

## WALK THIS WAY

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Ben Janssen | **Psalm 19:1-14** | September 6, 2020

TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID.

- <sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
- <sup>2</sup> Day to day pours out speech,  
and night to night reveals knowledge.
- <sup>3</sup> There is no speech, nor are there words,  
whose voice is not heard.
- <sup>4</sup> 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,  
<sup>5</sup> which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,  
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.
- <sup>6</sup> 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.
- <sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure,  
making wise the simple;
- <sup>8</sup> the precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is pure,  
enlightening the eyes;
- <sup>9</sup> the fear of the LORD is clean,  
enduring forever;  
the rules of the LORD are true,  
and righteous altogether.
- <sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.
- <sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.
- <sup>12</sup> Who can discern his errors?  
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.
- <sup>13</sup> 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.
- <sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in your sight,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Labor Day weekend is the time we set aside to introduce to our church the plan we have for our preaching and sermon series over the course of the next year. The theme for this year is *Walk This*

*Way*. I've been told that this is the title of one of Aerosmith's famous songs, but I didn't know that and I certainly didn't have it in mind when I came up with this theme. The idea I have in mind with this theme comes from Psalm 19. What we see here is that God has given to us his counsel for how we should live by speaking to us in a clear voice, and that he expects us to prayerfully live by his counsel.

## **THE COUNSEL OF GOD**

First, let us consider the necessity of paying attention to the counsel of God. How we live our lives is going to be shaped by the advice that we pick up from others. We are all living by the life hacks, financial plans, and medical counsel we've been told. Let's be sure that more than anything else we are seeking the counsel of God.

### **God Is Speaking**

A quick glance at this psalm and we see that it is divided into two parts. In verses 1-6, the subject is the created universe. In verses 7 and following, the subject is the Scriptures. What ties the two subjects together is the fact that God is speaking through both. The Psalmist wants us to hear the voice of God and, hearing his voice, he wants us to live by it. He wants us to follow God's counsel.

God is real. He is a Person, the best of all persons. We should know him. We should love him. But we should also obey him. We should do what he says, not because we are trying to appease him but because his way of living is the best way of living. The previous psalm reminds us the God who created the world and the God who gave us the Scriptures, "This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true" (Psa 18:30).

If we believe this, if God's "way" is perfect and if his word always "proves true," then shouldn't we want to know his way and live by it? Shouldn't we be listening for the voice of God saying, "Walk this way," and then eagerly doing just that?

### **The Whole Counsel of God**

Now there are plenty of people out there who will tell you what God's voice says about how to live. Plenty of people eager to get you following their way by claiming that it is the same as God's way. There are even plenty of examples of people using the Bible in such a way as to get us to do what they want. Plenty of preachers manipulating people to believe their words rather than God's words. This could happen at Crosstown as much as it could happen anywhere else.

When the Apostle Paul was saying his final goodbyes to the leaders of the church in Ephesus, he claimed to be "innocent of the blood of all" because he "did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). If we do the same, if we are faithful to preach God's "whole counsel" then the elders of this church can be sure that we have not been preaching "from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive" you into believing our words instead of God's words (1 Thess 2:3).

## Our Approach to Sermon Plans

This is why I think it is important to have a preaching plan and to announce to you that preaching plan. This is why I think you should care about this annual sermon where we tell you our plans for what you will hear from the pulpit. You should know what is being preached and care about what is being preached because your discipleship depends upon having the whole counsel of God declared to you.

What does it mean to hear the whole counsel of God? It means to hear the whole Bible. Old Testament and New Testament. In ten years, we have preached sermon series from 11 Old Testament books and 13 New Testament books.

The whole counsel of God means preaching exegetically; that is, taking the main point of a passage of Scripture as the main point of a sermon and applying it to our lives. You don't have to preach all the way through a book of the Bible to do this, but doing so helps make sure you aren't missing the main point of an entire book by focusing only on the main point of one of its passages. Again, in ten years, we have preached all the way through 8 Old Testament books and 11 New Testament books (29% of all biblical books).

But there's another approach that we use in planning our sermons, an old-fashioned approach that is known as catechesis, from a Greek verb (*katecheo*) meaning "to instruct." We find that verb used to describe Apollos, man who had been instructed (*katecheo*) in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus." (Acts 18:24-25). That's our goal for every member at Crosstown. To be so instructed in the way of the Lord that he or she can speak and teach accurately the things concerning Jesus.

Catechesis is, to use one definition, "the church's ministry of grounding and growing God's people in the Gospel and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight."<sup>1</sup> It is an ongoing ministry, that touches not only the head but also the heart, the habits, and the affections. It is comprehensive, enveloping the whole person. A disciple of Jesus should not only know Jesus but also love Jesus and obey Jesus.

To this end, there are three traditional facets of catechism that represent "three critical strands of biblical teaching in both the Old Testament and New Testament." (Packer, 89). These strands are summarized in the words Jesus used for himself in John 14:6 when he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Our catechism ministry is built around these three facets, using a three-year cycle to concentrate on one each year. We choose our sermons with a view toward the one we are on in a given year.

This year we are on Cycle 3, "the Way." In the Old Testament, "the way" describes "the manner of living that God requires and delights in." (Packer, 90). The early Christians were known as followers of "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

## THE VOICE OF GOD

Now if we also are going to be followers of “the Way,” then we need to heed God’s counsel. But that means we need to learn to hear his voice. Psalm 19 urges us to hear God’s voice in creation and in Scripture.

### The Voice of General Revelation

*“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”* When we look at the created things around us, we ought to be filled with wonder and awe at the glory of God. The fact that we look at trees and grass and clouds and stars with no sense of wonder is an evidence of how far we have fallen short of the glory of God. Every time we gaze at creation, every time we study it in education, and are not moved to worship, we sin. Sin in this case, is like the disability of deafness. Our loss of wonder and worship in God is not God’s fault, as if his glory cannot be seen and his voice cannot be heard. It is we who are deaf, not God who is silent.

The psalmist would have us look specifically at the sky, at day and night, at light and darkness. What are we seeing when we look at these things? We are seeing history. We are always observing the past. And according to astrophysicist Hugh Ross, if you are positioned in just the right time in history and just the right place in the universe, you would be able to observe the entirety of the universe’s history. Guess where that time and place is? Planet earth in the time of human civilization.<sup>2</sup> God wants us to see his glory in creation. He wants us to hear his voice in the universe he has made. Why? To evoke praise to the God who deserves the glory.

But also to hear his voice, the voice of God’s glory. Creation has a voice, according to verses 2-4. It is the voice of God’s glory. It is being poured out day by day, night after night. Yes, it is speaking praise to God, but according to verse 2 it is also speaking knowledge to humans. When we hear the glory of God in creation, we ought to not only join it in praise of God, but we also ought to learn from God’s glory knowledge. Or more specifically, wisdom. The glory of God proclaimed in creation is supposed to give us wisdom on how we should live our lives.<sup>3</sup>

But there’s a problem here. Verse 3 tells us of the paradox of “inaudible noise.” There is no literal noise from creation, but its voice reaches to every point on planet earth. It is up to the listener to perceive its sound and grasp its wisdom. But the fact is that not everyone grasps it. Some in fact look at creation and say it is saying, “There is no God!” This is where the second half of the psalm now bursts on to the scene. Unless one accepts the voice of God in the Scriptures, he will not be able to hear the voice of God in creation.<sup>4</sup>

### The Voice of Specific Revelation

So in verses 7-11, we find that the Scriptures are the source of more specific revelation. The “law of the Lord,” says the psalmist, “is perfect, reviving the soul.” The Hebrew word for *law* is *torah* which means instruction. God’s instruction includes the “testimony” of his saving acts (v. 7), his “precepts” or procedures for how things out to be done, and, yes, his “commandments” for how things must be done (v. 8). But those who “fear” the Lord find that God’s rules “are true and righteous altogether” (v. 9). To them, the way God instructs us to live in his word are “more to be desired” than the finest

gold. They are sweeter than honey from the honeycomb (v. 10). There are warnings found in “the way,” but those who keep to God’s instructions will find “great reward” (v. 11).

The beauty of the psalmist’s poetry in these verses is apparent even in our English translation. C. S. Lewis wrote of Ps 19: “I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.”<sup>5</sup> This morning we will introduce a new song to you that we will be singing throughout the year based on this beautiful psalm.

## **A PRAYER TO GOD**

But before we sing, let us see the prayer with which this psalm ends.

### **Blameless and Acceptable**

We can no more acknowledge the goodness and beauty of God’s instructions for how we should live than we come face to face again with our failures to do just that.

The psalmist began by looking at the heavens and reflecting on the divine law, and such reflection naturally evoked praise; but, as his eyes turn back from this double and glorious vision to gaze upon himself, the shock is almost too much.<sup>6</sup>

We are quick to admit our imperfection, but the psalmist does not turn us away from this reality, only further into it. “Who can discern his errors?” he asks. Our faults may be “hidden” not so much because they are so small but because they are so characteristic.<sup>7</sup> We know we fall short of God’s standard. We have no idea just how far short we really have fallen.

So the Psalmist’s prayer is bold: “Declare me innocent” even from these ingrained faults!

There is no lingering in self-pity here. The Psalmist is certain that God has forgiven him. But nor is there a hint of the thought, “Well, hey, who cares how I live! Let’s continue to sin so grace will abound” (Rom 6:1).

Instead, the prayer continues. “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer” (v. 14). May this be our constant prayer.

### **I Am the Way**

It is the right prayer for those who know the answer to Thomas’s question, posed to Jesus in John 14. When Jesus said, “You know the way to where I am going,” Thomas asked, “We do not know where you are going” so “how can we know the way.”

Jesus said, “I am the way.” To be followers of the way is to be followers of Jesus. To be his disciples. To increasingly know Jesus because he is the truth, to love Jesus because he is the life we are seeking, and to obey Jesus because he is the way. “No one comes to the Father,” Jesus said, “except through me.”

Tom Hamilton from Aerosmith says that the title of their famous song came from a scene in the movie *Young Frankenstein* when the main character is met at the train station by “this classic evil assistant” who grabs the traveler’s suitcase and begins to hobble down the steps saying, “Walk this way.”<sup>8</sup> The character not only follows down the steps but does so hobbling in the same way.

True disciples of Jesus know that the way we live our lives is not about following a cold set of rules but about following a good and gracious Savior. Jesus is the way we walk.

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<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), [29](#).

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Ross, “Gravity vs. God,” *Steve Brown Etc.*, October 22, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19, revised ed., ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), [180](#). Craigie also argues here that this psalm ought to be classified as a wisdom hymn.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, [181](#).

<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 56, cited in *Ibid.*, [183](#).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, [182](#).

<sup>7</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), [118](#).

<sup>8</sup> Dan Weiss, “Aerosmith Tell the Story Behind Their Hard-Rock Masterpiece ‘Toys in the Attic,’” *Spin*, May 4, 2015, accessed online at [www.spin.com/2015/05/aerosmith-toys-in-the-attic-40th-anniversary-oral-history](http://www.spin.com/2015/05/aerosmith-toys-in-the-attic-40th-anniversary-oral-history).