

Psalm 19 “Words” by Shawn Honey

Ignorance, insecurity, confusion, corruption

Nobody knows what they’re doing. Nobody. We’re all pretending and hiding.

Here’s what’s going to happen: Sometime this week you’re going to be with your boss or with your coworkers or with all the other moms or with your friends or with your spouse—it doesn’t matter. Maybe this’ll even happen today, in a conversation right after this service. Someone’s going to ask you a question. “What do you think we should do? What are your thoughts about this issue or that proposal? What’s going on in your family? What’s going on in your relationships?” Or maybe just as simple as “What do you do?” or “How are you?”

And behind the word salad you’re going to spew of competence and confidence and just the right sprinkling of humility (because you don’t want to sound cocky) is going to be this inner dialogue: “Don’t let them know how much you don’t know; don’t let them know you have no idea who that person is that they just mentioned while everyone else knowingly nodded. Use bigger words! Talk like an insider! Watch out because this conversation is starting to venture deeper than your surface, public anxieties into some real heart-exposure! Warning! Warning! Your confusion about God and his ways is about to make you sound like a heretic!”

And even if you manage to dodge all those word bullets, you’re going to find yourself alone with that inner dialogue still churning. “It’s all so fleeting. Life hasn’t turned out how I had hoped. What does it all mean?” And then the dialogue probes deeper. “If they found out what I’ve said, what I’ve done, what I’m really like, what I really am...”

These are the words of our ignorance, our insecurities, our confusion, and our corruption. But in the midst of this noise, is there a word that can rescue us? Is there a word somewhere that can overcome these other voices? Is there a word that can tell us the way to life? If so, where is it?

Let the heavens speak!

Well, Psalm 19 begins by telling us that there’s a powerful word that speaks at all times and in all places. Verse 2: Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge. Verse 4: Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Whose words? The heavens’, verse 1: The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims his handiwork.

Now, specifically, David zeros in on one element of the heavens—the sun in verse 4. And it’s perfectly understandable why. You see, we take it for granted, but the sun is glorious. Perhaps if we were more conscious of our connection to it like a primitive, agricultural society would have been, we would understand not only its glory better but why people the world over have always been tempted to worship it. With its powerful heat, the sun can both scorch to death and bring abundant life.

And what is the sun like? It comes out, verse 5, like a bridegroom leaving his chamber. Like a bridegroom leaving his chamber. That is, like a husband the morning after his wedding night. AAAAHHHH! And like a strong man he runs his course with joy. He's on top of the world... literally. Nothing can conquer him—so effortless, so joyful, so alive.

And if only David had known then what we know now. The sun isn't some shiny disk stuck up there in the sky. It's an enormous orb into which you could fit 1,300,000 earths. It produces as much energy as a trillion megaton bombs every...second.¹

And the sun is just your average star. All those other dots up there in the heavens—the stars—if only David had known, were actually big suns, just farther away. One of those stars, VY Canis Majoris (which is in the constellation Canis Majoris), is truly grand. Do you know how many of our suns would fit inside it? 9.3 BILLION! And all the stars in the known universe, if you could count them, would total 1 BILLION TRILLION. That's a one with 21 zeros after it.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. 2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge...4 Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

The heavens speak. No doubt, the heavens speak! But do they tell us the way to life?

"'Hush!' said the Cabby. They all listened.

"In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It was very far away and Digory found it hard to decide from what direction it was coming...Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it...

"'Gawd!' said the Cabby. 'Ain't it lovely?'

"Then two wonders happened at the same moment. One was that the voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. They were in harmony with it, but far higher up the scale: cold, tingling, silvery voices. The second wonder was that the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars...single stars, constellations, and planets, brighter and bigger than any in our world.

"...Far away, and down near the horizon, the sky...grew slowly and steadily paler...from white to pink and from pink to gold. The Voice rose and rose, till all the air was shaking with it. And just as it swelled to the mightiest and most glorious sound it had yet produced, the sun arose.

¹ <https://science.howstuffworks.com/sun.htm>

“Digory had never seen such a sun...You could imagine that it laughed for joy as it came up.

“‘Glory be!’ said the Cabby. ‘I’d ha’ been a better man all my life if I’d known there were things like this.’”

“I’d ha’ been a better man all my life if I’d known there were things like this.” This scene from CS Lewis’s *The Magician’s Nephew* and especially the line from the Cabby answers our question. Do the heavens, does creation speak a word that will give us life? No. If anything, the word of creation is that there’s a disconnect between us and glory. One is in line with its Creator, the other is not. One displays an effortless glory, strength, and joy; the other is so often foolish, weak, and plagued by corruption. “I’d ha’ been a better man all my life if I’d known there were things like this.”

Physical life is dominated by the voice of the sun—of all creation—but where is the word of deeper life? Yes, the heavens declare the glory of God, but what word will grant us entrance into that glory? This first word, the word of creation, isn’t enough.

So, is there another word somewhere that can tell us the way to life?

God’s two books

Ever since especially the time of Galileo and Newton, it has been common to speak in terms of God’s two books: the book of nature and the book of Scripture, drawing on (among other things) things like Psalm 19. The book of nature and the book of Scripture are two ways that God is said to have spoken. We’ve already looked at the book of nature. We definitely learn from the glory of creation that its Creator is even more glorious—one who is master of the stars. But God, through the book of nature, does not speak definitively to those hollow voices that betray our ignorance, our insecurities, our confusion, and our corruption. So is there another word somewhere that can tell us the way to life?

Let the word of God speak

Verse 7: The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

Did you notice how all these voices of the law, the testimony, the precepts, the commandment, the rules of the LORD—correspond to the voices we know so well in our own hearts? The last part of verse 7: The testimony of the LORD is sure—that is, dependable, trustworthy—making wise the simple. What does wisdom speak to? Our ignorance—all the foolishness we spew to puff ourselves up and to flaunt our sophistication.

Verse 8: The precepts of the LORD are right—they are straight. Rejoicing the heart. Just picture the Scripture reaching into your hearts and untying the knots of all your anxieties and insecurities and straightening them into joy.

Verse 8 again: The commandment of the LORD is pure—a better translation would be “bright” or “radiant.” Enlightening the eyes. What better word for how to navigate all the shadowy confusion of life?

Verse 9: The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever—speaking against the fear in our hearts that wells up in the face of the fleeting nature of all our dreams and endeavors.

The rules of the LORD are true—literally “truth.” And righteous altogether. Righteous “I’d ha’ been a better man all my life...” said the Cabby. The word of the LORD speaks to this longing. We have all transgressed the rules—whether they’re rules someone else made for us or the moral constructs we’ve set up for ourselves. We know what it means to regret our words and to long to hear another word that will make things right again.

David wraps up this section with these words, verse 10: More to be desired are they than gold... sweeter also than honey...in keeping them there is great reward. What ultimate reward do we seek? The reward of gold—of money? Of honey—the delicacies of what can touch the tongue? David says the word of God speaks something richer.

But did you notice how he began? Verse 7: The law of the LORD is perfect—that is, it’s complete. Reviving the soul. Reviving the soul. What have we been asking? Is there a word that will give us life? If so, where is it? So is this second word, the word of the Scripture, the word that will give us life?

No.

But wait a second. Doesn’t it speak to our ignorance, our insecurity, our confusion, our corruption? Doesn’t it “revive the soul”? Isn’t that the life we’ve been longing for?

Recently, I took a trip to the Hirshhorn Museum of contemporary art down on the Mall. And here was one of the pieces I saw. It was entitled “Pants and Woven Wire.”² It was a pair of pants woven, upside-down, into—you guessed it—wire. Interesting...But what was the artist trying to say? Now, I could see the art. And I was also able to read a description that the artist was from Spain with this telling detail: He was Catalan. And he produced this work in 1973 during the last years of Franco’s reign—a dictator who had worked to suppress minority languages of Spain, like Catalan. I had the art, and I had the written description. But what if I could have the artist himself? What if he could enter that space and speak to me? Of what it was like as a Catalan under Franco and what a pair of pants in woven wire had to say about that.

² https://hirshhorn.si.edu/search-results/search-result-details/?edan_search_value=hmsg_80.103

You see, the art itself is like our first word, the creation. The description I read is like our second word, the Scriptures. But the revelation I desperately needed—for the artist himself to enter and speak—that's like Jesus, the Word of God.

Let the Word of God speak

You see, the word of creation and the word of God—lower-case “w”—are not enough to speak to us the life we long for. We need the revelation of the Word of God—capital “W.”

Listen to where David has come. He started out with the blaring word of creation. He moved on to the clarifying word of the law. And faced with the voices of both—the voices of glory and wisdom and joy and enlightenment and enduring righteousness— he is exposed—ignorance, insecurity, confusion, and corruption. And out pours this confession, verse 12. Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. 13 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. Innocent, free, blameless. What is this prayer if not a spoken longing for life? But it was a longing that creation and the law could not ultimately speak to, but that perhaps one of David's descendents could.

Another way of saying it is this: The witness of the word of creation and the word of the law could not break the power of sin. Only the Word of God, Jesus, could.

Do you remember our New Testament lesson and our Gospel lesson? They both ended with something like this: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” and “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Now, this doesn't mean that the law was all legalism and earning God's favor but now God's favor is freely given. No, it means that the law of Moses, the old covenant, was good. It was a guide to life. But it could not speak the ultimate word that would break the chains of our corruption—the dominion of sin.

No, Jesus, the Word of God—the Artist who spoke creation into being and the Author who spoke through the law and the prophets—entered our human drama to make God known. His voice was God's voice. And he dealt definitively with our corruption. By our union with Jesus in his death and resurrection, God announces that the guilt of our corruption is canceled and the power of our corruption is broken. We are declared innocent and sin has no more dominion over us that we should have to listen to its incessant dictates and shaming voice. We are alive in God. No word in creation or revelation could speak that kind of life. Only Jesus the Word, the final Word, could.

So where is the word that will lead us to life? It's Jesus, the Word of God.

Let us speak

So what does this mean for us? Our encounter with these words is meant to lead us, it must lead us all the way to Jesus. If you stop at creation, you'll hear a great deal but be deaf to so much

more. If you stop at the Scriptures as mere abstract truths and kernels of wisdom, but close out the Voice of Christ that wants to make a claim on your life, you will miss your deepest longing for life.

Next, let your encounter with the words evoke your plea. Verse 12 again: Declare me innocent from hidden faults. 13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me!

What voices are loudest? Is it the know-it-all, sophisticated insider? The Word says, "Whoever restrains his words has knowledge...²⁸ Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise."³

Is it the endless tangle of anxious words and insecure groanings? But the Word said, "Look at the birds, look at the lilies. Your heavenly Father knows what you need and will care for you."⁴

Is it the noise of confusion? "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."⁵

Is it the reminder of corruption? "Jesus' blood speaks a better word..."⁶ the greater reminder of canceled debt⁷ and triumph over shame.

Go again and again to the Word, Jesus, and let his word, the Scripture, speak to you. And please open your ears. I think of one of the characters in the movie *Tree of Life*—the dad, Mr. O'Brien. He noisily plows through life with his ears shut off to the voice of grace. Is that you—so savvy, so confident, so assured, so right in your own eyes that you can't hear the words? "I wanted to be loved because I was great" he said, "A big man. I'm nothing. Look at the glory around us; trees, birds. I lived in shame. I dishonored it all, and didn't notice the glory. I'm a foolish man." Open your ears. Let the words evoke your plea for cleansing and deliverance.

And finally, let your encounter with the words evoke your praise. The word of creation, the word of Scripture and, I would add, Jesus the Word of God create in Scott Swain's words "a chorus of praise."⁸ And we are invited to add our own words. Verse 14. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart [my outer words and my inner words] be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer."

³ Proverbs 17:27-28

⁴ paraphrased from Matthew 6:25-30.

⁵ Psalm 119:105

⁶ Hebrews 12:24

⁷ Colossians 2:15

⁸ <http://rezchurch.org/resources/sermons>

As the heavens declare God's glory, day and night, with all their radiant splendor; as the Scriptures speak wisdom and joy and enlightenment and justice; and as Jesus speaks the final word "It is finished"; let's add our own words.

Rom. 11:33: Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!...36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.