

# How can I know God?

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This evening, knowing God. Where can I get reliable information about God? How can I get to know God? Well, please come with me to the reading which we had, Psalm 19. It's a Psalm about knowing God. It's a Psalm, it's a poem so it's written as poetry; it's not a scientific textbook but it works as poetry does. A Psalm about knowing God. And if we are to know God, says the Psalmist, we need to listen to two voices. Two voices. So point 1: the voice of creation.

"The heavens," verse 1, "declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork." It says David, says the Psalmist, "Look up. What do you see?" Well, you see the sky, the firmament, the expanse of the heavens. "And what does it tell you?" It declares the glory of God.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork." Think of it, the morning sun and everyone has a spring in their step, or a silvery moon and everyone speaks in hushed voices. It's magic. Or the myriad of stars and we are awestruck. Driving back through the night in Sri Lanka, we passed a wild elephant and so we stopped at a safe distance to take a look and as we stepped out of the van, it wasn't the elephant that we were looking at but the stars. With no light pollution, the brightness, the beauty was almost too much. I remember saying, "Look at the stars!" And we just stood there open mouthed. The universe is God's theater. It's the showcase of his handiwork and it declares the surpassing greatness of who God is.

"The heavens declare the glory," the greatness, the majesty, the worth, "of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork." It shows the work of his hands. When I was a boy, I used to use my hands to make Airfix models. God uses his hands to make the cosmos. Think about that, 10 billion, billion stars, millions of galaxies, distances off the scale and no bigger to God than an Airfix model or hand stitched embroidery. God can put the universe in his pocket.

Look at verse 2, "Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge." Day and night, says the Psalmist, were exposed to a witness that proclaims that God is. Day unto day utters speech, literally bubbles up with the news that God is. And night unto night reveals knowledge. It's like a relay race. One night passes on the batten to the

next night and the next night to the next night and each passing on the batten and they go with the news, "God is."

Verse 3, "There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard." It's unmissable. If once every 50 years God wants to speak unmistakably, then maybe the world would hold its breath. They'd want to be there with their iPhones or whatever to catch the moment. Plus says the Psalmist, God speaks unmistakably every day and every night, "Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge." If once every 50 years God was to speak unmistakably in French, well, either I'd learn French or I'd stand next to someone who knew French because I would want to know what he was saying. But here there are no language barriers. God speaks unmistakably in words we can understand. "There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard." The heavens declare the glory of God.

Look at verse 4, "Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world." In 1588 when England was under the threat of invasion from Spain, the Spanish Armada, what was the sign that the invasion had begun? Well, they had a chain of beacons and when the invasion started, that line of beacons was lit. The first beacon, then the next beacon, then the next beacon. A chain, a line of beacons going across the country, each one signaling to the next. A line of beacons carrying the message, "The hour has come." So says David, as day follows night, as day follows night, as day follows night, as day follows night, it's like a chain of beacons carrying the message across the world, across the ages. A message for all to see, a message so simple a child can get it in any language, in any place. A message that is unmissable and the message is that, "God is and the God who is is surpassingly wonderful. Just look at what he has made." Have you got it?

Then having spoken of the heavens in general, David now focuses on the crowning glory, the sun. Look at verse 4, "In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, And rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, And its circuit to the other end; And there is nothing hidden from its heat." Says David, the sun is like a bridegroom. I was at a wedding yesterday, not like an English bridegroom, this is a Middle Eastern bridegroom stepping out of his tent, stepping out of his chamber to claim his bride. He's magnificent, glorious, beautifully arrayed, striding out. The day has come. He is striding out to claim his bride.

"In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber." It's what the rising of the sun is like, isn't it? "And rejoices like a strong man to run its race." As the sun treks across the sky, it's like Usain Bolt: exuberant, exultant, rejoicing in his unwearied vigor.

"Its rising is from one end of heaven, And its circuit to the other end; And there is nothing hidden from its heat." The sun rises in splendor, sets in triumph and you look at it and you stand there and if you have seen the dawn or if you've looked at the sunset, we say, "Wow! Look at that!" We call people, "Have you seen it?" But the question that he is driving us towards is who made the sun? If the sun is glorious such that you cannot look

at the sun, what does that say about the maker of the sun? And again, the message is unmistakable, it's unmissable. No one is unaware of the sun. Even if you can't see its light, says David, you can feel its heat. My friends, you cannot hide from the voice of creation and the message that it proclaims to you is simple. You can get it in any language, in any place, and the message is that the one who made all of this is the true, the living, the eternal God. Infinitely God, God to the exclusion of all other gods. The heavens declare the glory of God, the one God. Knowing God.

So where can I get reliable information about God? Where do I begin? Well, it says David, you don't have to go on a long journey, you just have to look up because God has taken the biggest canvas there is, the sky, and God has written across the sky for all to see, "I am here and I am light and I am glorious and when you enjoy the warmth of the sun and are hushed by the silvery moon, then know that I am the God who is good, and knowing that you would die without the sun, and recognize that I am the God who is good to you." And all that I have, except my sin, comes from God. When you see the beauty and the wonder of it all, God is declaring to you that, "I am beautiful." Did you ever think about that? The Bible speaks of the beauty of God's holiness, of God's Godness. God is beautiful.

And when you're sad, what do you do? Your head goes down, doesn't it? It's instinctive. When we are sad our heads are down. And when we are happy, what do we do? Our heads go up. The very act of looking up at what God has made, that to look at the canvas upon which God has written his name, that we have to lift up our heads, is to remind us that the Maker of all this is to be enjoyed and that he is a source of everything good and everything that is to be truly enjoyed. He's a true source of joy. He's the one who made us lift up our heads. David elsewhere will say, "O Lord, you alone are my glory and the one who lifts up my head." We don't have to look down here to find God, it's looking up. The God who is himself joy and gives joy to all who know him.

There's also a warning because the sun can burn and the Bible says our God is a consuming fire so don't be careless. The God who is is to be taken seriously. Do you take him seriously? Do you listen to the voice of the sky? Or do you only see what you want to see? Only hear what you want to hear? Some people look at the heavens and they worship them, don't they, the sun, the moon, the stars? Some people look at the heavens and they say there is no God, no wisdom, no plan, no power, no person behind it all. Inexcusable. The heavens, so simple a child can get it in any language, in any place. Have you got it? The heavens declare the glory of God, the voice of creation.

Well, the second point is this: the voice of the Bible. Knowing God. Where can I get reliable information? How can I get to know him? Well, says David, step 1: the voice of creation. But that will only take you so far and, of course, the voice of creation can be misread, it can be misunderstood, I therefore need a clearer voice. I need words in the sense that I hear them, that words that go into my understanding and that's why we need the voice of the Bible. So, look at verse 7, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes 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 judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether." And lots of words coming then: law, testimony, statutes, commandments. They are simply different ways of describing the same thing, different ways of describing the Bible because the Bible is a book of words and they are God's words to his world.

Now, did you notice that little bit we read, verses 7 to 9, six times it uses this word "LORD" in capital letters. The word in Hebrew is Yahweh. It's God's personal name. Says David, if you want to be on first name terms with God, if you want to know him, enjoy him, meet with him, glorify him, then it's here in the Bible where God speaks to us in his own words that God has made himself fully known.

Now, when it comes to God's word, our track record is not good. No need to turn to it but it begins back in the garden of Eden. We read of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and God gives them a command, he says this, he says, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." So God, because he's generous and wants them to enjoy what he has made, he says, "Every tree, freely eat." What's there not to like? "Just leave one. There is one tree, don't eat from that." But what happened? Well, the Bible goes on to say into the garden came God's enemy and he lied and Adam and Eve believed him. We read, "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said,' has God really said, ""You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" There is God's word. It's straightforward. It's clear. It's a generous word. It's a wonderful word. There is just one prohibition and Satan says, "Oh, has God really said? Can you really take God's word for it? Come on, think for yourself. Free yourself up from the restraints of what God has said. One tree you can't eat? There are other options. Don't be bound in, don't be limited. Experiment. Go on, find out for yourself. Has God really said? Don't take his word for it." Then, of course, they do experiment. They do push beyond the boundaries that God has set and they eat of the forbidden fruit and you read the Bible, disaster unfolds. The world is plunged into chaos and darkness and misery and death. Everything is broken. Supremely what is broken is their relationship with God. So it all went wrong in the beginning by rejecting God's word and that's where it went wrong and the way back is to embrace God's word. Embrace what God said.

So look at it, verse 7, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul." This is the book to bring you back to God. If you're serious, "I want to know God, what is he like. I want to meet with him. I want to be on first name terms with him," this is the book to bring you to him. And the way the language is put it's the book that brings us back to life.

"The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple." Finding out for ourselves, living this life of trial and error has been a disaster but this is the book that makes us wise. The Bible says we're simple, we don't know. We don't know God. We don't know his ways. Well, this is a book that will make you wise because it will bring you to know him.

And, verse 8, "The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart." You see, a world without limits is gut wrenchingly miserable. A life without God is filled with sorrow. Well, this book is the antidote. This book will make you happy. Maybe the last place in the world you think it will be but this book will make you happy beyond words.

"The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." I am blind. I just don't see. I'm blind to God. I'm blind to my need. This is the book that opens my eyes so that I see. Have you ever gone through life thinking I must have some sort of sixth sense that make sense of it all so that I can see? I get echoes, things that sort of...there is something beyond but I don't know what is beyond. Well, this is a book that opens your eyes so you do see.

Verse 9, "The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever." We don't take God seriously and when we don't take God seriously, what does it do? He leaves us twisted and unclean. Well, this is the book that straightens me out and makes me clean.

"The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether." John Lennon sang, "Just gimme some truth. All I want is the truth." And in a world of lies, who is telling me the truth? Who is to be believed? Where can I get reliable information? I need to know. I want to know. Well, this is the book that gives me straight answers. Do you see, these are the words of life?

Now, maybe you've heard of HMS Bounty, maybe you've not heard of it but 200 years ago it sailed from Britain to the Pacific islands off Tahiti where the crew stayed for about five months during which they made lots of friends with the locals, particularly the local women, and when time was up and it was time to return, they didn't want to leave. So on April 28, 1789, the crew mutinied. Lieutenant William Bligh, commander of the Bounty, he was awakened by his crew who, he says, "Seizing me, tied my hands with a cord and threatened instant death if I made the least noise." Well, he wasn't a man to be threatened so he started shouting but it did him no good and he and his officers were loaded into a longboat and cast adrift.

The Mutiny on the Bounty. There were at least three films, Fletcher Christian who was the ringleader of the mutineers, he has been played by Clark Gable, Marlon Brando and Mel Gibson. But the films don't tell the real story. The mutiny is they sailed off with the Bounty and with them went a number of Polynesian men and an even larger number of Polynesian women, and because the mutiny carried the death penalty, they sailed off where they hoped no one would find them and they eventually settled on an uninhabited island, the island of Pitcairn and for the crew, it was a dream come true. Think of it, a beautiful deserted island surrounded by beautiful women, no work, no rules. For those mutineers, it was paradise. But the dream turned into a nightmare. There was drunkenness, jealousy, rape, murder, suicide. All the Polynesian men who had come with them, they were killed and it wasn't long before the original mutineers, only two were left. Two men and a group of frightened women and children that sort of barricaded themselves in a different part of the island.

Well, one of the men, Alexander Smith, he thought, "Well, if I'm to take care of this extended family, I need to be able to read but I can't read." So he said to the other one, Edward Young, "Can you teach me to read?" All they had was the ship's Bible. The ship had been sunk because it would give them away so they had taken off what was useful and there was an old Bible on the ship, maybe the ship carried a Bible, they took that and they started to read the Bible and he started to learn to read by reading the only book that was on the island.

Well, it wasn't long before Edward Young died so Alexander Smith was left on his own with a Bible so he plowed on going through reading, reading. Some parts of the Bible were difficult, nearly killed him. Other parts seemed to give and yield their message. But he read on and he read on and when he got to the end of the book, he was a different man. He was a man who was on first name terms with God. Why? Because "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes 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 judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether."

And he said this, he said, "I've been working like a mole for years," it's very vivid, isn't it? Think of a mole burrowing through in the darkness. "I've been working like a mole for years and suddenly it was as if the doors flew wide open and I saw the light and I met God and the burden of my sin rolled away and I found new life." No other influence. All he was was a man alone with this book but through this book, this dead man, this mole of a man, found life and the man ignorant of God was made wise, and the man who was miserable, living a nightmare life, was now filled with joy, and the man who had lived in the darkness had come blinking into the light. "The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." And this drunken murderer, God straightened out and washed him clean and he had found the answer. He had found the truth. He had found the Lord, the law of the Lord. First name terms with God. A sinner gloriously, wonderfully saved. "I saw the light. I met God and the burden of my sin rolled away but I found a new life."

I wonder what would have happened if he had had any other book? What if it had been the book that you're reading at the moment? Any other book? But it was this book. Many years later, the island was eventually found and visitors came and it was an American ship and they said this, they commented because obviously this extended family had now grown to quite a community, they said they had never met a people so good, so gracious and so happy. They said there were no fights, no crime, almost no disease. A happy people. And what was their most valued possession? What did they love? What was at the center of their community? It was this book, the book that had changed everything. "More to be desired," verse 10, "are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward." It's a true story. So if you want to know God, if you want to be on first name terms with the God who made you, the God who meant you, the God who put you here, the God who through creation has been speaking to you every day, then this is the place, an open Bible.

Now, if you're off this point, your relationship with God has not been good. In fact, it's been a disaster. You've ignored his voice in creation, maybe you know this book and you've rejected its voice and maybe like those mutineers you have tried to live in a world without restraints, without limits, without rules, without some God telling you what you should and shouldn't be doing. "So I am free to do as I please." But that dream is a nightmare and we're dying and we're simple and we're miserable and we're moles burrowing in the dark and we are twisted sinners in danger of being scorched because when you mutiny against God, there is always a price to pay and the Bible says the wages of sin is death; eternal punishment in that other place. But here is a word to change all that. Here is a word to bring life to the dying, wisdom to the simple, joy to the miserable, a light in the darkness, a word to straighten you out, to set you free, to bring you back to God and why? Because this is the book that tells us about Jesus Christ. It's all about him. I may have messed up but this God has not just spoken to us from the sky, he hasn't just spoken to us in this book, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, the Son who walked among us; the Son who came down from heaven into this world to save. And if the wages of sin is death, then Jesus Christ, God's Son, went to a cross where he died that punishing death that sinners deserve to die that all who trust in him can know the calm of sins forgiven; can find a new start, a new relationship, a new life; can be washed clean; a new life that the Bible calls eternal life. First name terms with God. It is called being saved. Do you want that life? Do you want to know God? Do you want to love him and enjoy him and glorify him? Would you want that tonight?

Well, look at verse 8, "The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart." Would others say that you're miserable? Do you go through life with your head down? Are you miserable? It sounds dangerous, doesn't it, to promise a message that will bring you joy. And we're not simply saying well, you're miserable and this will just bring you joy, that would be wrong but it's because it brings us to the God who made us to know him and to find him, to have all that sin and guilt and shame washed away; to be given a new life, a new start, a new beginning. I may have messed up one life but this is the God who says, "I will give you a new life, a life lived for me." When I was converted, I think the overwhelming impression I had was joy, joy that had no words to express it; joy that didn't burn out when the night was over; joy that wasn't rooted in things I could touch and see but was rooted in something real and lasting. The God who loved me, the God who made me, the God who sent his Son to save me and the God who has joy in himself, who turns water into wine, this is the book, this is the God.

"The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart." Do you want to be saved? Do you want your head to be lifted up? Do you want to know God? Do you want to know him tonight? Do you? Why then don't you make the closing words of this Psalm your prayer?

As we close, look at what it says, verse 12, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults." "Lord, I don't know the half of it, I don't see what you see, I can't see my sins so, Lord, show me. Show me what I'm really like. Show me my sins and then for Jesus' sake, wash those sins away. He died to make condemned sinners clean, well, make me clean. Cleanse me from secret faults."

"Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression." "Lord don't let me go back to the old life. Don't let me be sorry on a Sunday evening and moved on a Sunday evening and say, 'Yes, I know it's true. I know I need to come to Christ,' only then for Monday, I just go back into the rhythm of another week and nothing ever changes so I go back to my bad old ways. I don't want that anymore. I don't want to go back to Monday. Lord, save me tonight. Let me walk safely with you to heaven."

Verse 14, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my Rock," that's what it says, "and my Redeemer." "Lord, remake me so that I am like Jesus. Redeem me. Make me yours so that I am free and let me build my life on you, my Rock and my Redeemer."

Let's pray.

*Our gracious and Almighty God, we thank you that you have revealed yourself. We thank you that you have chosen the greatest canvas there is and written your name across the sky but we thank you, Lord, that we see that you have revealed your name more wonderfully in your word and we thank you that the word comes to us with such warmth and welcome and gracious invitations and that this is the book that does convert us and make us wise and rejoice the heart because it brings us to know you. Oh, our God, we pray that you would not leave us the way we came in but that you would come and even this night bring this word into the very depths of our being, to the very bottom of our hearts, and bring us to know you and to love you and to walk all our days with you through Jesus Christ, because we ask it in his name. Amen.*