Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Power and Sufficiency of God's Word
Scripture: Psalm 19
Code: GTY120

Preached on October 26th 2008 at West Point Cadet Chapel.

We remain standing for the reading of the text from which I will speak to you in a moment, Psalm 19...Psalm 19. It is a Psalm about revelation. It opens with testimony to God's general revelation in creation and closes with the testimony to God's special revelation in Scripture.

Psalm 19, “The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech. Night after night they display knowledge. There's no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens He has pitched a tent for the sun which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, 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 hidden from its heat. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving 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 ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold. They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned, in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep Your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.” May God bless His Word. You may be seated.

It is obviously a great honor and privilege to be with you today in the cadet chapel. I owe a debt to Colonel John Cooke for the gracious invitation that has brought me here, along with my son and grandson, to enjoy a weekend here at West Point...and the half has not been told, to come here is to experience one of the great experiences in our great nation.

Of course, beyond that it is indeed and always a privilege to represent the King of kings in the proclamation of divine truth. For that privilege I thank the Lord.

God has exalted His Word. In fact, Psalm 138:2 says He exalted His Word above His name. That is because God is not to be known apart from His Word, and that is to say spiritual truth is not to be known apart from His Word.

I have often said the truth is the most important thing that exists. The truth about anything is what you must know, whether it's the truth about your physical condition, or the truth about your spiritual condition. What is truth, said Pilate? The answer is, truth is the way it really is. Truth is reality. And the most important truth is that truth that tells you the way it really is about your own soul and your own eternal destiny. You will live forever, and understanding the truth that relates to that is the most important thing of all.

For that truth we turn only to the Word of God. The Scripture's testimony to its own power is bound up in many passages, familiar ones like Hebrews 4:12, “The Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Perhaps the greatest testimony to Scripture, we just read. Psalm 119 is a testimony to Scripture, 176 verses long. That might be a little much for this morning. In Psalm 119 you have 176 verses, each of which is a two-line testament to the truth of Scripture. In Psalm 19 it's a little simpler, you have three verses. But God is the master of an economy of words. He in His revelation can say everything that needs to be said in very few words. What you have in verses 7 through 9, and if you will, keep your Bible open and let's look together at Psalm 19, and in looking at Psalm 19 I want you to notice verses 7 through 9, particularly, because this is a summation of God's own Word on His Word.

Now in these three verses you have Scripture referred to in six ways, and I'm going to work with the original text a little bit so it might differ from whatever version you are reading which will be certainly related to that.

But going back to the basics, in verse 7 you have two references to Scripture. It is the law of the Lord, and it is the testimony of the Lord. In verse 8 you have two references to Scripture, it is the precepts of the Lord, or it is the commandment of the Lord. In verse 9 you have two references, the fear of the Lord and the judgments of the Lord. But you will notice in every case it is of the Lord...of the Lord...of the Lord...of the Lord...of the Lord...of the Lord...of the Lord, just in case somebody might question the origin of Scripture.

But please notice that while it is always the Lord who reveals His Word, else we would not know Him, we have no capacity to crawl out of our time/space box and truly ascend to the mind of the eternal God, He must break in with His own self-disclosure and that's what He's done in Scripture. But I want you to notice the facets of this glorious diamond...it is law, testimony, precepts, commandment, fear, and judgments. You can look at Scripture all these ways.

You also see here that there are six characteristics of Scripture indicated. It is perfect, it is sure, or trustworthy, it is right, it is clear, it is clean and it is true. And then you have six effects, it revives the

soul, or restores the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, endures forever and produces comprehensive righteousness. These are sweeping and powerful statements about Scripture. Let's go back and take them one at a time.

Scripture as law...that is to say it is God's laws for man's life. God the designer has written the manufacturer's manual. This is how human beings are to operate at maximum level. This is what it takes to live a life to the full. Scripture is the manual for human life. Tells us how to live, how to prepare to live forever. God's laws for man's life.

As such, it is perfect. I remember years ago I was doing a study of the Hebrew word for perfect. I spent about two or three hours chasing around in Hebrew lexicons trying to get the nuances of the word. After three hours I determined that what that word actually means is perfect...a little bit disappointing. That's what it means, perfect not as opposed to imperfect, but perfect as opposed to incomplete. You understand the difference? That is to say that Scripture is complete. That's why at the end of the Bible it says, “Don't add anything to this, or take anything away, or it shall be added unto you the plagues that are written in it.” It's complete. Jude put it this way, “It is the once-for-all delivered to the saints faith.” Everything that God wanted you to know is here, nothing is left out.

So Scripture, says the Psalmist, is complete, it is comprehensive. That is to say it covers everything necessary for life and godliness. The impact of this, the first effect, is restoring the soul. Let's talk about the word soul, Hebrew word *nephesh*. You can take just about any Bible you have in the English language, go back in to the Old Testament which was originally Hebrew, and you will find words like soul, spirit, self, person, heart, mind, many different words like that and if you went back to the Hebrew they would all be *nephesh*. It simply means the inner person, the real you.

So what is this telling us about Scripture? The Word of God is comprehensive and it is directed toward the inner person. What does it do for the inner person? Notice what it says. Restoring or reviving. Actually that is a word that means totally transforming. Reviving would be giving life to the dead. In other words, the Word of God has the power to give life to the dead. And given the fact that all men are dead in trespasses and sins, the only hope for life is through the Word of God. You are dead in your sins, but you are made alive together with Christ by grace through faith.

And how do you come to that faith? Faith comes by hearing the Word. Peter says you are begotten again by the Word of Truth, you've been given life through the Word. In Romans 10 Paul says Israel is dead in trespasses and sins. Israel is cut off from the life of God. What hope do they have? If they believe, if they confess Jesus as Lord and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead, they can be saved. And they can have life. But how will they hear without a preacher and how will a preacher go unless a preacher is sent because faith comes by hearing the truth. Scripture has alone the power to totally transform the human soul, to give it life. We are begotten again by the Word of Truth. We are given life through the glorious revelation of the gospel in Scripture. That's the first thing

he says about Scripture.

The second thing in verse 7, the testimony of the Lord, or the statutes of the Lord...this is sort of a word that means God's own self-disclosure. When you look at the Bible, you can view it as a manual for our lives. You can also see it as God's self-disclosure. It's God giving His testimony of who He is. And as such, it is sure or trustworthy.

One time I was visiting a Los Angeles Public Library and they had, I don't know, how many millions of volumes there. And I just stopped, I was a student at the time in seminary, and I just wanted to have a little conversation with the librarian and I just asked the question...which of the books in this library that are absolutely without error, completely and totally and absolutely true? She looked at me like...what? That's not the point of a library. It's to give you options. And obviously she was stunned by the question. I said, “Well, Ma'am, you only have one in here and it's the Bible.” In a world of lies and deceptions, in a world of people being fortified in destructive and damning error, there's only one source of truth that can deliver them. Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, “The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly.” You cannot liberate souls from their prisons, their ideological prisons with human weapons.

Paul says we're engaged in a struggle against...and he uses the word in 2 Corinthians 10, “fortresses,” same word in the Greek for prisons. Because people's fortifications, their ideological fortifications become their prisons. What are these ideologies? He says in the same passage, “Any idea raised up against the true knowledge of God, any unbiblical idea is a damning, dooming fortification.” And what do we do? We assault those fortifications and we bring those people out of those fortifications and we leave them captive to Christ. We are spiritual liberators. That's what evangelism is. And it's a mental battle, not an emotional one. How do you attack the errors in which people are imprisoned? Only one way to attack error, what is it? Truth...you bring the power of the Word of God to bear because it's sure. And look at this, it says it makes simple people wise. I love the Hebrew word “simple.” You know what it means? Open door, that's what it means. It's actually a very, very practical word, an open door. A simple person was like an open door, couldn't keep anything in, couldn't keep anything out. You hear people say, “I have an open mind.” Well the Hebrew would say, “Close it.” You need to keep some things out and some things in. This is a word for discernment. Sometimes you hear somebody say, “Ah, well I'm an agnostic.” Well the Latin equivalent is ignoramus, I've never heard anybody say “I'm an ignoramus.” I don't know, I just let everything in and everything out.

How do you know what to keep? How do you know when to close the door? The Word of God takes the people who have no discernment and no wisdom and makes them...what?...wise. Wise is *chakam* in Hebrew; it means "skilled in discernment in living." The Word of God totally transforms the whole inner person. The Word of God also enables the person who has been transformed to know the truth to have discernment and to live wisely.

Verse 8 gives us two more. The precepts of the Lord, principles, doctrines is what's in view here. You can look at the Bible as laws for life, you can look at the Bible as God's own testimony which is sure and reliable. You can look at the Bible as principles, as doctrines. And he says they're right. Now that's right not in the sense of right as opposed to wrong, that's obvious, but in the sense of setting a right course. That's the word. It's the rightness of going down the right path. We read a little earlier the law of the Lord is a light and a lamp to my path. Well it is not only the law of the Lord that is the light and the lamp, it is actually the law of the Lord that sets the path. So he says the doctrines that the Lord has revealed in Scripture set the right path for life.

And what is the effect of this? It rejoices the heart. It brings joy. Where do you find real joy? Walking in a righteous path. Jesus said, “Happy is the person who hears My Word and does it.” John says in 1 John, “These things I write unto you that your joy may be full.”

Look, God has given you a phenomenal mechanism and every human being has it. It's called a conscience. And its purpose is to affirm you or condemn you. And we all know the experience of a guilty conscience. But when you walk in the righteous path, your conscience excuses you rather than accuses you and you experience the joy of an obedient life. The Word of God provides that for you.

I love what the Apostle Paul said when he was being just maligned brutally by the false teachers who had come into the church at Corinth where he had given so much of his life and what they wanted to do was teach heresy. They wanted to overturn the gospel and have people believe lies. And in order to pull that off, they had to cause the people to lose their trust in Paul who was their teacher. And so, in order to do that, they came into Corinth and they started an ad hominem assault on the Apostle Paul and they just ripped and shredded him any way they could. They said he had a secret life of hidden sin and shame. They said he was in the ministry for favors from women. They said he did it for the money. They said his speech was contemptible, his personality unimpressive. They just went after him with everything they could. And this is the answer that he gave. “My conscience is clear.”

Wow, that's where you want to live, isn't it? You want to live with a clear conscience. You don't want to live with an accusing conscience. You walk in the path of righteousness, they can throw their arrows and their darts, they can fire their weapons at you, but your conscience is clear. He says, “My conscience is clear,” 2 Corinthians 1:12, “that I have lived in godly sincerity before you and before God.” You walk that way, your life will be filled with joy.

The second one in verse 8, the commandment of the Lord. This views Scripture as mandates, absolute commands. If you're here you understand authority and you understand commands. Not everybody in our culture does, but Scripture is not suggestions but commandments.

Notice it says they are pure or clear, I don't know what your translation says. The word is lucid or clear. That is to say the Scripture is not unclear. There's a very, very fast developing movement in evangelicalism today that denies the perspicuity of Scripture. Perspicuity is an old theological word for clarity. And what they're saying today is, “Oh, yeah, we believe the Bible is the Word of God and we honor the Bible and all of that. But hey, it's not clear. It's an old book, we really can't know what it means. It's very difficult to interpret so let's not get caught up in doctrine because it's not that clear anyway.”

Well that is frankly to deny the testimony of Scripture itself. The commandment of the Lord is clear. Why would God give you commands that aren't clear? I mean, that's pointless. It is crystal clear. As a result of being so clear, it enlightens your eyes. You read the Word of God and its clarity will penetrate your mind and heart if you are a believer. You have to start with the transformation then comes the discernment and the wisdom, then comes the joy then comes the enlightenment.

Some missionaries from our church in Brigham City, Utah, tough duty, trying to win people to Christ. They had two beautiful daughters and a son. They decided to come down to our church. They wanted to hear the choir with us. They were in a little small church in a hard missionary field, John and Nora Romanosky, gathered up their two daughters and their one son and a foreign exchange student from Europe who was staying in their home. They were trying to win him for Christ. Came down to our church on Sunday and Monday they wanted to go out to the Master's College to enroll their daughters. Went out there. On the way back, I don't know how, John pulled into an intersection against a red light, a truck coming down the hill very fast hit the car, catapulted the two girls out the back window, both dead lying in the street. A horrific experience.

The boys ended up in critical care. John and Nora escaped the serious injuries because the truck hit behind the front seat. I talked to John within a few moments after that. I said, “What are you thinking, John.” My first thought is, “Maybe it's just a dream but I know that's not true.” He said, “My second thought is, well I wanted my girls to hear a big choir, I just didn't think it would be the angelic one.” And then he said this, “I'm so glad it took those two girls that know Christ and spared that boy that doesn't know Christ.” Now how can you see that clearly in that crisis? Because Scripture says you have hope in His Word, right? You know where those girls are, rejoicing in the presence of the Lord. You know where that young man would have been, out of the presence of God forever. That's clarity....that's clarity.

Old Bishop Bergerov(?) was asked one time, “Can you explain death to me?” Some parishioner asked him. He said, “Sure. One day there was a man in a village, said to his wife...I've got to go to another village, do some business, be back before the sun goes down.” Had a little five-year-old boy. The little boy said, “Can I go with you?” He said sure, love to have you. Grabbed his little hand, off they went in the morning sun. Came to the river, recent rain swollen, washed the bridge out. All that is left are pilings. He looks at this and says, “I think I can make it.” Grabs the little guy by the wrist,

dangles him over the torrent, steps from piling to piling. Gets him, throws him on the shore, makes it.

He goes off. Does his business, takes longer than expected. By the time they start back, clouds have filled the sky, it's pitch black. As they walk back and the little boy starts to cry and his father who is holding his hand in the darkness says, “Why are you crying?” He said, “We'll never make it across the river, we'll never make it.” The Bishop said the peasant reached down, picked the little guy up, pressed him to his chest. In a moment he was sound asleep in his father's arms. Next thing he knew, he woke up in his own bed, in his own house. Bishop Bergerov(?) said, “That's what our hope is in Christ. What you fear you never experience, you fall asleep and wake up in the arms of Jesus.”

Where do you get that hope? Let me tell you, folks, if I have that hope I can take anything this life brings...anything. Many of you cadets will put your life on the line as many before you have. You need to have that hope burning brightly in your heart.

Verse 9, the fear of the Lord. What is that? That's a way to view Scripture. What do you mean fear? What does it mean to fear God? We did it this morning. What's another word for fearing God? Worship, adoration, exaltation, praise. The Bible is a manual on worship. It is the law how we are to live. It is God's self-disclosure. It is the doctrines that are right. It is the commandments that are mandated of us and it also is the manual on worship. The Bible has all these facets and, I love this, it is clean. That is to say it is flawless, it is unstained. Everything that is human has a measure of corruption, doesn't it? But not the Scriptures. That's why it endures forever, the effect, that's why it endures forever because it doesn't die, it can't die. Every word of God is pure, every word of God is pure. And because it's pure, it endures forever. The Word of God lives forever.

What does that tell you? Any culture, any time, any nation, any period, the Word of God is relevant. I hear people say, “Ah, you know, the Bible is not really relevant to the modern day.” You know, I've been all over the world, most places many, many times through my life. I've been in the jungles of certain places, sophisticated, elite universities of other places in the world and everywhere I go, do the same thing. Open the Word of God and let it loose. It's like a lion, you don't defend it, you let it out. It's okay on its own. It's powerful. It endures forever. It is always relevant to every person in every period of time in every place in the world in every language.

Well, the last comment on Scripture, but not quite my last, the judgments of the Lord. This says Scripture is divine adjudications from the judge of all the earth, the one who sits on the bench. It renders God's judgments and they are clearly laid out in Scripture both in the past and what is to come. The judgments of the Lord are true. I love that. I love that. Truth is what I love. I get up in the morning for the truth. I go to sleep at night only so that I can get rest to get up the next morning for the truth. Everything is about truth. I wrote a book not too long ago called *The Truth War*. It is a war about the truth in the world. And the Word of God is absolutely true...absolutely true. Everything is true that Scripture states. And as a result, please look at verse 9, “These words of Scripture, these

judgments of the Lord are righteous altogether." You have some kind of translation like that. Simply means they produce comprehensive righteousness because they are true. The Bible will tell you the way it really is.

I went in to a philosophy class at California State University at the invitation of the philosophy professor who was a former rabbi who had abandoned his Judaism for an agnostic position, and was teaching philosophy. And, of course, if you're an agonistic, you're a perfect philosopher because to be a qualified philosopher, you have to just look, you never have to find the truth. If you found the truth, you know, the search would be over, class would be dismissed, that would be it. So he invited me to the class and he said, "I want you to talk on biblical standards of sexual morality."

Now there's a popular class at a university. That will be a winner. I said, "Sure." So I went into the class and I said, "It's a pleasure to be with you students today and I am going to tell you what the Bible says about sexual morality, but before I do that, I just want to let you know one other thing...you're not going to accept what I say. You're not going to like what I say because you're incapable of responding to it." I just wanted to generate a little collegiate rebellion there. What do you mean I'm incapable of responding to it? I said, "Well, Scripture says the natural man understands not the things of God and to him they are foolishness because they're spiritually discerned and you're all spiritually dead."

They kind of chuckled a little bit like you did. So I said, "I think we probably need to talk about how you become spiritually alive so that you can really understand what I'm saying." One student in some of the course of this said, "How do you know we won't understand?" And I said, "Well let me tell you a way you can really understand." I just gave them the gospel for the next half hour...which made Rabbi Kramer squirm, as you would imagine. But that was really the truth. There's no way to get a comprehensive world view apart from embracing the truth written and incarnate...no way, that produces comprehensive righteousness.

I remember saying to the class, "You should be glad that I'm here today because I can tell you the truth about everything you want to know. Origins, tell you how we got here. Consummation, I'll tell you how the whole world is going to end. I can tell you what is true about life, death, right, wrong. I can tell you what's true about relationships, how parents ought to act, children ought to act, spouses ought to act. I can tell you all the truth you want to know.

And, of course, they're saying, "Is this guy crazy? What kind of a person is this?" But you don't understand any of it unless you've embraced the truth through the living truth, Christ, and the written truth, Scripture.

Well more to be said about that, but let's leave that. Okay? This is God's own testimony to the sufficiency of Scripture. It is perfect, sure, right, clear, clean, true. It totally transforms the whole inner

person, makes the undiscerning and naive skilled in wisdom, both understood and applied. It produces a true and deep and lasting joy. It makes the dark things clear. It enlightens the eyes. It is eternally relevant, enduring forever and produces comprehensive righteousness.

What do you want out of life? I think most people would like to be transformed totally. The Word does it. I think people would like to be wise and have true discernment. The Word of God provides it. I know people want joy. I know they want clarity on the dark things of life. I think people want a relevant source of truth. And I think people want to be, to borrow an army phrase, all that they can be. The Word of God does it all and that is why the Psalmist said this, “These words are more desirable than gold, yes than fine gold. Sweeter than honey in the drippings of the honeycomb. Their desirable and they're sweet. Scripture is your greatest possession, more important than gold. It's your greatest pleasure, sweeter than honey. It's your greatest protector, verse 11, it is by the Word of God that you are warned about what will destroy you. It is your greatest provider. In keeping it there is great reward. It is your greatest purifier. Who can discern his errors, acquit me of hidden faults, keep me back from presumptuous sins, don't let them rule over me, don't let me fall into great transgression. The Scripture...says David...I hid in my heart that I might not...what?...sin.

Yes it's your greatest possession, your greatest pleasure, your greatest protection, your greatest provider, your greatest purifier. And so the Psalmist ends with this, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation in my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

Why does he say that? What does he mean by that? It seems a little bit distant from the point which is all about the Scripture, but it isn't. He's borrowing from Joshua 1, and you look at Joshua 1:8, we're going to close there, Joshua 1...in fact, let's look at verses 7 to 9, I'm just going to read them to you. This is a place that you ought to find yourself often resetting your life.

Let's start in verse 7. “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law My servant Moses gave you. Do not turn from it to the right, or to the left that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth.” What's the next word? “Meditate.” There's mouth and meditate, back to back. “Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it, then you will have prosperity and success.” Have I not commanded you, be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. When you take the Word in, the Lord comes along with all His power. You see, that is what's behind Psalm 19. Go back to that verse, that last verse, let me make just one comment, it says this, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” How can our words be acceptable? How can our meditations be acceptable when this book of the law does not depart from our mouths, but we meditate on it day and night? Then it's acceptable and we enjoy His presence and His power.

Our, Father, we thank You for the greatness of Your truth. We pray, Lord, that You will seal this great text to our hearts and out of it may there come glory to Your name as we live in response to it, for the sake of Christ. Amen.

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