

PSALMS

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Psalm 19

Today we are starting a short seven week look into seven of the Psalms (and we plan on beginning Galatians in the fall.) So we will look at Psalm 19 today.

And the Psalms are a unique type of scripture because they were not written as a single unit all at once, but they were written over about 1200 years, but compiled into what we have now in about 500 BC, probably by Ezra the scribe. We believe God inspired them, so the whole process of writing them and assembling them was guided by the Holy Spirit.

And they're also unique because they are songs. Songs that were inspired by God to be sung by his people, and compiled for a people who need to recover the worship of their God and their sense of who they were.

The Jews were coming back from exile in Babylon. They had been taken away from their home country, away from the worship of God in the temple, they were in need of a major refreshing of the covenant they had with God. They had lost a sense of who they were as a people. And they were now beginning to re-establish the worship of their God in a rebuilt temple, they had to re-establish an identity for themselves.

They needed an anchor, they needed purpose and meaning. They needed to turn again to God. They needed a place to put their feet, when everything else had been sinking sand.

And the way God's people got their meaning in times of meaninglessness, their identity in times of isolation, their knowledge of who the true God is in their age of disposable gods, was through their songs, which is what these Psalms are. A book of poetry and songs that shaped the worldview and the God-view of God's people.

One Scottish author wrote, “let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws.”

Because songs are a powerful way of communicating truth, not only with facts but also with emotions. They affect the emotions as well as the mind.

So in the middle of our bible is this book of 150 Psalms, written to give us knowledge of God, which gives us a knowledge of ourselves, and a place to put our feet. And the hope as we study through these Psalms this summer is that we’d grow closer to God, we’d grow as people, we’d grow more into people of substance instead of participating in the weightlessness of our age. And that we’d be refreshed by them as well.

**Psalm 19:1-14 “The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above[a] proclaims his handiwork.**

**2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.**

**3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.**

**4 Their voice[b] goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.**

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

**5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.**

**6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.**

**7 The law of the Lord is perfect,[c]
reviving the soul;**

**the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;**

**8 the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;**

**the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;**

**9 the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;**

**the rules[d] of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.**

**10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;**

**sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.**

**11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.**

12 Who can discern his errors?

Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

**13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!**

**Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.**

**14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,**

O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

CS Lewis, who was a top scholar of poetry from early civilizations and medieval times, and best friends with a top linguistics professor, called Psalm 19, “the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.”

Because this Psalm says something that is central to what we believe.

Christians believe that God is a loving God. We even have a verse that says “God is love” - love is central to His character. But we know from our human relationships that part of love is communication. And to intentionally not communicate with someone is unloving.

You may have been in an argument with someone who gives you the silent treatment. And you know that silence in those cases is used as a weapon, as a punishment.

In prison, people who misbehave can be put in solitary confinement - where they can't communicate with anyone. And it's a severe punishment.

And if anyone believes there's a loving God out there, whether you're a Christian or not, your next question should be, "Where and how is he speaking?" If there is a God and God is loving, he must be a God who speaks, who communicates.

Christians believe that God is a loving God, and He is therefore a God who speaks.

When I was a young teenager, a young Christian, some well-meaning people taught me that the way to hear what God is saying to you is in the silence. Go in your room, shut the door, sit in silence, and eventually you will hear His voice. And I remember trying that and hearing nothing, and being unable to distinguish my own thoughts from what maybe was the voice of God. And it isn't that God doesn't prompt thoughts in those moments of silence, but in Psalm 19 we're directed to two main much-more-reliable places that God speaks.

And Psalm 19 is a poem where David revels in how God communicates with us. How the powerful words of a loving God that created the universe out of nothing are still being spoken, and they're being spoken to us.

And it is an invitation to us to listen to the voice of God, to hear Him speak, and to allow his communication to have its intended power in us.

And this chapter holds a key to our being spiritually revived which is a need we all have regularly. We get tired out, we lose our zeal for Christ, life gets cluttered with other things, and God becomes a yawn or a burden.

It's a normal part of the Christian life to need personal revival. And this, maybe the greatest of all the Psalms, points us to the voice of God as the place we can find it.

And in this Psalm, David is not just analyzing, but singing about the fact that God speaks. Because it is an incredible thing that God does love us, and that God does speak. He's not giving us the silent treatment, but speaking continuously. God certainly doesn't have to communicate - he would be just and righteous to just make the whole thing and throw it in his closet and never pay any attention to it again. He isn't forced or obligated to speak. But he does speak, and David responds to that by singing - singing back to God words He has received from Him.¹

¹ "For what St. Augustine said is true, that one can sing nothing worthy of God save what one has received from Him." - John Calvin

He sings this song about the primary ways God speaks to us: His World and His Word. And if we learn to listen to the voice of God there, it has a powerful effect in us. Christians need to be people who learn to read these books well, because it is there that we hear from God, and there that we build our faith. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. 2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, 5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. 6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

So the first book we can read is the book of God's world - the universe he has created. And the Psalmist looks at the beauty and the grandeur of the material world, and he says the whole universe declares the glory of God.

This is sometimes called general revelation - the way God has revealed himself to all people who can perceive it, of all time everywhere. Nearly everyone can see some of the beauty or majesty of nature and say, "There is a God, and I know something about that Creator."

During the French Revolution, one of the aims of the revolutionaries was to wipe out the influence of Christianity and the church. And one revolutionary said to a peasant: "I will have all your steeples pulled down, that you may no longer have any object by which you may be reminded of your old superstitions."

The peasant replied to him, "But, you cannot help leaving us the stars."

Nature, the universe that God made, is a primary way that God speaks, and speaks to people everywhere. Verse 4 again says, "**Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.**"

Everyone who can think, in all the world, is surrounded by a natural world that declares God's glory, that does it continually (day after day, night after night according to verse 2), and does so loudly - like a loud song. In fact, in verse 4 when it says their "voice" goes out through all the earth, it's literally the word "line" - which can either mean a measuring

line or plumb line, or a cord - like the string on a musical instrument. And in context, he's talking about joy, and a voice, and words - so the instrument translation makes more sense. He's saying that nature is God's instrument that day after day, night after night, sings to us about his glory.

So what is it all singing? What is it all saying?

1) He exists²

The natural response of all of our hearts, before we learn to suppress it, is to look at nature and say this is the world of a maker. To look at the colors of fall and say this is the work of an artist. To look at the intricacies and say this is the work of a designer.

So when you begin to wonder, is there a God at all? Open up your windows and listen to the song that's constantly being loudly sung by a world around you. Go camping and look at the stars, get out on the water, lay in the hammock and look up at the leaves. This whole thing says there must be a creator.

Look at the pictures that are coming back every week from this incredible James Webb telescope that we just put in space - and let each one be the voice of God to you, saying "I'm here, I'm wise, I'm powerful."

And if you're the analytical type, look at how perfectly made earth is to support our kind of life. Hugh Ross is a Canadian astrophysicist, with a PhD in astrophysics from the University of Toronto, and he looks at how fine-tuned the solar system is that he says it is impossible to not believe it was designed. The mass of the sun, the color of the sun, the mass of the earth, the thickness of the earth's crust, the length of a day, the mass of the moon, the strength of the magnetic field, the tilt of earth's axle, the oxygen and nitrogen ratio - all of these things have to be just the way they are to support life.

And for all of them to be tuned so well, all together, is evidence that they're all strings that were fine-tuned by a master musician.

² Francis Schaeffer in "The God Who is There" talks about how, if the Trinity predates creation, then our understanding of relationship and love is not bound to meaning we alone derive, but has existed before and above us. This fundamentally changes our approach to these things.

So our mind's reaction to nature is "this must have been created," our heart's reaction to nature is, "this is too beautiful, it didn't just happen." And that's the song that the universe is singing to us all the time and a primary way that God tells us "I'm here!"

2) He's wise

The more we can see of the intricacies of God's creation - the amount of information in a single strand of DNA, the ability of cells to reproduce that DNA, it all shows his wisdom is far beyond ours.

3) He's powerful

The power in nature is evidence that the one who put it all together must be powerful.

We'll look where the Psalmist looks, at the sun so huge you can put a million earths in it.

It's so hot that the temperature is 5800 Kelvin. That's almost 10,000 degrees fahrenheit, in case you're not a Kelvinist.

There's so much power and design and wisdom displayed in all of the creation, you wonder how we could study it and not see the work of a designer.

Albert Einstein did. He died, as far as I know, without believing in Christ. One scientist wrote this about him though:

"Albert's Einstein died in 1955. [Einstein wrote:]. 'I do see the design of the universe has essentially a religious question that is one should have some kind of respect and awe for the whole business. It's very magnificent and shouldn't be taken for granted.'"

In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. He must have looked at what their preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He had seen much more Majesty than they had ever imagined and they were just not talking about the real thing. My guess is that he simply felt that religions he had run across did not have a proper respect for the author of the universe...¹³

³ Charles Meisner

So he saw something amazing, checked out religion, and maybe it seemed trite, or the God they were talking about seemed small, or the best they could offer was some emotional uplift. And he seemed to think, "If there's a God, He's bigger than this."

So we know from God's book called nature that God exists, that God is wise, that God is powerful. Also, we know that He is both:

4) He is both engineer and artist

We see function in the universe - it works. We see power - its amazing. But we also see art. God is a God who loves beauty. And it does something to stir our hearts.

Look at verses 4 and 5 again:

In them he has set a tent for the sun, 5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

He says that at night, the sun is like a groom waiting in a tent, and then in the morning it bursts out of these because its time for the big day.

The whole thing is so over-the-top grand and unspeakably beautiful that it doesn't seem like we can explain everything with a blind and mechanistic universe. Because every day has more beauty than a wedding day.

And wedding days take design and preparation. Many people stay engaged for a minimum of a year because they know it will take a year to plan that wedding day. There are decorations in the room, decorations of the people - the groom just rents a tux, but the bride spends thousands on a dress, and then gets specialists to come in and do her hair and makeup because the day is supposed to be so beautiful.

And David looks at the sun and its course across the sky and says, "That's more elaborate than a wedding day! The sun's hidden, then bursts out, and all day long the colors of the sky change, the light from those angles makes everything change colors and change in types of beauty. I look up and its an elaborate, beautiful party!" This was planned out, and it all declares the glory of God.

And this happens every day.

“Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.”

– G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

Nature constantly sings, “There is a God, God is wise, God is powerful, God is an engineer, God is a God of beauty!”

And we’re supposed to be people who listen to his voice.

But here’s what we normally do with it - turn to Romans 1.

Romans 1 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen

So Romans 1 says that we can know a lot about God from what He has made.

But we twisted His words.

Rather than allow nature to say to us that God exists, that God’s powerful and wise, and engineer and artist, we suppressed those words.

And we said that nature is all there is - and we worshiped nature. And we can worship nature as pantheists who think everything is God, or we worship nature as atheists who say there is no God, but the material world is ultimate.⁴

God speaks and we twist his words and hear the wrong message, or hear what we want to hear.

Which means that the first book, the book of nature, while it is completely true, can be easily misinterpreted.

Nature is a voice of God - but its a wordless voice. And we can get the wrong interpretation of it:

- There are lots of animals that eat other animals. So maybe God is a God who just loves carnage and death.

- There are elements of nature that are unpredictable, so maybe God is very moody and random.

Those are wrong messages we can get from interpreting nature.

So nature has its limits.

Romans 1:20 says nature does speak, and that speech leaves us without excuse. If we don't seek God, we know better. He told us to seek him by the nature he made. We won't be able to stand before him and say, "I never could have known there's a God." He'll say, "Day after day, night after night, I poured forth speech." And we're supposed to hear the voice of God in nature and say, "He exists, he's powerful, I have to find him."

But there isn't enough in nature to know him.

And that's the deficiency in nature - it says something, but doesn't say enough.

In fact if you go back to Psalm 19, verses 2 and 3 reveal a paradox:

⁴ For more reading on this, see C.S. Lewis's "Meditation in a Toolshed" here: <http://ktf.cuni.cz/~linhb7ak/Meditation-in-a-Toolshed.pdf>

2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.

So verse 2 says day after day and night after night, the universe speaks. But verse 3 says there is no speech, there is no voice.

So God speaks through nature - but its speechless speech, a voiceless voice. There are (verse 3) no words.

And non-verbal communication, while it is a real thing, can only go so far.

There have been times when Debbie is upset, and I don't know what its about. But it is clearly at me, which could be any number of things. And I ask, "What's wrong" repeatedly because I need an answer. The non-verbal communication on the one hand is loud and clear. And its universally accessible. There is no language or culture where their voice is not heard.

But it doesn't fully explain itself. It's speechless speech and voiceless voice.

I need her to speak. I need words. Otherwise I won't get it.

So it's easy to get the interpretation wrong, and also, it isn't specific.

If you're trying to decide which job to take, the voice of nature will say to you, "God is there, God is wise, God is good." But it won't say, "Work at paychex." When God speaks in nature, it is very general.

It isn't God's magic 8 ball, where we pray about a big decision and look in a river, and it says "Signs point to yes."

Nature also says there's a God out there, but God doesn't fully explain Himself there. Specifics about who God is, about His story, about His son, about His cross - they won't be found in nature. The stars declare that God is glorious, but they don't declare the Gospel. They don't tell us the moral qualities of God. They don't tell us about his mercy, his love, or his forgiveness.

In fact, in the first 6 verses of this Psalm, God is referred to only once, and He's referred to by his generic name: El (short for El-Ohim). It just means God.

But then in verse 7, He starts referring to God over and over again, but now he calls him Yahweh, the Lord, which is a specific name, the name God revealed as his name when he talked to Moses at the burning bush.

It's a name we would only know if he specifically revealed himself to us.

He has revealed himself generally to us in the first book, nature. There we learn there is a generic God up there.

But there's another book:

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;

So David opens the law of God - the Bible (or what he had of the Bible), and he says, "Now this is perfect - and this revives the soul."

He goes to the Bible knowing that there's something wrong with him - he needs to be revived. He's broken, he's dead inside, he needs to be refreshed, he needs rest. And when he opens up the scriptures he says, "This revives my soul."

As refreshing as time in nature can be, and as much we'd say, "Get where you can hear that voice" and use it for what it was made for, this book can do more.

The powerful words of God here can speak into a weary heart and revive you.

And I know how many of you have just about had it with Christianity.

You are probably only there after a significant time out of the Bible.

If you never plug in your phone, you shouldn't be surprised when it dies on you. And if you aren't plugged into the word, allowing God's word to speak to you - if you are neglecting the source of your own revival, don't be surprised if your Christian life dies off.

the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

This is a sure thing that makes you wise! You can get the wrong messages from nature very easily, but it's harder to get the wrong message from words.

If my wife seems distant and sends signals, I'll probably not know what they mean. But if she says, "You haven't been home much" - that's crystal clear. Those are the words I need to be made wise.

8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;

This is a source of joy.

We treat our time in the Bible as one more thing we have to do. I have to do the dishes, pay the bills, and read the Bible.

But God hasn't spoken so we can have one more duty on our the to-do list that's already overwhelming. He has done it to bring joy.

In fact, he describes it like food:

the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Of all the things we do in a day to keep us busy and of all the burdens we carry, eating is not a burden. That's a joy.

And he says the word should be sweeter than honey to us.

But so often the Bible is associated with guilt - we feel guilty because we don't read it.

When we buy candy and put it in the pantry, we don't put it there so the kids will feel guilty when they're not eating it. We put it there as a treat. And that's what the scriptures are to us - they're sweet, and rewarding, and to be desired. We shouldn't be motivated to read by guilt, but by a craving.

Some of you are runners, and you talk about the runners high that you get. And you keep running because you crave it. I am not like you. When I try to start running, I'm immediately craving not running. But you run because you're craving it.

So why don't we crave Bible?

One, we doubt that its from God, and that it is it really all perfect, right, true, and sure.

After all, some of the passages are offensive to modern people. They seem old-school and our culture doesn't accept them.

It just doesn't seem to fit this day and age.

Around the world, there is agreement that the Bible doesn't fit the cultures of today. But it is different parts of the Bible that don't fit in every culture. In the US, we don't like what it says about sex outside of marriage. In some countries, they don't like the command to forgive everyone, or the idea of God becoming man and being humble.

Everybody's offended by parts, but we're all offended by different parts.

And if we say the Bible isn't the word of God because of the parts we find offensive, we are saying our culture, our time in history, our vantage point is better than every other culture and every time in history.

A lot of the ways our great grandparents live are embarrassing when we hear about them. We tend to then think, "We're smarter and better." But a lot of the ways we live will be embarrassing to our great grandkids.

We need to realize that none of us have the right perspective.

And if we throw out the Bible because it seems regressive and embarrassing, we throw out the key to being revived, to being made wise, to having light shine on us.

And these times of not wanting to be in the Bible happen to all of us, they're totally predictable because of what the Bible says about us and our tendency to be consumed by ourselves. And we will all need to fight through them, otherwise we miss out on the only thing that does thaw out our cold hearts.

Another reason we don't crave it is because we read it and just feel worse about ourselves.

David had that problem too.

12 Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. 13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

David, in light of God speaking, looked at himself and sensed his own failure.

He knew he had hidden faults and errors.

He knew he was prone to even sin presumptuously, knowing full-well what he was doing, sinning in what Spurgeon calls “the brazen pride which defies the Most High.”

And even “great transgression” was possible - high-handed, destructive rebellion against the Lord.

And he knew he was prone to the progression - hidden faults and insensitivity to sin. Then moving in to presumptuous sins that have dominion. And then high-handed rebellion against God.

The more we sin presumptuously, the more numb our hearts become to God - our awe at His world fades (book 1 - the world), our honor for His law crumbles (book 2 - the word), and we lose the clarity that comes with knowing who God is / who we are / what we are to do.

So David’s solution was to allow the word to point him to his redeemer.

John 5:39 “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,

Prayer of Confession

Sermon Questions