

Our God Speaks

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon, Church. Today I'll be reading from NIV, Psalm 19.!

Their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens, God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. Like a champion rejoicing to run his course, it rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other.

Nothing is deprived of its warmth. The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold. They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

[1 : 23] By them your servant is warned, and keeping them there is great reward. But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins.

May they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

That's the word of the Lord. Thank you. Great. Thank you so much. So do hold on to your Bibles.

But what's happening here is that we are in what's called a topical series. So normally we go through books of the Bible together as church, as you've noticed over the years.

But we have a really special opportunity to think about this particular topic. The first one being about the Bible. And so let's pray.

[2 : 23] Let's ask God to help us as we think through what we've just heard and more. Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks. You declare so much of your glory through the creation around us.

And then even more so, your instructions, your law, your statutes, your commands, your stories, Lord, all revealed through your word.

We thank you for all of this. And we thank you that through all this and more, you are the God who speaks. So speak to us now as we hear from you of our one truthful, trustworthy story of our Redeemer, Jesus.

Thank you that he transforms us and even helps us pay attention through the Holy Spirit, directing us to a life that pleases you. And we pray all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. All right. Confession time. I've got a weakness when it comes to shopping for certain things. What's your weakness? I don't know. When you go on Temu, there might be something that you just can't help.

[3 : 28] Click, purchase. Don't have Tell Me Now. Maybe Tell Me After the service. For me, actually, it's Bibles. I know it sounds so nerdy. But when there's a new or interesting version of the Bible that comes out, I'm just a sucker for it.

In fact, the Bookerama was happening out at Howard College. And I went over and saw, are there any old, you know, like, you know, vintage Bibles that I can buy and then maybe even sell off at a profit somewhere?

No, I wouldn't do that. But what Cheryl has discovered, though, is that, you know, we need more and more shelf space for Bibles of all types and kinds.

Actually, if you are interested, afterwards, check out the library. We've just laid out a few interesting Bibles from different times and languages and periods of history as well. I actually even convinced this one in the picture.

It only just came out early in Germany a couple of months ago. And I convinced my German friend, thank you, Jota, to send me this latest version of the Greek version of the Bible. I think I was actually the first person in New Zealand to own a copy.

[4 : 34] But not that it makes a difference. It's not just the Bible that you own, but actually what you do with it, right? And what you read and get out of it. It's not just because part of my role here at PCBC is to study the Bible and to read it and to pray through it for our sakes.

But actually because I think, and I'm really convinced, in these pages, our God speaks. Right? Our God speaks through the Bible.

Today we start a new series. It retraces the key beliefs that our church, PCBC, was founded on over 30 years ago. Right? They're not beliefs that were made up 30 years ago, of course.

But these were brothers and sisters who said, these are timeless truths from the earliest Christians about what we should believe and hold on to as the basics of what our church should be united on, founded on, and built upon.

And the first of eight key statements is this. And I'll read it out in full. That the Holy Bible, completed with its 66 scriptures, all being infallible inspiration of God, is without error and serves as the utmost guidelines in all aspects in life and conduct of believers.

[5 : 50] Maybe you've been part of PCBC your whole life. Maybe you've been part of PCC, or the truth behind it. Yet packed in this one sentence are very important claims.

Crucial. It's that the Bible, as you and I have it, on our pages, on our phones, the Bible, God's word here, is truthful. It's truthful. It's trustworthy.

And it's God's very own word breathed out to us through the Spirit. And that this word is the supreme guide for each of us, as people, in every area of life and conduct.

Through the Bible, in other words, God speaks. Typically, as I mentioned, we spend time singing through the word, praying and hearing from it.

And one way we do this often is just going through books of the Bible, right? It might be Genesis, the first of the 66 books. Or Job, we've done that before. Matthew's Gospel, we went through over a couple of years.

[6 : 56] This year, we went through 1 and 2 Timothy, those letters that Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy. And I think this ought to be the typical way we hear from God himself. We lean into the whole counsel of God.

We see how it points to Jesus. And then that shapes our hearts and minds to follow him more truthfully and genuinely.

But in the next few weeks, we're going to go topic by topic. And so we started with Psalm 19, but we're actually going to just go through other parts of the Bible. So do bear with me.

If I quote a Bible reference, hopefully you can find it or you can jot it down and you can look at it later for yourself. But actually, behind every statement of faith like this, there are actually questions that you and I have.

That's one of the reasons why it's helpful to go through topics. Because we make a statement like this. But actually, what's the real question behind it? The real questions might be this. Where should I find guidance for my life?

[7 : 57] The real question behind this statement could be, if God exists, how on earth can I know him? Or the real question behind a statement like this is, can I trust this as the word of God?

And the answer is that our church believes, yes, this is trustworthy. Yes, he is knowable. Yes, he gives guidance for all of our life through his word.

And so we're to turn to this Bible, to God's word for every area of our life. Whether it's our mental health, as we've been thinking through last month. Whether it's our relationships. Whether it's our view of what's right and wrong.

And how to find a flourishing life. Maybe your question here is more basic. You've actually never had the chance to ask, what is the Bible? Well, that's a great question.

Actually, you're not alone. I looked it up earlier this week. Thousands of people search this exact question, what is the Bible, on Google, every hour. So let's start with the basics.

[9 : 00] Why don't we help each other out here? This is a wonderful infographic that you can pick up a copy of on your way out if you like. I printed it courtesy of Wesley Huff. Some of us heard him speak last weekend.

But some key facts. So the word Bible actually translates as library. So what you have in here is actually like a mini library of 66 books.

You know how it's been divided for us. It's split in two parts. Two testaments or covenants. Different ways of saying the same thing. There's the old and the new. Or the first and the new.

It's inspired by God, right? 2 Timothy 3.16. We memorized this before. All scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and instruction.

It's a book that spans a long period of time. Any guesses which was the first book of the Bible to be written? The oldest book in the whole Bible. Any guess takers? Genesis.

[10:01] Genesis. Job. Okay. Both of you are pretty close. It's either one or the other. Genesis or the story of Job. Right. And which one is the most kind of recent?

Which was the last book to be written? Okay. Revelation with a singular. Okay. If we go through the book of Revelation, we can talk about why. Yeah. So, Revelation probably written about 90 to 96 AD.

All right. So, that's a long time period, right? 1400 BC to 90 AD. That's a long, you know, section of world history kind of crammed into the palm of your hand.

The Old Testament contains 39 books of instruction, history, poetry, prophecy. And then the New Testament consists of eyewitness accounts of real history, biographical accounts, all relating to the Lord Jesus, what he did, and the people who followed him afterwards.

And there's 21 letters to Christians, individuals, or to communities. And then there's the book of Revelation on its own as well. We're an international church.

[11:10] And actually, the Bible is a very international book. All right. Over 40 authors contributed to this book from three different continents. And any guesses on the three languages that it was first written in?

Someone from this side, perhaps? Original languages? Anyone? Okay. Mariah. That's right. So, Greek, okay, which is the language, common language during the New Testament times.

Hebrew, right, for the Old Testament. And then actually a bit of Aramaic, which is another common language spoken. And there's about 12 chapters of the Bible that was written in Aramaic. And look, one thing that people sometimes contest is that we don't have the original copies of what Moses wrote, all right?

Or what Joshua talked about. So, that's true. We don't. We don't. We don't have the original tablets or scrolls or books that the first people wrote. What we do have, though, is that we have enough copies, both in the original languages and through other translations, to be pretty confident that the Bible in its original form does not make mistakes in what it speaks about, right?

That's what we mean in a statement of faith by not erring. And so, as members of PCBC, we take the Bible to be sufficient in how it guides us, reliable in how it has been passed down to us, and it's trustworthy in what it tells us about God, about ourselves, and our world.

[12:46] I mean, listen again to Psalm 19. I'm going to read verse 7 onwards. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are much more precious than gold. They're much pure gold.

They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is worn, and keeping them there is great reward. Have you ever heard any other book in the history of the universe spoken about like that?

Yes, we marvel at the heavens that declare God's glory, but here he says the law, the statutes, they've got even more wow. Right? Right? Sweeter than honey, once we get to know God's word. More precious than gold. But maybe you might object, right? William, isn't that a bit of circular logic? You're saying you believe the Bible's true because it's from God?

[13:49] What if I'm not sure there is a God? What if I'm skeptical about miracles and impossibilities, like fire from the sky, maybe a man swallowing fish?

What about a dead man who comes to life again? And maybe I can just pose this question if that's you, and it could be. How did you arrive at that conclusion?

How certain can you be that everything in the world is always explainable by natural cause and effect, what you can see? And if there is an all-powerful author of this universe, let's say we look around and we go, this is an amazing world.

Who gets to decide what he can or can't do? And so maybe you're wrestling with questions like this. And that's okay. I want to invite you for a moment to consider reading the Bible for yourself, like many of us have, like we encourage each other to.

You could even start with one of the Gospels, right? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Four different Gospel accounts. Some people go cover to cover. Just go straight through. But the psalmist is saying, don't just kind of poke the Bible from a distance.

[15:00] Don't just kind of observe God's word from a distance like a scientist. No, you have to taste it. You have to try it for yourself.

Let me share with you two stories. One is Rosaria's story. Rosaria, sorry. Rosaria Butterfield, she describes herself once as a leftist lesbian professor, her own words.

She would spend her time researching the beliefs of the religious rights in the U.S. And she would do this to prove how bigoted, how hateful they were.

But then a Christian couple, she writes this in her own autobiography, reached out with kindness and hospitality. And it kind of started to make her curious.

She started to read the Bible and then read it differently. She said, I quote, I read the way a glutton devours. I read it many times that first year in multiple translations. For years, she said, I continued reading the Bible, all the while fighting the idea that it was even inspired.

[16:01] But the Bible got to be bigger inside me than I. It overflowed into my world. I fought against it with all my might. And then one Sunday morning, Rosaria says, she rose from the bed of her partner.

And an hour later, she sat in the pew of her friend's church. Our God speaks. Or let me share with you Brother Andrew's story.

After returning from war as an injured soldier, Andrew van der Beel was a mess. He was part of a Dutch regiment. Actually, he was part of a group of soldiers that committed war crimes.

And to kind of erase some of his memories, he turned to drinking alcohol to numb the horrors of what he'd done and been part of. And actually, after leaving the army back to the Netherlands, he felt very purposeless.

Who am I? Why am I here on this earth? And so he began to read his mother's Bible. He began to attend church and to join a Bible study. To find the answers he'd been searching for his whole life.

[17:09] Our God speaks. And I want to share all these testimonies because, look, none of you have this kind of experience, right? Everyone has their own different testimonies of encountering God.

But even if you and I acknowledge that the Bible is true, even if we go, oh yeah, I believe that statement, most of the time it's not that you're atheist that stops you from engaging with God, right? Most of the time it's because we're indifferent. We don't care. We're just thinking about how to make it through work the week to come. How do I pass my exams coming up?

How do I get a partner that I've been dreaming of? How do I just make it through the next week that I don't know I can get through? For all that and more, our God speaks.

Does he not? Through the Bible, we see our world for what it truly is. Through the Bible, we learn how to live with meaning, with satisfaction, with freedom.

[18:05] Identity, justice, and hope. Listen again to 2 Timothy 3, verse 16 to 17. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful in teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for not just a couple of good things, every good work, right?

It's a comprehensive statement. We live in last days, as Philistice reminds us last week. Last days that are full of angst over things like our mental health.

We are despairing over the state of our world around us. But as PCBC, we believe that all Scripture is God-breathed. And if God breathes out words, if he's responsible for them, God never fails.

And so we say that his word is infallible. It does not fail to do what its purpose is. When God inspired folks like Moses and Daniel and Mary to share their thoughts and stories and it gets written down, it was no mistake back then.

And even today it is useful for us to teach us, to instruct us, to rebuke us, correct us, so that we can be fully equipped for everything.

[19:25] PCBC was founded on a high reverence and respect for God's word, the Bible. It's actually why it carved into our founding documents, our constitution, there's actually a requirement

we meet regularly for worship, for prayer, for teaching, encouragement, and fellowship.

I hope you can see the pattern of why we do what we do here as a church family. It also says, our founding documents, we're to build members up as disciples in accord with biblical teachings in all circumstances, not just occasional circumstances, or when it's convenient.

It's in all situations. And in fact, our constitution says leaders are, you know, to admonish members according to the teachings of the Bible when needed.

And so that's why even if no one else around you brings a Bible to church, don't go with the flow. Bring it anyways, right? You and I are called to bring this trusty weapon with us, whether, you know, physically or whether in here.

We've been thinking about it. Here are lines and lessons that can pierce you and me deep, precisely where and when God wants, so that it will shape our life and conduct.

[20 : 45] During the week, I get to see a very interesting site. Every weekday, this is what it looks like at Botany Library. Who's been to Botany Library? Surely you're local, yep. This is where the Hunger Games start.

From 9 a.m., the students wait and they queue up before the door that has not opened yet, because they're trying to get in, right?

Because on the dot at 9.30, the librarian opens the sliding door, and a horde of students rush in, right, to try and secure one of the coveted study booth slots, or maybe the bay window where you can see everything while you do your work.

And, you know, when the sliding door opens at 9.30, there's, you know, I watch it from the cafe next door, so I can just kind of, you know, just have a little bit of shed and fro to, like, ha, that's interesting.

The librarian will just yell out at 9.30 or say politely, don't run, please, don't run, please, and all the while. Her words are not making a difference.

[21 : 51] Compare the Botany Librarian's pointless words to God's powerful word, right? God's powerful word. Think about it, right? Genesis 1, verse 3.

We see it from the right, from the very first page. In the beginning, God says, let there be light, and there was light. This is the talking God, as Gary Miller put it.

This is a God who's gracious enough to reveal himself to the world he made, to leave fingerprints of his handiwork in the skies and the sun and the stars, everything we see around us.

And then he shows up personally. He acts in the lives of ordinary men and women, right? These are accounts that are then recorded for us.

First five books under Moses through to Joshua and so on. In fact, throughout the Old Testament, we hear God speak through prophets like Samuel and Daniel. We see him engage with mothers like Naomi and Hannah, kings like David and Solomon.

[22 : 56] Sometimes the link, right, between what God says and what we see is very direct. In fact, the prophet Habakkuk, Habakkuk 2.2 says, It says, write down this vision, right?

God says to Habakkuk, and then so he writes it right down. Other times, what we have in God's word is what later authors and eddies have faithfully collected, right? Histories, poetry, prophecy. There are so many different genres in this library, this book of books. And when we turn to the New Testament, you and I, we see reliable eyewitness accounts of Jesus.

How Jesus of Nazareth fulfills all of the hopes of God's old covenant people. All those books in the Old Testament, they're all full of promises and people waiting for a promised redeemer.

Because the story of the Bible is this, you are not your own redeemer, but God has provided someone. You can't rescue yourself, but God will rescue you. And in the New Testament, we see right from the pages of Matthew chapter 1, right?

[24 : 01] The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew, he retold his experiences. He was once a tax collector, and then he ended up following Jesus.

Or you think of Mark, right? Mark was someone who came alongside a lot of the early disciples.

And he ended up recording kind of the apostle Peter's account of recollection. So much of Peter's life story is in Mark's gospel.

Or Luke, right? Luke 1 verse 3 says he records an orderly account of what he saw happen and what others saw happen. You can actually see that in Luke chapter 1 verse 3.

Or John, right? John lived longer than all the other disciples, but yet he was there with Jesus at the Lord's Supper. He was able to retell his close encounter with the risen Lord Jesus.

Whoever the human author, though, as Christians, we believe in what's called the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. I'll translate it that. It means every word, all of it, fully, is inspired by God. [25 : 07] All right? Yes, you know, men and women, they share their stories. Some of them got to record it down. And God is superintending. He's kind of orchestrating that whole process.

Like a great conductor that has brought this beautiful symphony together before us called Scripture. But don't be fooled, please.

The Bible is not just a symphony of instructions, right? A manual for how to run a car or how to run your life in a moral way. There are rules for godly living, right, through the Bible, right?

Some of you may even enjoy reading some of them and Proverbs and so on. But they should never be split off from the promise of a Redeemer and the power he gives us to live out these rules for life. In Galatians chapter 3, Paul points out actually the law, right, all these instructions, it's kind of like a schoolmaster, right? A teacher that shows us our need for Jesus.

[26 : 12] In fact, in the book of Romans, another way of describing the law, right, or God's word, he tells both Jews and non-Jews that God's law, it's like a mirror, right?

Anyone look in the mirror recently? You see what you need to clean up in your appearance, right, before you start the day. That's what God's word can be for you and me as well. It reveals our need for a Redeemer that will give us the best complexion.

So don't be fooled about how the Bible works. It's not just a bunch of rules. And don't be misled either as well. The Bible is not also neither a collection of just hero stories, right?

We all love watching the Avenged movies, right? Or we just love it when Star Wars puts out a new series and we're like, yeah, more hero stories. Sometimes we can think the Bible is just a collection of heroes.

Except when we actually read the Bible. Some of these people don't show up very heroically, right? Agree? Yeah? And actually one of the reasons we can be sure this book is the real deal, it's not just a Disney movie, is actually the embarrassment factor.

[27 : 26] So when you come up with fake news, you never write stuff that embarrasses yourself or, you know, people on your side. Fake news never embarrasses the author. But this is what's called the embarrassment criteria of testing something as real, okay?

Think about the people in the Bible. Think about how David, for example, Psalm 51, he confesses that he slept with someone he shouldn't have.

He confesses his own sin. Think about how Peter is very happy to have his life story told. He denied Jesus three times. Yeah, it happened. And the Lord changed me.

Think about Paul, once persecuting Christians. And now in the New Testament, he's able to say, I was once like that.

Chief of sinners. Right? Not only does the Bible fulfill what we call the criteria of embarrassment, that's one way we know it's trustworthy. Time and time again, it tells us how there's no single human being who is able to rescue us fully.

[28 : 28] But even better, no one else, no human is outside of God's ability to change and transform. Isn't that wonderful?

Yeah? One children's author put it this way. The Bible is not a book of rules or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a story, an adventure story, about a young hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure.

It's a love story about a brave prince who leaves his palace, has thrown everything to rescue the one he loves. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one big story.

The story of how God loves his children, comes to rescue them. And it takes the whole Bible to tell this story. And at the center of the story, there is a baby. Every story in the Bible whispers his name. He's like the missing piece in the puzzle, the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together. And suddenly you see a beautiful picture.

[29 : 37] Isn't that amazing? Sally Lloyd-Jones, author of the Jesus Storybook Bible, which we have a copy of.

We will explore some of these claims about Jesus in a couple of weeks in our third statement of faith. But listen to how the author of Hebrews makes this connection between the written word, the Bible in your hand, and the living word, the Son of God who walks into our lives from these pages. Listen again. Hebrews 1 says this, In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days, our days, he's spoken to us by his Son,

whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. Isn't that amazing? Do you believe this? Because our God speaks, we see a unified story of God's love and compassion. We see a clear and trustworthy account of God's heart for his people, us. And we see it through not just a bunch of words, as important they are, but through the living word, Jesus, the Son of God, in whom there is grace upon grace, the word who became flesh, who speaks life, who interprets the law for us, whose final cry on the cross where he was crucified for our sins was, It is finished.

[31 : 14] All right? Not just paid in full, revealed in full for us. Our God speaks. This is the key idea behind our church's first statement of faith.

I hope you believe this. I hope you cherish this truth. And maybe let's get practical here then. Because our God speaks, we're to take God's word seriously.

All right? Whether or not you can read it in English or in Chinese or in Tereo or any other language, there are some funny verses in the Bible, sure. But we need to take God's word seriously.

Actually, a funny verse in the Bible. You can look at this at me in your own time. Judges 3.22 says, Ehud drew the sword from his right thigh, plunged it into the king's belly. And, you know, when you get there in your Bible readings, your quiet time, you're like, what on earth is that for?

But every line, every story, every proverb, we need to read it in light of God's unfolding story of redemption, right? Not this king, that's for sure.

[32 : 16] But a king to come. King Jesus. And actually, one thing that this statement of faith means is that the job or the role, the privilege of explaining and defending God's word isn't just the person standing at the front giving the sermon, right?

Because this is a statement of faith for every member of PCBC to hold on to. Every member affirms this statement of faith, which means it's actually every member's responsibility to not just pay attention to what God's teaching, but to know it for themselves.

In fact, to do what the Bereans did in Acts chapter 16, 17. Search the scriptures to see if the things you're hearing from me or anyone else is reliable, trustworthy.

And so actually, that's why we'd encourage you as a member of PCBC, open the Bible together.

Not just here on a Sunday or Saturday night. Open it in different ways, right?

Maybe when you're hanging out with your friends, okay? Why don't you say, let's spend some time opening up together a little bit of the Bible and see what we find interesting. Or share, what have you been reading from God's word recently?

[33 : 31] If you need help with this, you can come along on a Wednesday night to a prayer meeting or to our English Bible study times. Or you can try and organize some of our own groups.

A couple of us do bubbles or one-to-one reading and chatting and praying together. There are lots of different ways to make this work. You can chat with your group leader. You can chat with others who are further along in the faith.

If you're stuck on how to make the most of hearing from God who speaks. And can I also make a humble request? Hopefully it's not too hard.

It's to bring your Bibles to church. If you have one. If you don't own one, come and see us, right?

You might not be able to take those really, really rare Bibles at the end.

But maybe come and grab one of the freebie copies as well. I'd love to give you a copy of God's living word for yourself. Of course, you might have it on your phones and that's fantastic. Well, if you have it on your phone, make sure it doesn't end up in competition with your DMs, your group chats, all your notifications.

[34 : 34] Right? If we know how to turn our phone off at weddings and funerals and movies, we can put life on pause, can't we? As we hear the living God speak.

It would be so sad for our church, wouldn't it? Right? Woe to our church if we just end up ignoring the Bible in favor of just emotional experiences.

Or if we elevate, you know, man-made rules or guidelines over and above the clear counsel of God's word. And yet, Psalm 1 reminds us, Blessed is the one who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, who literally, who mutters over it day and night.

That's the kind of vision that God gives us, right? As we engage with the God who speaks. God's truth, trustworthy, reliable, available to us for every season of our life.

And it starts by believing without embarrassment or shame that the Holy Bible, completed with its 66 scriptures, all being infallible inspiration of God, is without error and serves as the utmost guidelines in all aspects of life and conduct for believers.

[35 : 55] Shall we pray? Speak, O Lord, through your word, through your Holy Spirit, guiding us as we encounter the risen Jesus.

God's truth, O Lord, through your Holy Spirit, from speaking, hearing you speak from your word, to responding to you in song.

Help us as we do that together. In Jesus' name, Amen.