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**Title:** *Clarity Everyday: The Postmodern Problem*

**Scripture:** Psalm 19:8-9

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Good morning, Orchard Hill. It is great to be with you. And if you're new, I get greeted like that every weekend. It is good to be walking again and to be moving in a good direction. It's great to be here.

Let's take a moment and pray together. God, we come to you today and just are aware that in our church community there are a lot of different needs. People who've been through traumatic events, have health challenges, those who are in transition between one place, one role to another, or maybe those who are dealing with some kind of a relational hardship right now. And God, we pray that your hand would be evident in each of those situations. And God today, as we spend some time trying to understand your word and apply it to our lives, I pray that you would let my words reflect your word in content, tone, and emphasis. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Last weekend we began a series that we called *Clarity Everyday*. And I began by raising some controversial subjects, things that I know in our broader society, there are people who land on either side. And my point wasn't to say, here's the side that I want each person to take. It was that they're controversial because people believe that they're right no matter how they've landed on each of those issues.

And once they've landed part of what they've done is they've said, I have a reason for landing here. I have a source of authority. And the question really that we asked is, is your source of authority something that lies within you? Something where you say, I just know because I know, I figured it out, and I discerned it.

Or is your authority something outside of you? And for a Christian, the idea is that the source of authority that we have is ultimately in the Bible, that it's God's word, and that there's revelation that God has given. And we're looking at Psalm 19, and we talked about the sufficiency of Scripture and the idea that Scripture speaks. And when it speaks, we have all the words that God intended for us to have.

And today we're going to talk about this idea of clarity. And if you're tracking with this, we had a little book we recommended from Kevin DeYoung that you might want to pick up if you want to take another step or want to be in a group. But the idea is that there's an acrostic. It's long been around. This isn't new to me. It's called scan -

sufficiency, clarity, authority, necessity. These are the attributes of scripture, the characteristics. And when we understand them and apply them, they help us know how to be clear about what the Bible says every day and everywhere that we live.

So let me just start it this way today. As some of you know, I had a medical situation not just in the fall, but also in just some things internally that came from the scan. And whenever you have something that happens to you medically, one of the first things you do if you're a modern person is you get online and you start reading all about it and you see what everybody says.

Now, the situation that I have is something that there's a huge range of opinions, especially about the role of diet, in what this means for whatever situation I might face. So, you'll find people that say diet has no bearing whatsoever and then people who say you should eliminate everything fun from everything you ever eat for the rest of your life.

Now, here's my point. These are experts who have written on it, and I'm reading about it. And here's what I'm prone to do. Well, I like this piece of advice, and I don't like this. I'll keep eating this, but I'm not going to eat that. I'll listen to him on that because I didn't really care about that anyway. But you know, this I'm keeping. And what I find myself doing is I become the arbiter of all information, even though I'm picking from, quote unquote experts, and I'm just picking, choosing, and saying, here's what I like.

Now, the reason I mention this is because this is in our age, kind of the postmodern age. If you want to use a term that's been around for a while, this is a way that people approach the Bible. They say there are a lot of experts and experts differ. Therefore, who's to know? Who's to say who's right? I'll pick and choose whichever expert I want on whichever subject.

And what we end up doing, even though we say we follow the Bible, is we end up following our own internal sense of what we think is best. Because what we're simply doing is we're saying, I like this and I don't like that. And there are experts who are all over the place. So, I chose this. You choose that.

Who's to say? It's more common than we probably like to admit. We like to think that we're doing our research, kind of like me with Health WebMD, a few minutes on the internet. I did my research and I'm good at making my own calls. And that's what we like to sometimes do when it comes to approaching the Bible.

Here's what Psalm 19 says. This is Psalm 19, verses seven, eight, and nine. It says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple." We looked at this verse last week. And verses one through six talked about general revelation, special revelation. And so here you have this idea of the law of the Lord is perfect. It's exactly what He intended for us to have. It is trustworthy. It is certain. And the result is that it refreshes the soul. It gives us a sense of well-being. It gives us wisdom when we're simple or naïve, which is what that word means.

And then it says this, "The precepts of the Lord are right." And right here means straight. And this again, is where we start to say, well, who's to say? "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eye. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous."

And so, what that simply says is that God's word is right and that it's radiant, and that together means that there's clarity. Here are just some other places where we see this idea. Second Timothy, chapter two, verse 15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

So, how are we approved by God? By correctly handling the word of truth. What does that imply? That there is actually a correct way to handle the word of truth, and that it's something that you and I can understand and know and live in, that we don't need to simply say there are experts all over. One expert says this, one says this, and I guess I just have to choose myself. But that there is a way to know that what you read, what you see is right.

In Deuteronomy chapter six, we read this, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." The idea is if you can talk about them with your children, that you can understand them, know them, that they're clear enough that you can teach them and impress them on your children.

And then in Matthew Chapter 22, Jesus has an interaction with the Sadducees. And the Sadducees aren't a group that we always know a lot about, but they were generally considered to be an educated, wealthy class of individuals. And we're told right in this section that they didn't believe in the resurrection. They didn't believe

that when people died, they had a future. So, this life is it. That's what the Sadducees believed.

And they came to Jesus with the trick question. This is in Matthew 22 verses 23 and following. And their trick question was about the resurrection. And they said Moses had said once that when people die, especially a woman who dies, Moses' law said that the brother has to take on the brother's wife, and then they need to have children so that the name will live on. And if it happens seven times, then who's she with in the resurrection? A little bit of a trick question.

Here's what Jesus says, verse 29, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." So, Jesus challenges them and he says, you don't think it's clear, but it's because you don't actually know the Scriptures. You don't actually know the power of God. And I think that this little section in Matthew points to two mistakes that we make when we approach Scripture and why it doesn't feel clear to us.

And certainly, what I'm going to do here today is not going to answer all questions about understanding or interpreting the Bible. There are whole classes taught on this in seminaries. It's called hermeneutics. You'll spend 16 weeks studying this, reading books from all kinds of perspectives. There are classes taught in seminary about exegesis, how to understand scripture and interpret it and use the languages to understand it. So, this is not something that in one time together, I expect to answer every question.

But let me just tell you two mistakes that are made here that are probably common. And it may make us feel as if the Bible isn't all that clear. The first is what was happening here in Matthew 22 with the Sadducees, and that is wanting to discredit rather than to discover God's truth.

Whenever we come to the Bible and our desire is to say, it appears to teach this, but I don't like it, so I'm going to try to find an alternate explanation for it. Then we are in danger of setting up an interpretive rubric where we're not trying to say, God, what is it you want me to get from this? What is it you want me to understand? But I want to discredit.

And the reason I say this is what was happening is this is what the Sadducees were doing. The resurrection is taught in Job chapter 19, verses 25 through 27. It's taught in other places in the Old Testament, in First Corinthians 15:44, we're told about this bodily resurrection, but how it's different than our current existence. Philippians 3:21 says the same thing.

And so, when Jesus says, you don't know the Scriptures, what he's doing is he's saying the issue is you want to try to discredit what I believe. So, you've come up with a ridiculous question that isn't trying to prove anything except to show that Jesus' view can't be right. And what they were doing is they were using Scripture against Scripture.

Now, that's an important point, because sometimes what we'll do to discredit Scripture when we don't like its outcome or its statement, is we'll simply say, well, this passage teaches this, this passage teaches that, who's to say? Or we'll say something like this. You know, I just prefer to take Jesus' words. The red letters mean more than the other stuff.

Paul, you know, who really knows what Paul was all about? Later New Testament. I just focus on Jesus because I like what He says better than I like what Paul says. But when we do that, what we're doing, at least in part, is instead of synthesizing and saying the word of God is clear, and these things come together, we're simply saying, I'm going to choose one view over another.

And sometimes the issue is actually related to just our own desire, not just to discredit, but to say, I don't want to sit under the authority of who God is. So, I'm going to assume it isn't clear because First Corinthians 1:18 tells us that the way that the truth of God is understood is by the Spirit of God and that it's foolishness to people who don't understand it. First Corinthians 2:14 presses that point even further. And then my point here is just this. And that is sometimes the reason the Bible seems unclear to us is we don't want to accept what the Bible actually says about something. And so, we assume that it isn't all that clear.

You know how this works. If you have been married, sooner or later your spouse will ask you to do something. You know how this goes. They want you to do something a certain way, and you say, and maybe none of you do this, and you say, well, it just wasn't clear to me. And it's a way that you don't actually have to do exactly what they say. You know, you get the shopping list, go get all this stuff, and you go and it's like there's some little random thing down some aisle. You look for it for five, ten minutes, you can't find it and you're just like it's not clear. I got this instead. Isn't this good enough? Okay, come on. None of you have done that? Some times are owed to the lack of clarity is simply a lack of desire to bend our knee to what the Bible actually says.

Here's a second thing, and that is sometimes the reason that we won't understand or think the Bible's clear is that we jump to application before interpretation. And what

happens in this is we say, well, if this blesses me, if I get something from it, then that's enough. And to kind of take the idea of hermeneutics and boil it down to something really easy that any of us I think can remember and apply, let me just suggest three questions that you ask and answer when you approach the Bible.

The first is this, and that is what did it say or what did it mean? And here what you're asking is, what did it mean to the original author and the original audience? How did they understand it? Secondly, what does it mean today? That's the work of interpretation. And then finally, what does it mean to me?

So, when I say what does it mean? What does it say? That first question, what I'm really asking is what does the author intend, not what do you take away? So, in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, at one point he says if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out, and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off.

Sometimes people will say, well, I take the Bible literally, and you take it figuratively, and my literal interpretation is better than your figurative one. Well, the truth is, you can take the Bible literally while understanding that there are figurative elements. And this right here, Jesus telling you to cut off your hand is an example of this. Because anybody who says I take the Bible literally and there's no figurative interpretation should not have a hand or an eye.

Because clearly what Jesus was doing was, he was saying, listen, it would be better for you to be lame, to not have a hand, to not have an eye, than to try to navigate this world and the next without dealing with your own sin. And so, what we need to do is when I say, what did it mean and say, what did Jesus intend when he actually made that statement?

What did the original hearers understand? And what we know is the original hearers didn't say, well, I guess I should go around and cut off our hands. We would have history that says it was a handless movement. But what we have instead is understanding that says people understood even in that age that that is what Jesus was talking about.

And another example that we could talk about is I remember years ago when my wife and I were first parenting, we had kind of gone through a class about parenting. And there was a question about when you have a baby, do you do on-demand feeding or do you do kind of the scheduled feeding where you say you know if you cry, you cry and we'll feed you when we feed you because we're not going to have the kid driving our whole life. And on the other hand, you say, you know what, we want to nurture

the child and have them feel like all their needs are met. They're secure. They're taken care of. Two different approaches to handling babies.

The class that we went to advocated for the idea of this kind of schedule feeding. What caught my attention was their rationale; they're trying to make it like God's ideas for parenting. Their idea was that when Jesus was on the cross and he said to God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me, it was like God turning away from Jesus while He was on the cross. And you as a parent need to turn away from your child when they're crying because it's God's example to you.

Now, here's why I bring that up. That is not what that passage is about. So, when you ask what did it mean and you start to inject parenting stuff into the idea of Jesus on the cross and God, you are taking a liberty with the text. That's the postmodern approach to saying, If I get a blessing out of it, it's good. I mean, if I read about Nehemiah inspecting the walls and I say, I need to look at four different things every time I make a decision because there are four walls, you are not getting the author's intent. Nehemiah just walked around and looked at the walls. That was the author's intent. So, what did it mean?

And in this, we also need to just make sure we pay attention to context, because sometimes what people will do is maybe you've been guilty of this is we'll say, God, I really need to hear from you today and we'll look for something. But the problem is when we do that sometimes we will lift verses out of context without their original meaning, and we'll end up coming to a horrible conclusion.

Somebody has once put it this way. They said this if you open up your Bible trying to get direction from God and you come to Matthew 27, where it says and he hanged himself, that may not be God's intent for you. And as you say, okay, that was just one. I'll try it again. And you thumb through the pages again. You come to Luke ten and it says go and do likewise. That may not be what God intends for me today. And then you say, okay, two strikes, three maybe. John two says, whatever you do, do it quickly.

Now again, the point here is just to say know the author's intent, know the context and say what did it mean in the context? Then secondly, what does it mean today? When we read the Bible, we are reading something that spans time. And there are cultural things that happen in it that as we read it, we need to try to understand not just what it meant there, but how it translates to our time.

So, I moved to Pittsburgh in 2005, and 2005 was a glorious time for the men who wore gold pants because they won a Super Bowl. So, if you were around in 2005, you'll understand the sentence. But if somebody read this sentence that I'm about to

read 2000 years from now, they would say, what in the world was going on in Pittsburgh in 2005?

The Bus took the team on his back and rode them all the way to glory in the Motor City. You wouldn't have any clue what that was about 2000 years from now, but at the time you would be able or even a few years later be able to go, oh, I get what that's about, and what we need to do is be able to say, I'm going to look at the context and the historical background and illumine the text.

You may say, now this sounds like a lot of work. It's really pretty easy. What did it mean? What does it mean? What interpretation do I need to understand to get closer to this? One of the things that are happening in our day and age is people are saying, if you hold to certain views from the Bible, it proves that you're sexist, racist, or patriarchal.

Well, one of the things that has been controversial for a season has been the church's role in slavery. And if you read through your New Testament, you quickly see that the Bible says, slaves, obey your masters. And you might say, well, there you have it. The Bible's complicit in slavery, and the church has been complicit in slavery.

But if you understand, what did it mean? What does it mean? What you can come to see very quickly, especially using the meaning of words, is that the vision that we have of slavery in America is not the way that the word was used in the New Testament. It was used for indentured or bondservants more than for somebody who was consigned into slavery based on their race.

And there have always been people throughout history who said this is not the church's view or the correct biblical view. And so, we need to say, okay, when I read a verse like slaves, obey your masters, what did it mean? But also, what does it mean today? And it is not an endorsement of slavery in our day and age, which is clear when you understand it.

And that leads to kind of the third question, and that is, what does it mean to me? And here, what we're really talking about is coming to a place where we say, okay, now I'm moving to application, and I'm moving from this idea of saying the Bible is being interpreted and now I'm starting to move in a direction.

And here's something that I think is important to understand. If the majority of Christians throughout the world and throughout history have a common view of how to understand the Bible and you, in your cultural moment and location, decide on



something different, what makes you so certain that your understanding is right? So, we live in an age where what people are largely doing is saying the rest of the world could be wrong, the rest of history could be wrong, but I don't want to be at odds with my culture in any way, so, this is how I see it. And it's leading to something that many people have called deconstruction. And some people are even probably using this term to say, this is what we're doing.

There's an author and a podcaster, a woman named Alissa Childress, who has written about this, and this is what she says. She says, "Deconstruction is the process of going through everything you've ever believed about God and Jesus, the Bible and Christianity and all of the doctrines, all of the history, everything that you thought about it and rethinking absolutely everything."

Certainly, there is a time when rethinking what you have been taught is healthy, and deconstructing can be a good thing. But what she goes on to talk about is what's happening largely in churches today, as people are rethinking whether or not the Bible is authoritative, whether or not the Bible teaches something about eternal destiny, specifically how what it teaches about the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ, what it teaches about suffering, about end times, and about the church.

And we could certainly talk about sexual ethics and views as well, as we talk about it. And the reason that I bring this up here is as soon as you get to a point where you start saying, I'm going to apply this without doing the work of interpretation, what can happen is you can start saying, I like this outcome, therefore I'm going to pursue it.

Let me just give you an example that's somewhat ridiculous, but also really real, that hopefully will help bring this home. So, one of the things that I believe the Bible clearly teaches, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, it's tied to the passage that I talked about with cut off your right hand or your right eye, is that using images to stimulate yourself sexually is not right before God.

Jesus said if a man looks at a woman lustfully that he sins, that he commits adultery with her, and then it's in that context where he later says, hey if your right eye causes you to sin gouge it out, and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. So, let's just back up here for a moment and say that somebody reads that and says, yeah, but really, I've been married for a while. It's not really all that exciting anymore, and there are some pictures online that look pretty enticing. But yet they feel that they don't want to just jettison the authority of Scripture, that they don't just want to say Scripture doesn't matter.

So, I'm just going to take a moment and try to understand this. And so, what they do is they go in and they look at Jesus' words and they say, well, you know, maybe when Jesus said this, he wasn't just talking about all women, but only married women, because that word could mean married women or unmarried women. So, if I look at unmarried women, then I'm okay. Does anybody think that that's a good interpretation? What did it mean? What does it mean? What does it mean to me? If you come to a conclusion that has not been the worldwide conclusion or the historical conclusion, you're probably using your cultural moment to your advantage.

Now, I understand that many people today would say, well, the Bible's views on sexuality, they're repressive, they're not helpful. But yet this simple example shows you that as soon as you or I start to say, but I don't like what the Bible says, we actually take away the good that God intends because here's what that's about. In my estimation, it's not about God saying, I don't want any man to enjoy ever looking at anything. Not that he's pro that. God is pro the use of our bodies for pleasure, but it's God's way of saying I created pleasure, and the best way for you to experience it is in the bounds that I give you.

And we live in an age that says we don't like God's bounds, we don't want any bounds, we want to live free. But what we need to see is that our best freedom, our best opportunity at living the life that God has called and given us, that brings joy, is saying, God, I will surrender to your way, even if it doesn't make total sense to me. And, you know, God's standard of marriage and monogamy, if followed, would eliminate the MeToo movement. It would eliminate abuse. It would eliminate the heartbreak of broken homes over an affair. And sometimes what we do is say, well, I don't like that. So, you know, what's the harm in looking at God's creation and the beauty of it, instead of saying, God has given me this for our own good.

In fact, I would say that the Bible in many ways could be seen much like the owner's manual of a car. Do you remember, if you've been around for a while, you used to get an owner's manual and you stuck it in the glove box of the car, and then you take it out when the time came to see something? Now they don't even give you one. It's all online if you get a car. But the reason I say this is if you were to get a new car, new to you, used new, whatever it is, and you were to say, you know what, I don't care what the owner recommends or the owner's manual recommends, or what the manufacturer recommends.

Gas is really expensive these days. I'm thinking that maybe I'll put something else in the gas tank just to make sure it runs. I'm going to try a little concoction of baking powder, water, and some kerosene, to see if the car runs. What would happen sooner or later? Your car doesn't run. Your freedom is gone. Because you said, I think I know a better way.

What happens if you say oil changes, they're expensive. They're a headache. Who wants to spend 10 minutes at the Jiffy Lube? And you say, I'm not going to do oil changes. Well, what happens is sooner or later your car doesn't run and the freedom that you have goes away. And when we say it's not clear to me, I'm doing it my way, what we're doing is we're saying now I know better, and because it hasn't been clear. And what we can do is we can look at the owner's manual and say, well, it says every 5000 miles, whatever it is, depending on the oil recommendation of your car, 3 to 5, 6 months. And you say 5000, 10,000, 20,000. I mean, who's to say does 5000 really mean 5000? Could they be speaking figuratively? Could they just mean a large number of miles? And you end up in a place where you're just saying, I don't have any authority.

And here's just my last plea in this. One of the reasons that I'm so convinced that scripture is clear is I know it's clear about me. I know it's clear about you. See, Scripture says this very simple thing, and that is that every person is sinful and needs a savior. And if you're honest with yourself, you will come to a point where you will say, I know that I have been somebody who hasn't lived by God's standard perfectly and I need a savior.

But, you know, the Bible says something else. It doesn't just say that you're a sinner if you're a follower of Jesus. It also calls you a saint. And sometimes what happens in our identity is we'll start saying, well, I'm just a sinner saved by grace, so my sin is inevitable or my choices are inevitable. But that word saint means that you've been redeemed, you've been called, you've been empowered.

And I love how Martin Luther used to talk about it and write about it. He would say we're simultaneously saint and sinner. Well, that kind of identity is something that when you read and see in scripture, what you know about yourself, if you know yourself at all, is that I'm capable of and prone to and guilty of actual sin. But because of the work of God, that doesn't have to define me and it doesn't define me and it doesn't control me in the same way.

And when you understand that kind of clarity, that it's Jesus' work in and through you that changes you, then you are able to say, I can turn to the whole of the Bible and bend my knee to it and say, this is not an unclear book. It's not easy, but it's not unclear. It's here for my good. It's here to bring joy to the heart, to make wise the simple, to restore a weary soul so that I can have clarity and navigate whatever is in front of me right now. And that's a gift from God for you and for me if we'll take it.

Father, I thank you that your Word brings clarity. And God, I pray today that you would help each one of us who's part of this gathering to not simply look at it and say,

who knows? But instead, look at the Bible with a sense of anticipation. Look for your guidance and you're speaking to us. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.