

Date: January 2, 2022

Title: *All Heaven Sings to Christ Alone*

Text: Psalm 19

Preacher: Peggy Peek

Here is a picture of my first car—a Honda Civic Hatchback. Some of you would call it red but it is maroon. I bought it just after I graduated from Texas A&M with money I got as a graduation present from my parents for my down payment. It was a 1987 model and it was used. I chose it primarily because it was maroon and it was what I could afford. I bought it in 1989 and it had 31,000 miles on it. I bought it for the bargain price of \$3,400 and the monthly payments were \$188.75. The month after I bought it (without a job and about to start seminary), the savings and loan I financed it through went out of business.

My car payment was more than my share of rent at the first apartment I had at seminary. I had very little furniture, part time jobs and lots of enthusiasm for preparing for ministry. I kept that car all through seminary, a move to an internship in Georgia midway through seminary and then my move to Boston after I graduated from seminary. I lived in 8 apartments and houses while driving that car.

The thing I loved about it most was it got almost 40 miles to the gallon, it was a four-speed stick shift (so it felt like I was a race car driver—topping out at 80 mph) and it was square—Being square was important—it could hold a lot of boxes of stuff and furniture for the multiple moves I made. When I moved to Boston, I sold all my furniture that I had spent money and 4 years accumulating and packed my car with my 13-inch TV in the floor board of the passenger seat, my clothes and boxes and boxes of books in the back. My mother wanted me to take household items—I assured her I was moving into a furnished missions house in Boston. My Dad, the professor, understood—books were the possessions of a student or a scholar—and he knew I had just spent years preparing for ministry with these text books and references. He did make sure that I could still reach my tire jack in my car just in case for the cross country trip from south Texas to New England and off they sent me with a \$5 book of state maps from Walmart.

I share this story from my past for this reason—Pastor Mark asked me to preach today back in November—I said yes and then he shared the text he had mapped out in his preaching schedule—Psalm 19—biblical poetry. In all the books I moved to Boston and all the books I have in my office—not one is a book of poetry except those found in the Bible. Poetry is not the language I am fluent in. I used to groan when an English teacher would say we are about to start a 6-week unit in poetry. I am a huge fan of prose—fiction and non-fiction so we are going to journey this morning together through one of the more beautiful and understandable psalms.

I first read through this Psalm in preparation of this sermon in the mountains of North Carolina at the Cove in early December at sunset. I was struck by God's timing. I was surrounded by beautiful mountains in all of God's grandeur and the Holy Spirit spoke loudly through this Psalm that December evening. I've asked a young adult to read Psalm 19 for us this morning. As he comes, please turn in your Bibles, and stand if you are able in honor of God's word.

Psalm 19

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.**
 - 2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.**
 - 3 They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.**
 - 4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.**
- In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.*
- 5 It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.**
 - 6 It rises at one end of the heavens**

*and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.*

7 *The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.*

*The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*

8 *The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.*

*The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.*

9 *The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.*

*The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.*

10 *They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.*

11 *By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

12 *But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.*

13 *Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.*

14 *May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

The Word of the Lord. Thanks Be to God.

As I mentioned, I first read this Psalm at Sunset—so I snapped a photo on my phone—the camera that is now almost always with us. Here is that picture. And then the next morning, I was out early to look at the sunrise and so began a pattern in December—I began to look for God’s glory in His heavens and the works of his hands in the sky—every day—I was able to be more intentional about it at Sunrise—I have a dog, Camden and he rises with the sun and so now I also am up. I have a great view out my balcony on the 4th floor of my condo on my corner of the world on Rockville Pike.

Our PowerPoint slides this morning are those views throughout December. But God in his graciousness, made sure I got to see the sunsets from many different places—and not only did he arrange the locations—he made me mindful as I kept up with the hectic pace many of us kept in December with work and preparing for Christmas. I noticed the sky with great regularity this past month and here are some of the pictures. I’ll have more to say about them later. But now back to our text.

C.S. Lewis wrote about Psalm 19 *“This psalm reflects, more than any other, the beauty and splendor of the Hebrew poetry found in the Psalter. I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world....This psalm combines the most beautiful poetry with some of the most profound of biblical theology.”*

Psalm 19 has 3 basic parts and we will look at each of the three. **Creation** (vv. 1-6), **God’s Law** (vv.7-11), and **Our Response** (vv. 12-14).

I. The Revelation of **Creation** (vv. 1-6)

One of the main differences between the first section and the second two is the **name of God**. In the first section, David uses the common word for any deity at the time **El** or God. Later in verses 7-14, David begins to call God the more personal, relational name, **Yahweh** or LORD.

As David wrote these words of scripture, he was expressing the struggle of every believer. God is our guide in our spiritual struggle but what we learn as we encounter scripture in both the Old and New Testament—Jesus—God’s son and God Incarnate is our **spiritual guide**. The first verses of this Psalm remind us of Genesis 1 and John 1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
John 1

This is important. The Old Testament is not just history about how God used to be before Jesus came to earth in the New Testament. All of scripture points to Christ. All Heaven sings to Christ alone. The Sunday School curriculum we use in our Children’s ministry from Lifeway, Gospel Project emphasizes this in their mission: Every story, every theological concept, and every call to mission from Genesis to Revelation allows kids and our leaders to see how the whole Bible points to Christ. Ultimately, the gospel message changes everything; heart transformation can only take place when a someone experiences the gospel. The curriculum helps the kids and the leaders understand that the Bible is not just a collection of stories, but one unified story—God’s story of redemption.

But as I was studying, I did see a bit of the beauty of the poetry of David’s language—in the first verse, the word order is said and then reversed:

A		B		C
The heavens	declare		the glory of God	
C’		B’		A’
The work of his hands	proclaim		the skies	

Space is the revelation of God’s creation of the heavens. David is really saying the heavens keep on declaring, keep on proclaiming! There is an orderliness that is marked by the minutes, hours, days, years, tides and full moons. God alone is the Creator and the heavens are all “the work of his hands”

(Deuteronomy 4:19) ***19 And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.***

We are not to worship creation. We are to worship the creator.

This natural revelation of creation is still without words in verses 3 & 4.

***3 They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.***

***4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.***

John Calvin observes, “When a man, from beholding and contemplating the heavens, has been brought to acknowledge God, he will learn also to reflect upon and to admire his wisdom and power as displayed on the face of the earth, not only in general, but even in the minutest plants.” Over the Christmas break, I watched a little bit of TV. One of the Christmas movies, I watched was called Godwinks. Godwinks was defined as those little coincidences that aren’t coincidence, but come from divine origin. Godwinks are always signs of hope. So, as we see the beauty of God’s creation, it is a Godwink

of his handiwork. If we see the beauty of a grandparent seeing a grandchild for the first time, it is a Godwink. If we see a beautiful sunrise or sunset, it is a Godwink or part of that natural revelation. It moves us forward toward the person Yahweh God.

The natural revelation or creation of the sun is metaphorically compared to a bridegroom and to a champion. There is joy in knowing that the sun will rise each day. And there is celebration in knowing that the power and heat of the sun allows us to do the work that enables us to thrive on this earth. The benefits of creation are not unique to Christians or only those who believe in God. They are of benefit to everyone—even those who do not acknowledge a god.

II. David moves us on to the **Revelation of God's Law** (vv. 7-11)

Nature can declare, proclaim, pour forth, and display God's creation and the works of His hand. But the revelation of God's law is greater because it is from Yahweh (LORD, vv. 7, 8, 9). Yahweh is the God of a covenant with his people which was much more significant than the God "El" in the first 6 verses.

The revelation of God's **law** more significant because it is comprehensive—and David fully explores that in the verses 7-11. Divine speech has the power to create. Through his word God keeps his covenant: (105:8-9) 8 He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations, 9 the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac.

Statutes are often synonymous with covenant. Statutes are to be transmitted from generation to generation."

Precepts are Yahweh's expectations for his children and are to be followed because they provide freedom and joy of the godly.

Commands describe anything ordained by the Lord.

Decrees are issued by royalty and establish God's sovereignty over his covenantal community.

David then gives four benefits of following the law, statutes, precepts, commands and decrees of God

First, God's word revives or refreshes the soul. It assures forgiveness and cleansing. ***Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.*** Psalm 80:3

During my days of campus ministry in Boston, one of the students who began showing up was Chris, a freshman from Bethesda. Now, he started showing up because he was quite fond of Melanie from Long Island. He was not a follower of Christ—but he was a follower of Melanie. The summer after his freshman year, he began asking a lot of questions about Jesus and Melanie was happy to answer them during long distance phone calls. She let me know that at some point Chris had decided to follow Christ that summer.

When Chris showed back up on campus that fall, he and I had a chance to catch up and I asked him what had caused him to take that step of faith and this is the story he relayed to me. During the boring summer afternoons when he wasn't working, Chris started watching afternoon TV and was fascinated by the show *Sally Jessie Raphael* and all the trainwrecks of people's lives on that show. By then, he had absorbed enough biblical wisdom from hanging out with Christians his freshman year, that he made the declaration to Melanie on one of his long-distance phone calls that if the people on the TV show would just try to live a little by biblical principles, their lives would be probably dramatically better. Melanie agreed and asked Chris if he had considered reading the Bible. (That Melanie has a sharp young lady).

Chris acknowledged he probably should read the Bible but that he didn't have a Bible at home. Melanie mailed him one and suggested he read the Gospel of John and then the book of Romans. Chris told me that he read the book of John in an afternoon and evening and remembered a lot of the stories from his parochial school days. Then late that same night he started reading Romans. And he said it was like nothing he had ever experienced. He felt God's presence as he read

every word and then he got to Romans 10:8-10 ***“8 But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: 9 If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”*** Chris said as soon as he read those words—he knew he had to declare Jesus as Lord and be saved. As I listened to his story that August afternoon in the late 90’s I was stunned at the power of God’s words to those who hear it and believe. Reading God’s word changed his life for eternity.

The **Second** benefit of God’s word is it is completely trustworthy and full of wisdom. One of my favorite verses is Colossians 2:2-4 ***My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.***

The **Third** benefit God’s word is the incomparable joy we get when we follow it. The joy brings inner peace. These past three months as many of us here at Redland have been helping resettle our Afghan family (and now a second family, part of the extended family of the first), we have found joy while serving and helping these families. So many of you have shared in that joy. It is contagious. And we started the project because we felt compelled by God’s word to help those in need of help. It began with faithfulness to God’s word and Joy is the fruit of that faithfulness.

The **Fourth** benefit of honoring God’s word is how it helps us see God’s creation and how we are seen. It gives light to the eyes and is radiant. By honoring God’s word, we are always in the midst of His presence. We are standing on Holy Ground.

When we engage with God’s word, we humbled and come with an attitude of true worship because of God’s grace and mercy. It is more precious than pure gold and sweeter than honey from the honeycomb. Those words bring to mind some of the lyrics of a praise song that has been running through my mind these past couple of months from “Holy Water” by We The Kingdom: *Walking down these desert roads [you’re] water for my thirsty soul. I need you...Your forgiveness is like sweet, sweet honey on my lips. There is great reward in keeping God’s law.*

III. **Personal Reflection** (vv. 12-14)

So now—like all good Bible Studies—we move to personal reflection. Without practical application, we have just been to a poetry recitation. David reflects on his relationship to God and his revelation. In Psalm 8, when he reflected on God’s glory in the heavens, he considered mankind’s condition (v. 3-4).”

***3 When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
4 what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?*** Psalm 8

Now David reflects his own sinful condition and frailties. We have hidden sins (even from ourselves) and we also have willful sins. That’s one of the best things about living in Christian community together here at Redland and any healthy church. Spend enough time with one another and someone will help you discover your hidden sins—and as iron sharpens iron, God helps us raise one another to a more sanctified existence. And hopefully our community is also good at keeping us from being willfully sinful. That circumspection and accountability that causes us to expect our best from ourselves and one another.

The final verse calls us back to the beginning of the Psalm. David asks that his words (our words) be pleasing to the God who has had his creation declare the Glory of God and proclaim the works of his hands. David invokes the God, Yahweh, his Rock and his Redeemer as the covenant God who is in relationship with us that brings us salvation.

We hear the voice of our Father by listening carefully to what Jesus says. We read in Hebrews 1 ***“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*** Hebrews 1:1-3).

As I close, I wanted to share with you a few things—the title of the sermon is from one of the songs we sang today “In Christ Alone.” I began this sermon explaining how much I don’t enjoy poetry—that was not altogether true. Music is a language that speaks to my spirit in ways that prose or logic or technical journals never will. It is the language of the creative elements. And it is the soundtrack of my life. I think some of you know what I mean. I hear a song from childhood that plays on the radio and I am immediately transported back to the scenes of childhood. I hear a favorite song from a band from high school and I can still sing every word. I have hymns and songs that nurture my soul long even after I have stopped regularly listening to them. So, the poetry of music and the psalms have a power that speaks for the Holy Spirit when we open our ears and our hearts and allow it to teach us.

That first evening and morning I was studying that text, I was listening to my playlist and In Christ Alone, I kept hearing this phrase with the beautiful sunset and sunrise:

*I give my life, I give my all
I sing my song to Christ alone
The King of kings, the Lord of all
All heaven sings to Christ alone*

All heaven sings to Christ alone from the beginning of time until the end of time. May we sing along with it.

The second thing I wanted to share with you was a aha truth I discovered this past month with the sunrises and sunsets. Some of them were taken out in the middle of nature in beautiful surroundings and some of them were taken at Ledo’s pizza while I was eating dinner before a zoom meeting. Some were taken at the mountains. Some were taken on my patio a mile from downtown Rockville on Rockville Pike. All declared the Glory of God and the works of our hands. Sometimes we are too quick to compartmentalize God. We should be looking for those Godwinks in all of our surroundings because the reality is, God is present everywhere. ***All heaven sings to Christ alone!***

Let’s pray.

"In Christ Alone"

Verse 1

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light my strength my song
This Cornerstone this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love what depths of peace
When fears are stilled when strivings cease
My Comforter my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

Verse 2

In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness

Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

Verse 3

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

Verse 4

No guilt in life no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home

Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

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