

Deuteronomy 29:29

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 June 1982

Preacher: Donald Macleod

[0 : 00] We shall turn again to the chapter we read, and the closing verse of the chapter, General Metair 29, reading at verse 29.

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things we will reveal belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Our greatest privilege as human beings is that God has revealed himself to us. And revelation is, in biblical terms, a process in which God draws aside the veil that obscures from us what he is and what he has accomplished and what he intends to accomplish still.

Revelation is literally God's unveiling of himself. To express the same idea a little more precisely, revelation means God telling us a little of what he knows about himself.

In other words, revelation always begins with God's knowledge of himself. And the glory of God's knowledge is not that God knows the universe exhaustively, because the universe is always finite.

[1 : 56] The glory of God's knowledge is that God knows himself exhaustively. And in revelation, God is sharing with man a little of what God knows about himself.

God himself is always the source of revelation. God always takes the initiative in revelation. God's revelation. That revelation arises, as I said, out of what God knows about himself.

And it consists in God sharing with us something of that knowledge. God's revelation is always adequate to our human needs.

In other words, God tells us all that it is necessary for us to know in order to our own salvation.

God has held nothing back that man needs to know. That is what we call the sufficiency of divine revelation.

[3 : 15] It is sufficient for all our redemptive needs. It is sufficient to know in order to know in the world.

It is sufficient to know in the world. But then, at the same time, revelation is never exhaustive. It is always sufficient for man, but it is never exhaustive.

In other words, God hasn't told us all that he knows about himself. And God hasn't given us a revelation in the material by which to answer every question that we ourselves are able to ask.

There are questions that we can formulate to which there is no answer in the revelation that God has given to us.

We know that at one level because God is infinite. And because our minds could not at all cope.

[4 : 34] If all the omniscience of God were poured into them. We know also that a man like Paul, for example, was given a broader revelation that he was permitted to sit down in writing.

He was raised up to the third heaven. And there he saw things lawful to be uttered. In other words, Paul didn't tell us all he had seen.

Or shared with us even all that he knew about God. And we have the same fact indicated also in this. That a day is promised to us when, by contrast with the present, we shall know even as also we are known.

Here we see through a glass darkly. But then we shall see face to face. Now it is this great lot of fact.

The fact of the limitedness of God's revelation. That is brought before us in the words of our text.

We are told that there are secret things which belong unto the Lord our God.

[5 : 56] And there are those things which are revealed. In other words, there are two great categories of truth. There are secret things.

And there are revealed things. And we have a different and distinct duty in relation to each of these. Let's look first of all at this.

We are told that there are secret things. There are things that God has kept to himself. There are great facts upon which God has chosen not to draw the veil.

He has kept them hidden. He has kept them obscured. There are questions we can ask which God's revelation was never intended to answer.

For example, we can ask, when will Christ come again? We can ask, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

[7 : 05] Those great questions of chronology with regard to events at the end of the world. When are these things going to be? When is Christ going to come?

When is the end going to suddenly be upon us? And the answer, says Christ himself, is, Of that day and that hour, Knoweth no man, Know not the angels in heaven, Neither the Son but the Father.

We can say and say very solemnly, That we're living in the last days. We can say, Christ is coming in our time.

But the moment we say that, We have gone beyond the bounds of God's revelation. Those are things that God has kept, says the Lord, In his own power.

It tells us, No man knows why the Son of Man is coming again. The angels themselves don't know Why Christ is coming again.

[8 : 15] And even the Son of Man, says the Lord, Even he doesn't know the chronology. Christ himself and his human nature Was not privy to that information.

The great principle involved here Is that God revealed to Christ as prophet Only what Christ needed to know In order to be God's revealer And his people's teacher.

And God did not see fit Even to tell the great prophet Christ When he was going to come again. And God did not see fit to reveal it Because it had not the least bearing Upon our salvation.

It was not an important item of information. It had no connection at all With our progress in grace. With our movement towards Being in glory with Lord Jesus.

So we can ask When are these things going to be? But the only answer we'll get Is that is one of the sacred things.

[9 : 35] That's one of those things that God has kept In his own power. And it is the height of folly And of presumption On any man's part To endeavor to lay down a time scale For things that God has chosen Not to reveal.

We have no right to waste our energy Asking that kind of question. Because it is One of God's great secrets. God knows But God has chosen not to tell us.

God hasn't drawn the veil Upon this particular question. Take another question. Are there few that be saved?

A question put to Christ himself. How many are elect? How many is God determined to save? And we can put it otherwise and say Will Christ have the majority?

Will more be saved than will be lost? When it comes to God's final assessment of mankind. And that is a very interesting question.

[10 : 48] And it's one we ask Sometimes under pressure Because we look at The state of God's cause And we say The church is only A tiny minority. A struggling minority.

And we say If God is so powerful And if God is so loving Then Why are there so few saved? And is it not Possible that in the last analysis Grace Grace will have More on its side Than the devil has On his side?

Now God has given us Certain hints We know that Where sin abounded Grace will much more abound We know for a certainty That the elect of God Is not a tiny constituency We know that at last

They will be innumerable As the stars in the sky And the sand upon the seashore And it may be May be that we can speculate And maybe entertain Some kind of personal hope That Christ will

have the majority But we can never stand On the rock of the rock Of the rock of holy scripture And say that the Bible says That Christ Will have the majority The Lord's own answer One answer to

that question Was this Strive to enter in

Don't to vex your soul As to the numerics And the proportions Of this great question But make your own Calling in your election Sure Strive Make an effort To ensure that at last You at least are In the

fold Of the Lord Jesus Christ And let me go on beyond that We may ask again How can God Hold us responsible We have those great facts Of divine sovereignty And human accountability We know

In our own consciousness That God has foreordained Whatsoever Comes to pass We know that Not a sparrow falls

Without your heavenly father We know that Fortuitous and accidental events Like the fall of the dice That these are under divine For ordination We know that Men's Free decisions We know that Men's evil decisions We know that These lie within God's For ordination We know that The king's heart Is in the hand Of the Lord We know that Absolutely everything Lies within God's decree Within God's plan Within God's For ordination And yet we know that And yet we know also That God holds men Accountable For all their actions We know that God Holds politicians Accountable

[14 : 28] For all their actions We know that God Holds Judas Accountable For his betrayal Of the Lord Jesus Christ We know that God Holds you and me Accountable For our unbelief And yet We have the objection If God has foreordained All these things How can God Hold us accountable Remember in Romans 9 How Paul faces that question He has the imagined objector Saying to his argument How did he then Find fault Because no one Ever assists God's will No one ever does But those things That God foreordains And how then Does God hold them Responsible How can God Blend them for doing

What God himself Has ordained Now that is the Biblical form Of the objection It was an objection That man could bring Against Paul's own theology And yet Paul's only answer Is this Nay but o man Who art thou That replyest Against God In other words Paul has no answer Except to bring us Face to face With the majesty And the sovereignty Of God Paul doesn't have a theory By which he can explain How God can hold men Responsible For doing what he himself Has forwarded For doing what he is You put a minister On to any Panel Expose that man To questions

And people will ask Invariably How can you reconcile God's foreordination With human responsibility And the man Who endeavors In the name Of theology In the name Of revelation In the name Of the word Of God To answer That question Is going Beyond his mandate Because there is No biblical answer One can endeavor Certain kinds Of philosophical Answers And certain kinds Of metaphysical Answers But one can ever Stand and say Here is the Teaching of God's Word As to the Compatibility Of divine Foreordination And human Accountability All we can say On the basis Of God's Word Is that both

Of these Great principles Are true God has Forordained Whatsoever Comes to pass And God Holds man Responsible For all His actions These are Great biblical Principles They can be Proven Each on Its own Independent Evidence But there is No biblical Theory Of the Relationship Between them That is A secret Thing It is a Thing That belongs To the Lord Oh God In other Words There is A logic And there Is a Reason There is A resolution Of that Dilemma But it is One that God has Chosen Not revealed To us And it is A challenge To our Own Piety To our Own Submission To the Word of God That our Reflection Will stop At the Point where Revelation Itself Stops That we Shall Recognize That this Is indeed A secret Let me Go beyond That still People ask How can I know That I Am Elect And very Often they Want to Know it When they Are challenged With the Word of The gospel They More Than less Say That if Only they Knew They were Elect Then they Would come To Christ And they Become Christians They want To know Am I Elect They want To know Is their Name written In the Lamb's Book of Life And they Want to Know Before they Become Believers They want

[19 : 31] To know Because they Say that Is the Only Warrant They have To come To the Lord And yet We cannot Know That is One Of God's Great Secrets We cannot Know before We come To Christ Are we Elect We cannot See Whose name Is written In the Lamb's Book of Life Because the Only sign Of election Is our Own faith In Christ And there Can be no Sign of Election Before our Faith But otherwise The warrant That I have To come Tonight To Christ Is not That I Elect No Man Comes to Christ On the Basis of Us being Elect But you Come to Christ

On another Basis You come To Christ On the Basis of Being Called They Are you I May be To Some Here Tonight And it May be Very Doubtful To them Whether Or not They Are elect But there Is one Thing Of which There is No doubt and that is that you are called. And it is upon that great and indubitable fact that you are to rest and upon which you are to act. You are to come to Christ not because you know you're elect but because you know that you are called. And that calling is extended tonight to every single individual in this congregation. It is an indiscriminate call.

It's a call to the elderly. It's a call to the children. It's a call to the backslider. It's a call to the apostate.

[21 : 36] It's a call to those who have led prodigal lives. It's a call to those who have led the lives of Pharisees.

It's a call to those who sometimes have tended to conclude that they have put themselves beyond the reach of the gospel. A call to those who argue that they have led the day of grace past. there is a road from wherever you are to Christ. There is a call to wherever you are from Christ. There is a command to me all that labor under heavy laden. It's not a call to those convinced of their own sin.

Or a call to those who know they are elect. Or a call to those who feel that they are prepared. It's a call to every man and to every woman.

[22 : 41] A call that says Christ is dead for you. To quote the old moral theology of Scotland Christ is dead for you.

There is a crucified Savior for you to come to from wherever you are and whoever you are there is a road from where and a road from who you are to the Lord and to Savior.

Not because you elect but because you called. Let me put it otherwise. Remember Rabbi Duncan's great principle.

Sin, he said, is the handle by which I get Christ. You ask me how can I know that Christ wants me? And how can I know that Christ will receive me? Because I don't know if I'm elect. I don't feel convinced of sin.

[23 : 51] And I don't feel declared. And I don't feel interested. And I don't feel my heart. I don't feel it strangely warmed to use John Wesley's phrase.

I feel none of those things. Well, as the Duncan supposed you were a sinner. Sin is the handle by which a soul gets Christ.

The marvel of God's gospel that every sinner is called. Not convinced sinners. Not interested sinners.

Not prepared sinners. But sinners are called as sinners. And I would say you make that you handle to get Christ.

You may try to get your heart broken. You may try to get your heart warmed. You may try to work up some interest beyond the current level of your interest.

[25 : 01] But all those things that are relevant has come because you're called. Called because a sinner. There are all those secret things.

when will Christ come again? Are they few that be saved? How can you reconcile God's foreordination with man's responsibility?

How can a man know that he's elect? All these are secret things. Let me add to them one thing more. That is the mystery of our own providence.

Now sometimes that is a real mystery. sometimes God's road is inexplicable. The losses we are to endure.

The pain we are to suffer. The changes in our circumstances. The severance of relationships. Our hopes disappointed.

[26 : 04] Our fears realized. Movement into many providences. places in which we seem less useful to God.

Than in the sphere in which we were. Times when it is so difficult. To say with the apostle Paul. I have learned in whatever state I am.

Therewith to be content. And sometimes our hearts are saying why. the kind of why that the psalmist uttered in Psalm 22.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? The great why of man in Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Although for him that why was the why of a unique agony from a far country. but sometimes we too are saying why.

[27 : 07] Lord, why this thorn? Lord, why this pain? Lord, why this sterility and why this uselessness in my life?

I cannot see that this pain is bearing any fruit, is having any sanctifying effect, is increasing in any way my usefulness in the service of thy kingdom.

Why? And sometimes it's a secret. Sometimes to that why there is no more answer than Christ God to his why from the far country.

There was only the silence of heaven and the silence of the word of God. And sometimes the awful loneliness as we feel lost in that vast and meaningless and pathless universe.

Remember how it was with Job. How difficult it was for him to understand. And how his friends wrestled with a problem and came up with all kinds of religious arguments.

[28 : 25] they were so distasteful. That he said they were only miserable comforters. They were only aggravating his sense of despair and that terrible bitterness which is Job's great contribution to the revelation of practical religion.

That man tells us how bitter a Christian can feel. How far from God. How forsaken by God. How lost and how bewildered and how pained and grieved and tormented by all the pseudo answers of a shallow pastoral theology.

And he remembered the only place where he finds comfort. Lord I have heard of thee with a hearing of the ear but now mine eye seeth thee wherefore I abhor myself and repent of my bitterness and of my impatience in dust and ashes.

Now you bear in mind Job got no answers to his questions. None of his wives got answers.

[29 : 56] The only comforted God was mine eye seeth thee. He could have a vision of the God who reigned, a vision of the God who cared, of the God of infinite compassion and the God of infinite wisdom.

And he knew that in God all the questions found answers and all the antinomies were resolved. that's where he found his peace, not in propositions but in a vision.

And sometimes all we've got in the valley of the shadow of death, all we have is the assurance that the Lord is my shepherd and the lamb is in the midst of the throne.

and there is no else. There are no answers. There is nothing responding to a why out of what seems an infinite silence, an infinite vastness.

But there is always that. The Lord doth reign, the lamb on the throne, and the Lord shepherding. that's what one must cling to when we do court is higher, when we walk in darkness, and there is no light.

[31 : 30] Well, that's a terrible place, when there is no light. It is such a place, one might say, as life would be impossible in.

How can there be life without light? It's a road that some of God's children sometimes have to walk. I road that tonight may seem very distant and very remote from many of us, not least myself and our prosperity.

But there are tonight some of God's children in it, in a darkness that may be felt. And they are asking why, and maybe screaming why, and there is no answer.

The only assurance and consolation they can have is that mine eye seeeth thee, and if they can't cling to that, let them trust in the name of the Lord, even when there are no propositional answers to our questions.

things. There are then, says the prophet here, there are secret things, there are limited revelation that you and I have to recognize. But then he says, secondly, there are also those things which are revealed, revealed unambiguously, and emphatically, clearly and clearly.

[33 : 07] And let me go quickly through some of the most important of these. I think the point I want to begin there is this, this great question that you have in verse 24 of this chapter.

Now you bear in mind that the last verse of the chapter is the summation of the Lord's answer to that question.

There was the Old Testament church, and that church was going through all kinds of tribulation. The whole land thereof is brimstone in verse 23, that land which the Lord overthrew in his anger and in his wrath.

And the nations are asking, why has God, has Jehovah done this to his own church? And what is the meaning of the heat of God's anger against his own church?

Why then today that we have cause to ask the same question with regard to the state of God's cause in this land of ours?

[34 : 28] A land in which the Christian church is a steadily declining minority. A land in which your voice is less and less heard.

A land in which your voice is less and less credible. We have to ask ourselves what is the reason for the decline?

I'm not going into the answers to that, but I'm going to say one great thing, and that is this, that it is no mystery, and that it is no secret.

It is the thing which has been revealed, and that is the whole burden of this chapter, that when the land would suffer as God said it did suffer in this chapter, the reason would be quite clear.

They went and served other gods and worshipped them, and that's why the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land. It seems to me that we go on talking about this terrible question of why we fail to make impact, and we are pretending all the time that it is a great mystery in God's providence why we're not making an impact.

[35 : 57] And I'm saying that it is no mystery. It is rooted in what we are, it's rooted, it expresses, it follows wrong, the quality of our own relationship with God, and our relationship with ourselves, within our own brotherhood.

It follows from our attitude to the world in which we live, the lack of evangelistic concern, and it follows from inherent defects in our own organization, in our own structure, that we are unprepared to adjust, and unprepared to alter, to relate them more effectively to the world in which we live. No detail for the moment on that, but I'm just saying, please let us stop pretending it is a mystery. It is not one of the sacred things.

Why has the Lord ended this unto this land, they went and served other gods? And if they had stood with a tear streaming down their faces, saying to God in agony, Lord, why have you left us? God would have had no patience with that. And I don't believe that God has any patience with that mood by which we ascribe or an effectual as to God's sovereignty and to the mystery of God's providence.

[37 : 38] The reasons are written all over the face of the church. They are part of the revealed things. And in the words, it's not a problem of guidance.

It's not that we don't know what's wrong. It's that we are unwilling to put right what is wrong. so there is this great thing you will say, why is the Lord unto this land?

The second thing is this, that God has answered with unmistakable clarity the question, what must I do to be saved? Now what a great question that is.

It's a question that is in the highest sense an existential question, what must I, what must I do? It is part of the urgency, of the anxiety announced of an individual situation, what must I do?

And you will see too, it is a question about doing, what must I do? What decision must I make and what step must I take?

[38 : 55] it's a question that recognizes that there are things that God requires of us if we're to escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin.

What must I do? And that great unmistakable answer that says, you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you do it.

It's not something God does for you. It's not something Christ did for you. It's not something God's spirit does for you.

But you believe. Are you believe in the specific direction of Christ? It's not that you believe in the goodness of human nature, or in the virtue of your own sincere obedience, or you believe in the general goodness of God, and the prosperity of universal salvation, but you trust Christ to save you. You trust him to deal with your sins. You trust him to give you the right teaching. You trust him to give you the right leadership.

[40 : 18] Now, tonight, as any of us pretending that here is one of God's secrets, can we honestly say before God, Lord, we never knew what we had to do to be saved.

We were never clear on it. We didn't know we had to do anything. Are we really saying that to God? Or don't we tonight acknowledge that again it's not a mystery.

Now, I've seen people, we've all seen them, and they pretend there is some great difficulty. They don't know where the straight gate is.

They don't know where there's not a way to be found. They don't know what faith is. They don't know what Christ is. They say that's a secret.

And I'm saying it's no secret. It's a revealed thing. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. You are pretending that there is an obscurity.

[41 : 30] You are pretending there is something that requires to be clarified. And Christ is saying, submit your intellect to me.

me. And Christ is saying, bring your sins to me. And Christ is saying, trust me to lead and to guide you.

And you are saying there is an obscurity. And I'm saying there is no obscurity, but there is a reluctance. There is an unwillingness to yield, to submit the intellect, to bring the sins, to follow the way that Christ is beckoning and Christ is leading.

And if it is a sin on the one level, to try to be wise beyond what is written, it is no less a sin to pretend that there is an obscurity where God has given clarity.

The revealed things belong unto us and to our children forever. Or again take this. How should we then live? Is there some obscurity there?

[42 : 39] as in God made unmistakably clear to us the way Christians are to live? God has given us the law and we say yes that's the Old Testament and I say well at least half of the New Testament is law too.

The Gospels are full of law and the Epistles are full of law. And it seems to me sometimes that Christians are coming with all kinds of elementary ethical problems and pretending there is some obscurity and that in Christians in which God has spoken with unmistakable clarity if only we did the trouble to examine God's word for ourselves.

The ethics of marriage and sex and relationships, the ethics of work, the ethics of wealth, the ethics of war, and many of those great problems in the area of the sanity of life.

God has spoken on those things and the answer in my opinion is not lying in great commingated textbooks. The answer lies to sitting down patiently with God's word and seeing what God's word teaches upon those great questions.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.