence in our society.

As T.S. Eliot put it, those who talk of the Bible as a monument of English prose are merely admiring it as a monument to the grave of Christianity.

But you see, the great mistake that all of these people are making, however much they treasure the Bible culturally and historically or in a literally sense, the great mistake they're making is that they have never really understood what the Bible really is and what the Bible is for.

and why we need it and what the real tragedy is if we lose it and if we stop paying attention to it. Because if you detach the Bible from faith in Jesus Christ, if you remove it from its place at the very heart of the church, then the Bible's true value, which is an infinite value, well, it's lost completely and altogether.

[10 : 01] So it's important, very important, that as Christians from time to time we go back to basic and we ask these vital questions. What is the Bible? What's it really for?

What does it do? Why do we treasure it as we do? And the answer the Bible itself gives us is that in these scriptures, that is in the 66 books of what we call the Old Testament and the New Testament, in this book we have the unique revelation of God Almighty to humankind.

Not just our revelation, but the only complete and true revelation of God which can make human beings wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Because these scriptures reveal to us the person of God fully and completely in God the Son, in Jesus Christ our Lord. God himself made flesh, made manifest to us in the scriptures. Jesus said these are the scriptures that bear witness to me. Now the whole Bible is God's revelation to man.

[11 : 24] Spoken from the first time as Hebrews 1 says in the prophets and in these last days as he says completed in the revelation of God the Son, Jesus Christ and preserved for all time in the word of God written.

That's what the Confession of Faith of our church, the Westminster Confession calls the Bible, the word of God written. So what kind of word is it that we have in these our Bibles?

Whether it's the King James Bible or the NIV Bible or the ESV Bible most of us have or whatever Bible it is you have. Why do we treasure the Bible?

Well first of all and above all we treasure the Bible because the word of God written is God's covenant revelation to us.

So it's the unique personal self-revelation of God given to us in order to lead us back into proper relationship with God through Jesus Christ the Son.

[12 : 34] It's the unique personal revelation of God in order to lead us back into proper relationship with God. In short God speaks to us and the Spirit writes scripture for us so that we may know God.

let me try and unpack that this morning under three headings let's start with absolute basics if that's so then this special revelation of God in his word is absolutely necessary God must reveal himself to us if there is a God if it's going to be possible to know him if God really is God then by definition he's beyond our merely human analysis our finite analysis and description because God is the ultimate reference point God is a transcendent creator of all things he's of an absolutely different order of being to all the rest of us now that's hard today because we live in a culture of relativism and so we tend to relativize everything and paradoxically that's actually because we tend to absolutize ourselves that is that we tend to make me my experience our experience the very heart of the universe that's what's driving increasingly the identity politics of our day isn't it it's just the latest manifestation of it me and my identity is central to everything but you see that's what you're doing you're absolutizing yourself if you were to claim for example that well all religions are just different ways of looking at the same thing all religions are just relative as many people say today but you see what you're doing there you're making an absolute claim aren't you that you're absolutely right about all of these religions you're claiming the very thing that you deny to all these other religions that any one of them could be absolutely right self contradictory isn't it that's the problem for people like

Richard Dawkins and so on but if there is a God if there is a real God who is omnipotent who is infinite who's eternal who's omniscient but all of these things then by very nature by definition he's above us and he's beyond us and the only way that we could know about him far less actually really know him is if he chooses to reveal himself to us because our world and our experience is a closed system we're trapped inside it not just this planet but the whole universe the whole galaxy and everything else remember way back the first cosmonaut the first man in space the Russian Yuri Gagarin he went up into space and he came back and said I've been around the world and seen there is no god up there it's just preposterous isn't it we've got Voyager spacecraft and I've gone right outside our solar system they're keeping going and they're keeping going but they can go on and on and on and on and they're still inside the universe the orbit of creation but how could the creator of such a universe if he existed possibly be constrained and confined within it it's absurd to even think that it's a bit like this is how

C.S. Lewis is described it's a bit like a character in a play a character who is in a play can't go outside the story world that they exist in and get to know their playwright well that's absurd isn't it they live inside the world created by that playwright such a thing would be impossible unless of course by some extraordinary means that playwright were to write himself into his own play and become one of the characters and become actually part of the play and in a sense that is precisely what God must do if we in our world can possibly be able to know him we can't find him God has got to find us he's got to reveal himself to us but that is exactly what God has done that's the second thing

God has revealed himself to us so that we can know about him so we can know about his attributes his nature his work and so on but also and above all so that we can come to know him personally because he is a personal God he is the God of relationship of powerful of devoted covenant

relationship who created us so that we should know him and love him and enjoy him forever and that's why you see from the very beginning long ago many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers God spoke to human beings and he spoke both in his words and in his works all through human history words and works that reveal God to us in person words that create relationship and that nurture relationship now generally speaking the Bible speaks of two ways that God reveals himself first of all there's God's revelation in nature and in history that's what we sometimes call general revelation that's what

[18 : 33] Psalm 19 perfectly declares the heavens declare the glory of God the sky above proclaims his handiwork and so on Paul speaks similarly in the first chapter of Romans where he says that God's 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 and because of that Paul says people are without excuse that is what he's saying is that an honest person a rational person looking at the world about them and its extraordinary beauty its complexity its wonder an honest person must surely ask himself and say well where did all this come from surely an extraordinary creator must have made all of these things so why don't they do that well some do of course we had a Thai student some years ago in the church here and I remember when

I asked him how I became a Christian and he said well I was studying science I was studying microbiology and the sheer complexity of it the sheer order of it the sheer intelligence in it drove me to seek an answer why and the only place I could find an answer to my science was in the Bible but many don't seem to find that Richard Dawkins doesn't speak like that does he why well the apostle Paul gives us the answer in that first chapter of Romans where he says in our unrighteousness we suppress the truth it's as simple as that human beings have an extraordinary capacity for self delusion which is almost infinite we're seeing that today all around us in the world in all kinds of different ways at least just an economic situation we suppress the truth that you can do certain policies and there'll never be a payback that you can borrow endless money and suddenly it'll all come back and it'll all come out of the magic money tree why is it possible for human beings to delude themselves in so many ways especially in this greatest of all truths about

God well it's because in all of these cases the real truth is just too uncomfortable to admit and so it's far better and far easier to play let's pretend and of course to believe God's truth would literally turn our personal world upside down and so we hide from it that's what you see right back at the very beginning of human history right back in Genesis chapter 3 man says no I'll choose my own way I'll be God and not you and when God comes what does man do he hides himself in the bushes not to have to face up to the truth so we are blind by nature to this revelation from God or at least at best we can see it only very very dimly we can't suppress it totally can we because the sheer breathtaking beauty the wonder of God's creation does hit us and whenever that happens whenever we see a beautiful landscape whenever we're awed at the birth of a new baby whenever we're overcome by sheer beauty by delight by wonder that's our deep inner soul admitting that there is something transcendent that we can't explain that we have to worship that's what

C.S. Lewis means when he talks about the inconsolable secret the eternity that is in the heart of man that can't be suppressed utterly can't suppress it completely but even supposing we could see all that God has revealed in his works without words from God still then we could only know in part couldn't we right back at the beginning in Genesis chapter 2 before man's great rebellion we read about God not just showing his creation to man but coming and speaking with man right from the beginning God has revealed himself in words and that is because without words relationship is impossible words are what makes relationship possible I know these days that we seem to be using less and less words it's all abbreviations and text speak isn't it you know are you okay and lol and all that

I still remember David Cameron got mixed up with that and thought lol meant lots of love and it was laugh out loud and all that but even if you're using that kind of language you're communicating hopefully with somebody who understands because you can't have a real relationship can you without words of some kind because words words reveal us they reveal who we are they reveal what makes us tick they reveal the things that we love the things that we hate the things that make us laugh the things that make us cry the real us that's the danger isn't it for the politician who leaves his mic switched on after he thinks it's been switched off words are terribly revealing for good and for ill that's revelation you see it's an unveiling of the real us and it happens in our words it's like

taking the paper off the wrapping paper off a present it reveals the gift inside
[24 : 22] I remember some years ago you know that we have some of these lovely paintings hanging in the building in Bath Street and I remember getting to know the artist of one of these paintings paintings and I had seen his paintings I enjoyed them I got into a conversation with him and a communication with him and I actually got to know him reasonably well I went to visit him at one time and he said to me he said to me in terms of his understanding of God and so on he said no all I need is nature that gives me all that I need of God just seeing nature and painting I don't need any these words from the Bible and I said to him well have a think about this because I knew a little bit about you from your paintings from your work and I got to know a bit more about you as I looked at more of your paintings but actually it was only when we started writing to each other that I actually began to get to know you properly and you got to know me that's what led to us actually meeting each other getting to know each other more and that's the reality isn't it you see God is a speaking God and he speaks in order to be known and in order to know us in order to engage with us and love us so that there might be relationship that's real and that was so right at the very beginning but of course Genesis chapter three put a smoke in all of that it was an act of great betrayal of that love relationship it's an act of spiritual adultery human beings spurned the Lord the covenant Lord of life and having rejected that right relationship that led to a relationship breakdown and man hid I didn't want to talk to God anymore and even more seriously and sadly God had to shut man out of his presence so they could not talk anymore and that's the curse isn't it upon our sin a great gulf of silence between us and God and you see rebellious human hearts suppress even the even the memory even the echoes of God's revelation in the world that he's made that's a tragedy isn't it a broken relationship we don't talk anymore there's just silence and when there's been a relationship breakdown like that the truth is and we all know it that the the wronged the party in the wrong can't put it right we don't have the right to do that don't have the capacity even if we wanted to a broken marriage covenant through unfaithfulness and infidelity it's a terrible thing but remorse alone can't fix that can it only real and deep grace and mercy from the wronged party can ever have the power to rebuild that relationship and if it does so it will be at very great cost because a price has to be paid pain has to be born agonies have to be endured there has to be a fresh reaching out at great cost in words words of forgiveness words of fresh invitation words of good news words offering hope and redemption reconciliation and reconciliation isn't that right and that friends you see is the whole story of the bible it's the record of this second kind of revelation of god to man god's revelation in the gospel in the good news of that covenant relationship that man was made for that it might be restored that it might be put right that there might be reconciliation and restoration and the whole of the bible is that wonderful revelation the great unveiling of god's heart of extraordinary love and of his wonderful purpose of redemption and of the heart of that redemption in the one who would himself pay the price bear away the great barrier to restoration the guilt the curse of human sin the son of god himself our lord jesus christ why do we treasure the bible well because above all the bible is god's word of self-revelation which comes to its zenith its climax in the person and the work of jesus christ our savior it's god's word of revelation which climaxes in that work of redemption through the word made flesh in the person of jesus christ but from the very beginning all of god's words of redeeming grace pointed to him it's all one great story it's the story of the christ of all the covenants the one to whom all of god's promises pointed and at last were fulfilled in the whole old testament you see promises and prepares for god's salvation through the coming in the flesh of god the son to be our savior and the whole new testament shows the wonderful fulfillment of all of that everything that was promised of old through the prophets the bible is a single coherent revelation of god a revelation of god's unfolding covenant of salvation coming to its glorious climax in the person of our lord jesus christ all of these are the scriptures that speak of me said jesus everything in the law of moses and in the prophets and in the psalms must be fulfilled that's what he said to the two men walking on the road to emmaus after he had risen from the dead in luke chapter 24 and he opened their minds so that they might understand the scriptures that that's what it's all about a great unfolding story of god's covenant saving grace come to its climax in the glory of the death and resurrection of our savior the scriptures all the scriptures are a covenant word from god a word of personal revelation of god himself in order that despite the sin that separates us from him we should be able at last to know him truly and intimately and wonderfully through the savior christ the messiah our lord jesus the whole bible is a coherent unfolding revelation of god in jesus christ the

son the god who has become our savior let me just summarize very briefly how it coheres in the person of jesus christ in five p's the old testament prepares for the christ that's what we saw repeatedly didn't we in the book of hebrews as we studied it the prophets speak god's word of promise the priests spoke of god's saving promise for sacrifice to save us from sin and the kings spoke of his glorious kingdom of the rule of god the old testament prepares for the christ and then in the gospels of christ we have the revelation jesus the savior is presented to the world as the king as great david's greatest son as the prophet who speaks god's word with absolute authority and as the great high priest who bears away his people's sin and in the acts of the apostles he is proclaimed to the whole world and in the rest of the new testament in the epistles that faith is passed on to the church and preserved for the future and then the very last book of the bible the revelation of john there's a final unveiling of the great perfection of his work in his glorious eternal reign the good news of god our savior revealed and fulfilled in jesus christ the son of god promised prepared for presented proclaimed the faith preserved and passed on in the church and perfected in glory forever and that's what the bible is in a nutshell it's the covenant word of god and his great salvation that's why we treasure it it's his word that offers and makes possible a real restored relationship with him our creator because in jesus he has himself become our redeemer that's why we treasure the bible god must reveal himself to man if he is truly god

if he's not just a figment of our imagination if he's not just like us if he's not just a big version of us he must reveal himself to us but all through the ages from the prophets to these very last days through his son he has revealed himself to us fully and finally and forever in the finished work of christ our redeemer and so here's the final point friends and this is a really vital one god must reveal himself to man but he has revealed himself and that revelation demands response we must respond to god there can be no relationship without words without revelation of a person's true being but neither can there ever be a relationship without a proper response to that word we know that don't we a man a man can reveal himself he can unwrap his heart and soul to the woman that he loves he can offer himself to her in a covenant word of a lifelong relationship creating word he can say will you marry me that's a powerful word isn't it that's a word to create and to create a transformation of the future to create a relationship lifelong will you marry me a powerful word but unless there's a response unless she says

[36 : 11] I do there won't be a marriage will there won't be that relationship and just so with the bible it's a personal revelation of the heart of God almighty to man and it's a covenant word like that offering life offering intimate knowledge fulfillment the thing we were created for the thing we can only ever have through Christ the savior in the bible god is saying to every one of us come come back to me come through Jesus Christ my son be mine again through him forever and ever share that life from now and for all eternity Jesus said no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him there must be revelation but there is and so Jesus went on and said come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you learn of me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy my burden is light that's God's personal revelation of himself to every one of us everyone who will hear so the question is for each one of us every one of us listening this morning what is our personal response been what will it be today what will it be right now and all for the rest of our lives well let's pray lord how we thank you for your words to us wonderfully revealing words words of love words of truth words of wonderful life creating promise in the gospel of your son help us lord we pray to stand on these promises to grasp them to take you at your word today and every day so that we might be yours as you long for us to be all the days of our lives and all the days of eternity help us to treasure this your word we pray for Jesus sake amen