

Psalm 19

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[0 : 00] We are riding on a wave of Olympic euphoria. I think it's confirmed that third place in the medals table is guaranteed for Team GB. Caught up over these past couple of weeks in a sporting gold rush. A generation is, as we speak, being inspired. The national feel-good factor is hitting record heights. Now, in that context, you might reasonably presume that the minister would catch the mood and seek to inspire, if not a generation, at least a congregation. Well, you presume wrong.

This morning, I want to talk about sin. Sin is far from inspiring. Sin sucks. But sin, unlike nebulous feel-good factors, is very real and needs to be understood in order to be tackled.

Now, in my defense, the subject matter has been somewhat imposed on me by the need to conclude our consideration of Psalm 19. Last week, we got as far as verse 11, and I indicated that this morning we would continue with the concluding verses. Now, in the event, as I gave some thought to the concluding verses, even the concluding verses we're going to deal with in two sermons, and the second of those two, not this evening, but next Sunday morning, all being well. But this morning, we're going to think about verses 12 and 13, where the psalmist talks about sin. He talks about his own sin.

And as he talks about it and touches on it, so we too, as we consider it, must do likewise. Now, in what has gone before in the psalm, David, with verve and beauty, has helped us hear the voice of creation singing the praise of its Creator. He has elevated us to even higher planes as he celebrates with delight and wonder the spoken Word of God and points us forward to the Word made flesh, the altogether perfect One who revives the soul and gives joy to the heart. And then he has to spoil it by bringing to our unwelcome attention the ugly reality of sin. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me.

What can we learn in these two verses concerning sin? The problem of sin and the solution for sin, or if you wish, sin's reality and sin's remedy. Both of these are dealt with in these verses in Psalm 19.

[3 : 24] We're going to begin with the problem of sin. Sin is a big problem and, not surprisingly, a big subject. And this morning I will limit myself, or intend to limit myself, to what we can learn about sin in what the psalmist declares in our text, which evidently is not, not as intended to be, an exhaustive treatment of the subject. That said, even in these two verses, the psalmist does introduce significant truths concerning sin that we can note and, in a measure, develop.

I want to suggest that there are five characteristics or traits of sin that we can find in the words of the psalmist in verses 12 and 13 of Psalm 19. There may be more, but there are five that I've identified and want to talk about in the light of the text this morning. And I'll mention what they are, and then we can think of them each in turn before moving on to that fundamental matter of sin's remedy, the solution for sin, sin in all its multifaceted characteristics. But what are these characteristics?

Well, first of all, I want to suggest that the psalmist makes it clear that sin is universal. We'll explain what we mean by these things in a moment. First of all, then, it's universal, but also that it's ingrained. Another thing we can say about it that we draw from these verses is that sin is senseless. Sin is powerful. And finally, sin is serious. Universal, ingrained, senseless, powerful, and serious. We perhaps need to take a very brief step back and make clear what sin is before describing some of its traits. Now, clearly, in describing the traits, we will be covering that question, what is sin? But even before doing that, just very briefly to answer that question, what is sin?

Sin is variously described in the Bible, but is essentially rebellion against God manifested in disobedience to His law. There is a story told, and I can't vouch for its authenticity, but there's a story told of the great American evangelist D. L. Moody, who came over to the U.K. on a famous preaching tour, and he was preaching in Scotland. And in full flow, he launched the rhetorical question, what is sin? And quick as a flash, a wee boy in the audience piped up, sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God, which is the Shorter Catechism answer to that question.

In other words, sin is disobedience to or falling short of God's law, or if you wish of God's will for us. If you remove God, you remove the possibility of sin. Without God, there is no one to rebel against.

[6 : 39] But back to the traits of sin identified by or hinted at by the psalmist. And the first one that I said or anticipated commenting on was that it is universal. It's universal. There are very few things that I could state with absolute confidence about this fine body of people before me. Each and every one of you, by the way, that's the fine body of people I'm referring to. I could state with a great measure of confidence that you have all seen or heard something about the Olympics in this past week.

But even that I could not state with absolute confidence. But I can say with absolute confidence that you have all sinned in this past week.

Well, never mind me. What about the psalmist? Well, the psalmist, too, clearly holds to this conviction concerning the universality of sin. He, too, believes that everybody sins. Notice the implication of the question that he poses in verse 12, which is very much a personal question concerning his own problem, but it implies and carries within it convictions concerning the problem of sin universally. Who can discern his errors?

The psalmist actually goes beyond simply saying that we are all sinners. He takes it as a given that we are all guilty of errors or sins, and he further affirms our incapacity to recognize the extent of our sin. Who can discern his errors? The answer is very clear. Nobody can. Nobody. There is nobody in this whole big wide world who is able to even identify all of their sins, far less anybody who is free from sin. Sin is universal. Now, this, of course, is the unequivocal voice of Scripture. Nowhere stated more eloquently than by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Sin is universal. You are a sinner. I am a sinner.

[9 : 15] We are all sinners. Sin is a problem, and your sin is also a problem. But in these verses, there's another trait of sin that the psalmist identifies, and that is what I mentioned a moment ago, that it's ingrained.

David's recognition that he is incapable of discerning his errors, and his parallel reference to hidden faults where hidden faults where hidden is to be understood as hidden from David's capacity to recognize, as we were commenting with the children just a little earlier. This points to or evidences this trait of sin, that it is ingrained, so ingrained that David cannot discern the extent of his sin.

He's not able to identify. He can't, at the end of the day, sit down with a piece of paper and say, right, I'm going to write down all the sins that I committed today. He could make a stab at it. Not a bad exercise for us to ponder on the way we're living, but he would fall short. He wouldn't be able to identify them all. Sin is so ingrained in his very identity and personality that he would be unable to exhaustively identify the many ways in which he had fallen short, in the many ways in which he had transgressed God's law. Sin is ingrained. Sin lies at the very core of our being. It is an integral part of our spiritual DNA. We are corrupt not so much to the core as from the core.

A cheery message for the closing day of the Olympics. But does David really believe this, or are we putting an unwarranted and unduly miserable slant on his words? There in verse 12, who can discern his errors, forgive my hidden faults? Are we drawing too much from these words of David? Well, listen to David himself as he describes himself before God in the psalm that we sung a few moments ago. Psalm 51 from verse 3, For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me against you. You only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Why is this? Why is sin so ingrained? The Bible takes us to the Garden of Eden for an answer to this question, an answer that is developed and explained by Paul in the passage that we read in Romans chapter 5. The heart of the matter is to understand that Adam and Eve represented the human race in their disobedience. Adam in particular acts as the representative head of humanity, and we are part of that humanity. And so when Adam fell, all fell. Again, listen to Paul, verses that we've already read in Romans chapter 5. Therefore, as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all sinned. And then he goes on in verse 19, Through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners. Paul states the truth most succinctly in his letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15 of his first letter, in Adam, all die. The doctrine that encompasses these first two traits of sin that are referred to, or at the very least hinted at by David in the psalm, its universality and its ingrained nature, is a doctrine known as original sin. And the word there is used in the sense of that sin is derived from our origin. It's a term that we don't find in the Bible. It was coined by Augustine, but though the language is not biblical in that sense, the concept certainly is. Again, if we turn to our catechism, and in question 16, it answers succinctly on this matter concerning original sin and the effects of the effects of it, the covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself but for his posterity, all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. It is important to clarify that sin is universal and ingrained in the human condition from the point of the fall. It was not and is not intrinsic to human nature as created by God.

Sin is an intruder, but an intruder that holds man in a vice-like grip. Sin is universal. So, sin is universal. It's ingrained. But we can further say, on the basis of what the psalmist speaks here in these verses, that sin is senseless.

[14 : 56] Before going to our text and drawing from it where it is or in what way the psalmist makes this claim, I just want to notice with you how in the New Testament several words are used for sin.

One of these words is the word *anomia*, the Greek word *anomia*. Now, the reason why I mention the Greek word is that it's very easy to identify an English word that is derived from it. It's the word *anomalous*.

The word *anomia*, translated sin, literally means without law or lawless. And so, we can understand the connection with that English word *anomalous*. Something that is *anomalous* is something that is contrary to law or reason or the established order of things. And Paul describes sin as lawless, as against reason, as *anomalous*. And sin is like that. It is without reason. It makes no sense.

And the psalmist, as we turn to our text, the psalmist captures that implicitly in his request of God that he be kept from willful sins. Then in verse 13, keep your servant also from willful sins. That is, from deliberate sin. Now, the question that I pose is this. How can it be? How can it be that a man who is able to hear creation sing the praises of God in the manner that the psalmist is able to?

A man who delights in God's laws, that which is more precious than gold and sweeter than honey. A man whose highest desire is to please God, as he goes on to say in the final verse. A man who knows God as his rock and redeemer. How can such a man sin willfully, deliberately? See, it makes no sense.

[16 : 56] It happens, but it makes no sense. We can conceive of such a man sinning inadvertently. We can conceive of those hidden faults that he speaks of. Yes, such a man could be guilty of hidden faults.

But that he would sin willfully and presumptuously, that he would sin consciously and deliberately, that he would so rebel against the one he describes as his Lord, his rock, and his redeemer, it makes no sense. It is anomalous. It is against law. It is entirely unreasonable. It makes no sense, but it is an accurate portrayal of the believer in his experience of sin. This is you, my believing friend. You too sin willfully. And you know that you do. You're conscious that you do. It makes no sense. It's a monstrous anomaly that a redeemed soul united to a risen Savior would commit an act of lawlessness. And yet that is what we do. That is what David is conscious that he does, hence his cry for help. Keep your servant also from willful sins. This is what I do. I don't want to do it. I need your help to be kept from deliberate, willful, conscious sin. The Apostle Paul, with honesty and with anguish, grapples with this reality in Romans chapter 7, or he shares with us his struggles in that chapter.

We know the words well, the good that I would do, I do not. And the evil that I would not, that I do. This is not to excuse sin, but it is to recognize its senseless character. Sin is senseless.

But we have to move on. Sin also is powerful. This too comes out from our text. David is very conscious of the power of sin. He speaks of the danger and the reality indeed of sin ruling over him. Keep your servant from willful sin. May they not rule over me. Now, I'm sure when he asks of God that sin would not rule over him, he's not just thinking about some theoretical possibilities.

He's recognizing that this has been his experience, that sin has ruled over him. He's not happy with that. He rebels against that, but he's conscious that he has experienced that, and he is fearful that he will once again be ruled over by sin. And so he cries out to God, may sin not rule over me. He has experienced, the psalmist has experienced sin's power in his own experience and is conscious of his own inability to break its hold over him, hence his cry for help.

[20 : 04] The power of sin is one that grows in the measure that we are careless in resisting sin, in the measure that we are careless in seeking help in the face of temptation. It begins with a careless glance. It germinates as we play with it in our thoughts. It begins to take hold as we flirt with it, and before we realize, it has taken control. I don't know what came over me. I wasn't myself.

I don't recognize myself. I want to stop, but I can't. Do any of these thoughts or cries sound familiar to you? Sin is powerful. And I ask you soberly this morning, what sin rules over you?

What sin is beginning to tighten its claws around you? And here I could give a long list of possibilities, but I'm not going to do so. I simply leave the question with you. Sin is powerful. Sin has this tendency and capacity to rule over even the believer, and so I ask you to ponder and to examine yourself in this matter. To be ruled over by sin is an awful place to be. You, believing friend, are a subject of King Jesus, and yet under the rule of sin, this is beyond foolish. It's treasonable.

And so we must know our enemy. Know your enemy. Underestimate the power of sin at your own peril. But there's a final trait of sin that we find referred to or hinted at in the words of the psalmist here in our text, and that is that it's serious. Well, given all that we've said, this is hardly a startling revelation, but let me just develop it very briefly. Sin is serious. Sin carries, serious, serious consequences. The psalmist in these verses envisages the possibility of innocence recovered and blame removed. He says, then I will be blameless, innocent of the great transgression.

But implicit in that hopeful vision is the recognition that in the absence of divine help, sin is guilty. He is guilty. He is to blame for the manner in which he has broken God's law, for the manner in which he has fallen short of God's will for him. Sin carries with it guilt before God.

[22 : 46] Sin alienates us from God. Sin places us under the wrath of God. Sin kills. It kills us spiritually, and undealt with it kills us eternally. The wages of sin is death. Sin is serious. The popular conception of sin, certainly the word sin, is a very trivial one. It's just a bit of fun. It's harmless.

It's no big deal. Even this morning as we came in to church, and we were listening to the news on the radio, and there was talk of the Olympic Village, and with great hilarity it was being suggested, how many illicit affairs must be going on as people recover from their exertions in the Olympics, hopping from room to room and being unfaithful to their wives. Oh, and it was all very jolly, all very funny. Yes, isn't that a funny picture that's being painted? That is the popular conception of sin. But nothing could be further from the truth. Sin is serious. These then are some traits or characteristics of sin that we find in the words of David. It's universal. It's ingrained. It's senseless. It's powerful. It's serious. Sin is a problem. But sin has a solution.

And David identifies what we might call two solutions to the problem of sin, or perhaps more accurately, two aspects of God's solution to the problem of sin. Two things in particular that David highlights in these two verses. First of all, forgiveness. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

Our sin is against God, and so God, as the offended party, has the prerogative to forgive our sin. And it is a prerogative that he gladly exercises. This was the experience of the psalmist. This is why he calls out for forgiveness in confidence. And it is the eloquent testimony of Scripture. God is a God who delights in mercy. He is a God who enjoys forgiving. And so forgiveness lies at the heart of God's solution to the problem of sin. God forgives sin. And of course, it goes without saying, but it needs to be said.

And we delight in saying it. He can forgive your sin. He is able and willing to forgive your sin. You are a sinner. You have sinned against God in ways that you don't even know or can imagine.

[25 : 37] But he is able and willing to forgive you. So forgiveness is one aspect of God's solution. But another aspect of God's solution to the problem of sin is also identified by the psalmist, what we might call protection. In verse 13, keep your servant also from willful sins.

Here the psalmist is not seeking forgiveness. He's referring to sins that he hasn't committed. He's referring to a situation of domination under the power of sin that has not yet happened. And he's saying, protect me from that. Protect me from sinning. Protect me from coming under the rule of sin.

And so, part of God's solution, if you wish, to the problem of sin is his protection from it. Lead us not into temptation, in the words of the prayer that Jesus taught the disciples.

And we can and we must take hold of the forgiveness and the protection that God offers to those who seek it. So God's answer to the problem of sin, the solution for sin involves forgiveness, it involves protection. But I have a difficulty. And my difficulty is this. Is forgiveness of actual sin, which it would seem that David is referring to very clearly there in verse 12, and is protection from potential sin enough to merit the psalmist's bold conclusion? Then I will be blameless. The word blameless there is the same word that in verse 7 is translated perfect. Then I will be blameless. Then I will be perfect, innocent of great transgression. Do you understand the question? My question is this.

Forgiveness of actual sin, forgiveness of actual sin, and protection from potential sin, does that, or is that sufficient for the psalmist to be so confident that he can be blameless, that he can be innocent? You see, forgiveness of actual sins does nothing to deal with our corrupt core. Protection, welcome as it is, will never free us absolutely from sin in this life, as we will often fail to seek the protection graciously offered. There must be more to the solution if we are to enjoy the prospect of being truly blameless and innocent.

[28 : 12] And the reality is that we can only understand the all-encompassing solution for sin provided by God for us in the work of the Redeemer, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the only, holy, blameless one. He is the one that this psalm points to, the perfect, altogether righteous one who revives the soul. He is the one who deals definitively and exhaustively with the problem of sin.

And how does He do so? How does He provide the solution for sin? Well, He does so, Jesus does so, by acting as our representative head in His living of a perfect life and in His dying a sinner's death.

Just as Adam acted as our representative, and so in Adam we all fell. So, Jesus is described by Paul in the passage that we read there in Romans as the second Adam who secures our redemption. Now, this is a huge subject, but let's just fleetingly notice how Jesus, the second Adam, provides a solution to the very traits and characteristics of sin that we've considered. We've considered these characteristics.

Well, let's see how these characteristics of sin are dealt with by the work of Jesus. What did we say, first of all? We said that sin was universal, that all our sinners will be assured that the efficacy of the death of Christ in the place of sinners is universal. It is sufficient for all. If we note the language that Paul uses in this regard, they're in the same chapter that we've already read in Romans chapter 5. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. Or even more clearly, in 1 John in chapter 2 and verse 2, we read concerning Jesus, Jesus. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. Yes, sin is universal, but Jesus provides a universal solution. There is nobody, nobody in this big, wide world, nobody who can say, He can't help me. There is nobody who can say,

I'm too far gone. There is nobody who can claim to be beyond help or redemption, for the solution to sin provided by Jesus is a universal solution. That is not to say that all avail themselves of the solution, but it is to declare confidently that its efficacy is sufficient for all.

[31 : 12] So, the solution provided by God responds to that characteristic of sin. But we also said about sin that it's ingrained. How does the solution provided by Jesus deal with this aspect of the problem of sin? Well, it does so in this way that as we are brought to faith in Jesus Christ, we are given a new heart to replace the corrupt one. He gives us a new nature to replace the old corrupted one. Even the psalmist, who maybe doesn't explicitly make reference to that in the verses we're considering, but in the psalm that we've sung and that we will sing again, the concluding verses in Psalm 51, it's very clear that he is aware of this need for something that goes to the very core of his being.

And in Psalm 51, in verse 10, the psalmist cries out to God, create in me a pure heart. The psalmist is conscious that forgiveness of actual sins, wonderful though it is, is not sufficient. He needs a new heart. And that is what we are given. We are given a new heart. We are given a completely fresh start, a new beginning. The solution for sin secured by Jesus does not involve only the forgiveness of actual sins committed, but a complete new beginning. Hence the language of being born again, a new life.

And what a new life! Again, listen to how Paul describes it, I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

So the solution provided by God in Jesus deals with the ingrained nature of sin. We said also that sin was senseless. Well, the solution provided is a solution that restores the right order. It brings us individually to where we were meant to be. It makes us what we were created to be, men and women who can live lives that are pleasing to God. The solution ultimately will remove all lawlessness from the experience of the believer. And so though sin is senseless, the solution provided by God is one that responds also to that characteristic. We said also that sin is powerful. Well, we can be sure that the solution for sin provided by God in His Son, Jesus Christ, breaks the power of sin. Calvary, the cross, was a battleground where a mortal and decisive blow was dealt to Satan and where the power of sin was broken. And that victory was confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus and the believer. You and me, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, we are granted resurrection power to live a life freed from the power of sin.

Now, we do have a quandary or a difficulty in making this claim, because it is true.

[34 : 39] And it's a troubling mystery that sin remains in the experience of the Christian. It is very evident by David's words here in the psalm. Sin remains a pernicious presence in the life of the believer.

But we can affirm, though sometimes it may not appear to be so, that its power has been broken. And in time, in God's time, it will be history. Sin is, praise God, going, going, and soon to be gone.

But we finally noted, as we considered the characteristics of sin that we can draw from these verses in Psalm 19, we noted that sin is serious. And for a serious problem, we need a serious solution. And the saving work of Jesus as our representative head is a serious solution. It deals with the very root of the problem of sin. It covers every angle. It answers every question. It covers all the bases. Sin is a big problem, but Jesus is a massive solution. And we need serious solutions to the human condition.

We need serious solutions for our own lives and for our society. One of the more preposterous products of Olympic euphoria is the suggestion being seriously floated that if we could only get everybody doing sport, we would have the solution to a whole series of social ills, ranging from childhood obesity to youth gang culture and social isolation, and no doubt the list goes on. Now, I'm a believer, as far as sport is concerned, such is my fidelity to sport that I was willing to endure 90 grim, goalless minutes at Pataudry yesterday afternoon. So, don't say that I'm not interested in sport or I'm knocking sport. But let's get real. Sport is not nor never will be the answer for our broken society.

Jesus is. Jesus is. Jesus is. Jesus is a serious solution to a serious problem. Sin is a problem. Sin is a problem. It's a problem for all of us. It's a problem for you. Do you recognize it as a problem? Sin is universal, but a sense of sin is not. There are many who live oblivious to their sinful condition. You go through life thinking that all is well. Maybe that's you. But sin is a problem, and it's a problem for you. But there is, praise God, a solution to the problem of sin. Jesus and His finished work on the cross is the solution. The solution is there, available for all. And what you must do is what the psalmist does in this psalm. He recognizes his guilt, and he cries out to the Lord for help.

[38 : 04] And I would urge you, I would urge you all, to do likewise. Let us pray.