

**Date:** August 6-7, 2022

**Title:** *Clarity Everyday: Authority*

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

**Speaker:** Dr. Kurt Bjorklund

Well, good morning, and welcome again to Orchard Hill. I often will say something like it's really good to be together. And one of the things I've said the last several weeks is that's not a throwaway line. Right now, for me, just like, hey, it's good to be together, there is nowhere I'd rather be this weekend than here with you and able to be a part of this gathering.

And to those of you in the Strip District, Butler, Chapel, Southpointe Home Gathering, and online, it's great that you're able to be a part of this gathering as well. My recovery continues to go well. I'm walking well. The only thing that seems to be a real limit right now is it seems that doing dishes or unloading the dishwasher really stresses me out.

So, let's pray together. Father, thank you for the chance just to be here and God, to open the Bible and to see what it says to each of us. God, I pray that for those who come from seasons of difficulty, weeks of difficulty, from a place of doubt, from a place of question in God, for those who come from turmoil, those who come from success and joy and a sense of being overwhelmed by your grace, that to each of us you would speak God. I pray that your word will be alive to us and that my words reflect your Word in content, tone, and emphasis. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, there's a word that became somewhat prominent in the last two years, and the word is misinformation. You probably first heard it around the whole COVID scenario where it was said that there were people spreading misinformation. And if you followed the stories, of course, the irony is that those who were said to be spreading misinformation in many cases were spreading things that later other people who were saying it was misinformation would say, oh, this is the way it is.

And then what happened was soon the two political parties used it as a political football to say the other side's spreading misinformation and what should concern probably any of us is now there's supposedly an agency that's going to be established that will have the right to tab things, misinformation. And when they're tabbed misinformation, be able to say this is something that you should not have access to.

And the reason I say that should concern any of us is nobody should want the government to try to limit what kind of information we should take in. And regardless of your political party, you should say, I don't want anybody telling anybody that they can't say something.

And here's why. Misinformation is such a big deal because you know that if somebody has information, whether it be wrong or right, that information drives how they believe and how they act. And when it comes to our lives, understanding the information that we take in, its source and authority in our lives are significant because it drives what we believe and how we act.

We've been in a series that we've been calling *Clarity Everyday*. We've been looking at Psalm 19 and we've been talking about Scripture, the Bible, and how it is God's Word. And we've used an old acrostic, the word scan. So, we looked at the sufficiency of scripture. We talked about the clarity of Scripture. Today we're going to talk about the authority of Scripture. And then next week, the necessity of Scripture.

And what we've tried to do is to understand what this Psalm points to about the revelation of God and the fact that you can live without any fear of misinformation if you root your beliefs in the Word of God in the Bible and say, this is something that is true. But here's what I would just like to ask you to begin, and that is what is it that you really think about the Bible?

And this is a great question, not just for you, but anybody, because if you wanted to spark a lively lunch debate at your place of work, next time you're out to lunch, just say, hey, what do you all think about the Bible. And what you would have very quickly is you'd have people saying, I don't want to talk about that at all. Are you kidding? That's not a topic I want to talk about. That seems ridiculous to talk about.

But then you would have people who would say the Bible, I think, is full of errors, it's full of myths, it's full of biases. And it's part of why there's oppression in the world. People have used the Bible to oppress.

And then there would be people who would say, I think it's a collection of great stories, moral stories that help some people. And I found some help from it, but it's not authoritative. And then you would find people who say it is authoritative, it is the Word of God. It leads me, and guides me in my life.

Well, here at Orchard Hill, we believe that the Bible is the authoritative word of God, and we believe it unapologetically. In fact, what we would say is that the Bible is the

word of God, and this is Wayne Gruden's definition of the authority of Scripture, "The Bible is the Word of God in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey the Bible is to disbelieve or disobey God." Okay, let me say that again. "The Bible is the Word of God in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey the Bible is to disbelieve or disobey God."

And what happens for all of us in one way or another is we either say the Bible is the Word of God, and we sit under it and it becomes our authority and we judge all that we do by it, or we sit above it and it's down here somewhere where we say, I'm going to decide in each instance whether I give it credibility or not, or whether it has authority or not.

But because we believe that the Bible is the authority, what it means is that we say as a community, we want to sit below it, we want to sit under it. We want to say this is indeed our authority. Now I recognize that some of us who are gathered would say, well, that's nice. But what I really want is to do life the way that I want to do life. And I don't want anything to be my authority. I want to be free.

But what if it really is the Word of God, the words that God intends for you and for me to have, and for us to order our lives through this book? And if this is the book that God has given us and we sit under it, then what that means, very simply, is that it is intended for our freedom as the creator of the universe.

God has given us His Word to direct us. And what if it's really His Word? Then this would be the way for you and for me to gain our freedom in life and our joy. Here's Psalm 19, verse nine. It says, "The fear of the Lord is pure..." And here, when it says the fear of the Lord, it's probably referring back because of the way that this is structured because verse seven and eight is structured with two-part statements.

So, it says, the law of the Lord is perfect, the statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, the precepts of the Lord are right, the commands of the Lord are radiant, and the fear of the Lord is pure. And so, the fear of the Lord here is probably working just like the other statement saying when you revere the Scripture, then this is what you have.

And here it says it's pure, meaning that the Bible is without defect, that there's nothing that you will read or find in the Bible that is defective. And then it says this verse nine that it's enduring forever, it's without expiration, it's timeless. How many things that you hold in this world are timeless and aren't shaped by culture or our cultural moments? And yet this is exactly the claim that Psalm 19 makes about the Bible, that it is timeless, and that endures forever.

And then he says this, the decrees of the Lord are firm. There's no wobble in them, and they are all righteous. That's how the ESV says it. The NIV says all of them are righteous. They're without compromise. There's nothing in them that will lead us astray.

And what these are all pointing to is this idea of authority. And what I'd like to do is give you a very simple equation today, and the equation is this, and that is inspiration plus reliability equals authority. Inspiration plus reliability equals authority. And I want to talk for a few moments about inspiration or the fact that the text is inspired.

Here's what we read in Second Timothy, chapter three, verse 16 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." And so here the author is looking back and saying, all the scripture that we have is God-breathed. It's inspired by God. It's something that God has given us so that we have Scripture as something that we can look to and say, this is inspired by God.

Then, Second Peter, chapter one, verse 21 puts it this way. It says "For prophecy never had its origin in human will." And you might think, is this just referring to certain prophecies? But this is referring to the prophets, referring to the scriptures. Again, probably a part for the whole. So, "For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

So, the claim that the Bible makes for itself is that this is produced by inspiration, that God moved people to write the very words of God. Now I understand that that's a circular argument, meaning you can't say something's inspired because it claims to be inspired and have it be a foolproof argument. At some point that's circular.

But here's why this matters. Because if the Bible didn't claim to be inspired, you'd have no reason to give it that consideration. When you read a Wendell Berry book, a novel, you don't say this is potentially inspired by God because Wendell Berry never claims that his books are inspired by God. Now there are some Christian authors who claim their books are inspired by God, which we should not take seriously.

But the Bible itself says this is God-breathed. The people who brought this about were carried along by the Holy Spirit. So, you have reason to say this book has to be considered as either inspired or a fraud? Here's what it can't be is just a good book with all kinds of good stories pointing us in a good direction. And the reason it can't be that is because it claims to be inspired. And so, the option that's not open to you is

to say the Bible's good, and it has some good things to say because it claims to be inspired. It's either a fraud or it has to be on some level inspired by God. N

Now, sometimes people will get concerned and they'll say, well, how do we know what's really in the Bible? How do we know that we have the actual words of God here? And certainly, the church has long held this idea of the canon of the Scripture and the test of something being in the canon or canonicity, where apostolic authorship or endorsement, a consistency with all that had been taught and a wide acceptance by the early church in the 66 books that you can hold in your hands or download or see have been widely accepted as being the very books.

And here's what else is true, and that is from its time period, it is the best, attested piece of literature that we have. And here's why this is important. If you go to college and if you go to some kind of a college with a liberal arts approach, one of the things that will happen is you'll be required to take a philosophy class.

And one of the things that will be required in your philosophy class most likely is that you'll have to read either Plato or Aristotle or both, and they're both from this time period. Do you know that? Almost nobody says, well, did Plato really write that? Can we know that these are the words of Plato? No, we just say, oh, I'm reading Plato today. That must be Plato.

There are thousands more manuscripts for the New Testament and the Old Testament than there are for Plato or Aristotle. Meaning it is better attested to that the people who claim to write it actually wrote it. And you can say I hold in my hands what Matthew actually wrote, what John actually wrote, and they claim that they were part of or the early church claimed that it was God's inspired words.

Beyond that, Jesus believed it. Matthew 5:17, we see that Jesus said that there would not be one jot or tittle that would pass away from His Word. And what that means isn't that again, because Jesus believed it, it's so, but it means you can't detach Jesus from the Scriptures and from the idea that to disbelieve or disobey the Bible is to disbelieve or disobey God.

And certainly, even if you're not convinced of the inspiration, you have to admit that the Bible is unique. It's unique in its composition, the way that it was written over so many years in different continents, in different places by different authors, and yet has a remarkably similar message. It's unique in its circulation. There's never been a book that has been sold in as many languages and in many places and in as many copies as the Bible.

It's unique in its durability, despite people trying to eliminate the Bible, it continues to have an impact in our world, and it's certainly unique in its impact. And so, I think it's very reasonable to say the Bible is inspired, but that leads to the second part of the equation. The second question is, is it reliable? Can we say that the Bible actually speaks truth? Because if it claims to be inspired but it's not reliable, then on some level it calls into question the whole idea.

And the reason that I bring this up is that one of the things you will hear or maybe you thought is you'll say, well, the Bible makes some sense in some ways but isn't it full of weirdisms and mistakes? And what I mean when I say weirdisms is, you know how this is. You read something in the Old Testament and you say, what in the world is that? Or you read about the version of some people will say the Old Testament God, as if the Old Testament God, the New Testament God, are two different Gods who struck people down, and you said, I don't want to believe in a God like that.

And what often happens is people will come and they'll say, well, there's some mistake. And maybe you have friends like this who will say, here's a mistake, and they'll memorize one mistake that they say happens in the Bible and they'll repeat it and they'll say, therefore, that disproves everything. And what's often going on is it's I don't like what the Bible says, so I find one thing that I can object to and I find some credence in objecting to it. And now I don't have to accept its authority on any level.

But here's what is true, I believe, and that is most of the mistakes that people point to have a resolution if you will take the time to study them. It's not always a perfect resolution, but there are answers to the questions that people raise around the authenticity or reliability of the Bible.

Let me give you one example in Second Chronicles, chapter 32, there is a statement about Hezekiah building a water source in Jerusalem. Here's what we read. This is verse 30 of Second Chronicles 32. "It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook." So, Hezekiah was one of the rulers of the ancient city of Jerusalem.

And the way that people would siege cities or sack cities in those days is they would often surround the city and keep food from coming in and then keep water from coming in. And the way that Jerusalem is situated up in the mountains, there's not an easy path to the water. And so, what Hezekiah did, anticipating that one day the city would be sieged, is he built a tunnel that brought water into the city and he concealed the spring so there would be water for everyone to drink if the city was ever under siege.

So, for almost 2000 years, people could not find the tunnel. And they said, if the Bible's reliable, then, of course, there should be a tunnel. We cannot find any kind of aqueduct or anything that shows that there's water coming. But in 1880, Hezekiah's tunnel was actually discovered. And you can actually go and walk in this tunnel today. In fact, here's a picture of me walking through the tunnel.

A few years ago, I went on a trip with John Delancy, who leads trips to Israel and is a part of our church. You can literally go and walk through this tunnel that for almost 2000 years, people said that's proof that the Bible is wrong. And now you can go and walk through it.

And there are probably several hours worth of those kinds of examples that I could cite for you today. I won't do that because there's another service coming. But my point is that when people point to things, it either has been resolved or might be resolved and with further study could be resolved. Sometimes it isn't external things like that. It might be internal things. And there are dozens of these kinds of examples where people will say, well, the Bible says this here and then this over here, how do you resolve those?

One example that is just really simple is sometimes people will say, well, Matthew's genealogy and Luke's genealogy, genealogy being the statement of how Christ came to be born, are two different genealogies. How does that work? Now that one has a really simple resolution? Matthew is tracing Jesus' genealogy through Joseph, the father's side, even though the Holy Spirit was his father, but because he was his earthly father, he gets that genealogy. And Luke's is through Mary, through the mother's side. And again, with most of those questions, with some study, some considerations are resolved.

In fact, there's a book that I'd recommend if these things bother you. It's called *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties* by Gleason Archer, and he takes all of these in order of the text. So, if you're ever reading the Bible and you're like, what is the deal with that? He gives a very short, quick explanation of the possibility of what you could say.

The answer to the question is, and my point is, the Bible has been proven accurate over and over again externally and internally. And here's what else is true, and that is fabrications when they are reported in a short time period, are usually disproved when they are grand. And here's what I mean. If I were to say, in August, I wanted to check out my new walking ability, so I went down to the confluence of the three rivers in Pittsburgh, and I walked across the Ohio River to prove that I could walk, here's what would happen. If you were writing about the incidents of this year, you would

say that never happened because when things are written in a time period where there are witnesses, then the outlandishness of the claims is proven to be false.

And most of the texts that we have were written within a generation or so of their supposed happening, meaning that it was way too early to not have them laughed out of existence, the stories of the miracles and the accounts that we read about in the Bible.

Here's what happens even in our day. If an actor fabricates a story about a racial attack and says, hey, I was attacked because of some haters in my life, what happens is sooner or later, the police find the people who supposedly did the attack and they say, hey, I don't want to go to jail for this. He paid us to do the attack. That's how things go down in our day and age. And it's how they go down in Jesus's day and age.

And here's the other thing. The accounts of the disciples are too counterproductive to just be kind of a public relations document. Sometimes people will say, well, the Bible's just full of public relations. It's the account of people who want to create some kind of control. But the disciples, when you read this book, Jesus' disciples are not very impressive. Do you know what they did when Jesus died? They didn't believe that the resurrection was going to happen because they didn't get it. They didn't understand all that Jesus said. So, they cowered in a room behind a locked door. That's your heroes of the book. And if you were writing this, that's not what you would do. That's not a very compelling hero's story. You would say, I've got to make these people more heroic in one way or another.

And my point is just this. There's reliability when you study archeology and history and facts, there's reliability when you study internally, there's reliability because this was recorded within a generation or so of its happening and there's reliability because the story is not how you would write propaganda.

I also think it's reliable because I believe God is faithful and that he wouldn't give a book to his church, his followers, that can't be counted on. And I believe it's reliable because of what it says about me and what it says about you in the Book of Titus. We read this in chapter three, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. "



One of the ways that you know the Bible's reliable is it's reliable in what it says about you and about me. And that is despite our best efforts there are times that we deceive. There are times that we act in ways that aren't in conjunction with even our own best idea of standards, and that it isn't our goodness that brings us to God, but it's the mercy and goodness of Jesus Christ on our behalf that brings us to God.

And when that message resonates, you say, I know that there's a reliability to this text. So, if the Bible is inspired and it's reliable, then it's authoritative. So, the simple equation it's inspired and it's reliable, therefore it's authoritative. And what that means if you're going to say the Bible is authoritative, that you say, I will sit under the authority of the Bible rather than above the authority of the Bible.

I will say this is my authority, but I have a concern. And my concern is for Christians generally around our country. And my concern is this. And that is I believe that there are more Christians, people who would say, I'm a follower of Jesus being disciplined and I use that word intentionally here, being disciplined by their podcast, their news sources, their newspapers, their magazines, blogs, than they are by the Word of God.

Here's why I say that. What's happening, and some of this can be generational, some of this can be political, is people will say, I like listening to this person or I like reading this source, and we'll go to our source and we'll make that our primary source. And what we'll do is we'll say, yes, I believe the Bible is authoritative, but there's also this that is really authoritative.

And even though we won't call it authoritative, what we're doing is we're being disciplined by that information because we take it in all the time and we almost can get into a point of a liturgy. Do you know what liturgy is? It's something that you repeat over and over so that it has an influence over you. Well, some of us have a daily liturgy, and it's around our news or our blogs or around something.

And we're saying, I'm listening to this, and don't get me wrong, I'm all for listening and reading and paying attention to the news. I do it myself. And one of the reasons I can say I have this concern is it's easy for me to do the same thing, to say, this is what I'm listening to. And yeah, the Bible's authoritative, but I'm being disciplined, you're being disciplined, we're being disciplined as much by MSNBC or Fox News as we are by the Bible, as much by The New York Times as we are by the Bible, as much by the blog that we read and the person we like to listen to as we are by the Bible.

And, you know, the problem that that causes. I know if you listen to one side or the other politically, you say, well, the other side's full of misinformation. And my point isn't even about that as much as it is to say if you're a follower of Jesus, be very aware

that your worldview is coming first and foremost from the Scripture, not from some other source, that has quietly become something that's here for you as opposed to the Word of God.

Psalm 19 tells us that when we attend to the Scriptures that it's pure, verse nine, that it is without defect in our lives, that it endures forever, that it's not just about the cultural moment that we're in, that the decrees of the Lord are firm, that they don't wobble, they don't change, and that they're all together righteous, that you don't have to say, is this the right way to see this because you have a source that will never be prone to misinformation.

And when you take in the Scriptures, what Psalm 19 says is it will refresh your soul. It will make wise the simple, and it will give joy to the heart. And I've said this almost every week of this series, do you ever feel like you have enough refreshment, like there's enough joy just in the way that you go about your life, that you go, oh, I'm good? I don't need any more joy. I don't need any refreshment. I don't need any wisdom. I have all of it that I need. Well, what this text is saying is that this is actually where those things come from.

And, you know if you've been around people of faith, that there are people of faith who would say it was the word of God that I turned to in my darkest hour. And it was in that place that I found comfort, where I found affirmation, where I found understanding. It was there that I was challenged.

We have a program that we call Re|Engage for Marriages. I've seen people step into that program and have their marriages changed because they said, now I'm stepping into the Word of God and putting my marriage under the authority of the Word of God. I've seen people step into Financial Peace and say, I'm putting my finances under the authority of the Word of God, and it changes their finances. I've seen people reorganize their relationships with their kids and their parents and change things that weren't working because they said, now I'm going to let the word of God be my authority.

And one of the things that sometimes happens in our culture is people will say something along these lines, and that is, aren't people of faith part of the problem, not part of the solution in our world? Don't they make it worse? Not better?

I saw an article recently by a man named Josh Howerton. I don't know his backstory or credentials, but the article was called "No, Christianity is not as Bad as You Think." I think that's a pretty bad title, to be honest. I realize he was trying to write probably for

a broader audience, but I want to say Christian belief and understanding of the Bible will help you thrive. That would be a better title.

And what he did is he went through five arguments that people speak against people of faith. And then he did research and pointed to data to say this is just simply not true. Let me just give you a few of these. One of the first ones that he said was that people will largely say Christians are pro-life, but they're not actually for people once they're born.

And what he did is he pointed to statistics that say in the general population, 2% of people will adopt children at some point or foster children, take people into their home. But of people who are churchgoing Christians, people who would say, I'm a Christian and I attend church on a regular basis, that number is 5%. So, one and a half times more people who are churchgoing actually say, we'll take people into our home who are not our own flesh and blood and raise them. And so, what he's saying is that Christians actually impact the world in a positive way because of their belief system.

One of the things that he points out is that people will often say, well, Christians aren't faring any better in this world. And he has a whole list of data on this. But here's what he concludes. He says studies show that people who are of the Christian faith and attend church on a somewhat regular basis are less depressed than the general population and are less suicidal, have less emotional pain, and medication kind of attempts, in other words, they don't use medication to numb themselves in the same way, they have greater social support, they found greater meaning in life, and they're more likely to volunteer or be engaged in civic engagement than people who are not churchgoing.

And then to show this, he said of the general population, 41% give some of their resources to help people who have less than they do. But of Christians who attend church regularly, 65% do. And he said 27% of people volunteer in some way in society. But of people who attend church on a regular basis and are Christian, 43% do. And here's his point very simply, and that is when somebody says, well, the Bible has a negative impact on the quality of people's lives and on society, they're just simply wrong. The opposite is true. When people take the Bible seriously and make it their authority, it impacts their lives positively, and they in turn impact culture positively.

So, the question again is, will you say this is my authority and I'll sit under it, or will you say I'll sit above it, and I will make decisions on a case-by-case basis whether or not I bend my knee to the authority of the Bible?

I remember years ago I was in my early twenties; I was working at a church and I had gone to speak at another church's event and I was driving home. It was late on a Saturday night. I'd been at this retreat all Friday, and Saturday I was driving home. I stopped to get gas, and I went into the bathroom at the rest stop, and there were a group of guys about my age who were in the bathroom and they were buying beverages at this establishment.

And the beverages were going to lead to some partying. And then there were some women presumably who were with them, young women, and they were choosing which woman they would connect with and they were talking about the things that they were going to do. And I'm standing here right off of having taught the Bible at this retreat, and I'm thinking, this is kind of weird.

And as I'm standing there, I have this thought. I don't know if you ever get these strange thoughts when you're somewhere. And my thought was this. I wonder what would happen if I said to this group of guys, hey, you know, I've been teaching the Bible this weekend. Would you guys like to go have a Bible study? I saw there's a picnic table right outside. Would you guys like to go sit down and just have a Bible study instead of the evening of Super Bowl stuff that you have planned?

Now, I didn't do that because that would have been weird. Maybe I should have done it, but I didn't do it. But why would that be weird? Do you know why that would be weird? Because at that moment they have a vested interest in saying, I don't want to know what the Bible has to say, because right now what I want to do is I want to do my life my way. And if somebody dares to say, this book has something to say to your life, what they would say is that I'm not interested, but the understanding of the authority of the Bible is to simply say this, and that is to disbelieve or disobey the Bible is to disbelieve or disobey God.

And when that becomes how you live, it directs your past, brings joy to the heart, refreshment to the soul, and wisdom to our path. And here's my question for you. What's your plan B? If you're here today, you're watching today, and you're saying the Bible, not so sure. What's your plan B? Is it to let Tucker Carlson or Rachel Maddow disciple you? Is it to let The New York Times be your source of knowledge? I mean, talk about misinformation. Is it to let your friends guide your thinking? Is it to read blogs and magazines that tell you how life works? And again, I'm not against those sources. What I'm saying is this, what's your plan B? Are you going to go inside you to say this is my authority?

But what I would simply say is, if that is true, it's not pure. It's not something that endures forever. It's not something that you look at and you can say, this is firm, there will be no wobble and this is altogether righteous. What you will do instead is you will go from one worldview to another, always wondering why things never seem to land just right in your life.

But when you say this is my authority and this is what I will give credence to, you are tying yourself to the God of the universe and saying, now my life will have the direction that he gives. That's my hope for me, for our community of faith, and for you.

Let's pray together. Father, as we are gathered today, I know that saying that the Bible is your word in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey it is to disbelieve or disobey you is a big step for many of us. But God, I pray that you would help all of us to take that step because your Word promises us that that is where we will find joy, refreshment, guidance, wisdom, and clarity every day of our life. So, I pray that it be true for me. I pray it to be true for each person who's part of Orchard Hill this weekend. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.