

Series FolkSongs of Faith

This Message How God Speaks to Us

Scripture Psalm 19

As a young man, David spent a lot of time in the outdoors as a shepherd. He was greatly impressed by the awesomeness of the physical creation, and thoughts about nature frequently appeared in his poetry. For example, in Psalm 8, he wrote, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?”

In other Psalms, David described the authority and sovereignty of God through the images of nature. For example, he compared the voice of the LORD to a thunderstorm: “The voice of the LORD is over the waters, the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters ... The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning; ... The voice of the LORD shakes the desert” (Psalm 29).

When he wanted to describe the attributes of God, David frequently used the physical characteristics of earth. “Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.”

There are numerous examples of David’s familiarity with and observations of creation and nature, and how he used the characteristics of the physical world to help his readers to understand the greatness of God. Today we will focus on the Psalm which best describes how God has revealed Himself to us. Psalm 19 explains that God has revealed Himself through creation and through the written word.

Read Psalm 19

David began this Psalm by reflecting on God's self-revelation of Himself through nature. This is what theologians call "general revelation." A person only needs to look up and around to understand that there was a Designer and Creator behind the cosmos. There is structure and orderliness in everything that can be seen. When we look at a painting in the art gallery or a famous building we can learn something about the artist or architect by what we see. In the same way, when we study the heavens, we can know something about the glory of God.

There are two verbs in verse 1, "declare" and "proclaim." These verbs have the meaning of continuous action. The heavens "keep on declaring" and "keep on proclaiming; they speak continuously to us without interruption. This continuity is also emphasized in verse 2 "day after day," and "night after night." There is a regularity and consistency and predictability about the universe. We live by this regularity since God's creation controls our earthly habits — eating, sleeping, work and school schedules.

Natural revelation does not require words. If audible words were used, they would have to be in the vocabularies of 1000s of languages. God, in His wisdom, chose a different approach when He wanted to speak about Himself — He used a non-verbal universal form of communication so that everyone could learn and understand. Verses 3 and 4 explain that everyone, no matter where their location might be, or mother tongue might be, can see the evidence of the existence of God. The voice of the heavens "goes out into all the earth, ... to the ends of the world." The message in the heavens is "transcendent" and "divine" in its qualities. It "declares the glory of God."

Starting in the last part of verse 4, the heavens are described as the boundary in which the sun rises, moves across the sky, then disappears. In David's era and, in fact, throughout the Bible, the earth was assumed to be fixed in space, and the sun was assumed to move around the earth. From the standpoint of earth, the sun is the most obvious and important object in the creation. Everyone is aware of its effects. Everyone appreciates its presence.

The sun is described in two unique ways. Instead of simply writing that the sun slowly emerges in the morning and dispels the darkness, David described it as a bridegroom who joyfully and eagerly rushes from his place to meet his bride. The Psalmist also described the sun as an “athlete” or “warrior” who was eager to enter the competition where his skills would be tested. One metaphor speaks of joy and happiness, the other of power and strength. Both metaphors anticipate something to be accomplished. In the context, this something is the proclamation of God’s glory.

As awesome as the evidence in the heavens is, it is not enough to satisfy the human heart. Creation can get our attention, but it does not enable us to know God personally, or help us to understand God’s purposes and how we can fit into those purposes. In verse 1, the word translated “God” is the general Hebrew word for “Creator God” or “God of strength.” Beginning in verse 7, there is a change of emphasis. The word “LORD” appears several times. The word “LORD” is in caps, meaning “Yahweh,” the God of personal covenant relationship. People can know God in a general sense as the Almighty Creator, but the only way we can know Him personally is through His Word.

Verses 7 through 11 describe this personal aspect of God’s revelation. Theologically it is called “special revelation. Note the different synonyms used for the “Word of God:” “law,” “statutes,” “precepts,” “commands,” “fear,” “ordinances.” These terms imply authority. They require obedience. Let’s think about laws for a minute. Laws are necessary for the good of society, necessary if people are to live in harmony with one another. Without laws, everyone would do whatever he or she would want to do and this would lead to chaos, so governments set up laws by which society can function as smoothly as possible. In a similar way, God has given us His written guidelines so that we can know how to be in harmony with Him and have fellowship with Him.

The Law given to Moses was the basis of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the Hebrew people. Notice how David described the law in verses 7 through 11. The Word of God is “perfect,” meaning that it is complete and without fault. It is “trustworthy;” it is dependable, consistent. It is “right,” that is, appropriate for the need. “Radiant;” it is enlightening, illuminating from the standpoint of understanding. “Pure;” means no unwholesome elements are in it. “Sure and altogether righteous;” these adjectives mean that the Word of God is reliable and guaranteed virtuous. These are very significant descriptions.

Now note the benefits of the Word of God: It “revives the soul,” that is, it gives meaning to life; it rejuvenates what is dead in the life force of a person. The Word of God “makes the simple to become wise;” it is the source of wisdom. “It gives joy to the heart;” providing inner peace and contentment. “It gives light to the eyes;” it gives purpose, points the way ahead, provides guidance. It qualifies people to endure forever.

Now notice verses 10 and 11. David regarded the Word of God as more valuable than gold, the most expensive substance in his day; and more pleasing to the appetite than honey, which was the sweetest substance. The implication is that the Word of God is of greater value than any other objects of a person’s desire.

Casual attention to the Word of God is not very useful. As David emphasized in verse 11, it is “in keeping them (the Words of God) there is great reward.” God’s revelation of Himself demands a response. The only proper response to God’s Word is faith in, acceptance of, and obedience to what He has said concerning Himself and His purposes.

So what has David taught us so far today? We have learned that God has revealed Himself both through creation and the Bible. These two ways are sometimes called the Two Divine Books. The Book of God’s Works provides non-verbal, but discernable, general evidence of the existence of a Creator and His power.

The Book of God’s Words provides more concrete and specific revelation about God’s attributes than can be revealed in nature. In particular, the inspired writings of the Bible disclose important characteristics of God such as holiness, love, justice, and mercy, as well as the fact that God is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The point of Psalm 19 is that God’s works and words complement each other. There is harmony between the observable reality of the greatness and power of God and the conditions He has laid down for personal relationships. God wants to get the attention of people, and then to draw them to Himself, and so He appeals to humanity in these two very significant ways.

When David reflected on the greatness of God, he realized how weak and inadequate he was. He identified himself as a “servant” of God, as someone who must please his master. He was forced to face his own sin and to call out to God for help in overcoming it. David mentioned “hidden sins” in verse 12. Sin is so much a part of us that we don’t even realize it. Our moral consciousness is flawed and deficient. Hence, in spite of our efforts to live a righteous life, we can do wrong things without recognizing that we have violated God’s standards. Like David, we need forgiveness.

In verse 13 David mentioned “willful sins.” These are sins of rebellion and deliberate disobedience. They are the sins of a person who knows the truth, but chooses to not be obedient to the truth he knows. The person who sins willfully breaks God’s law. He seeks to please himself more than God. “Willful sins” can be habit forming; each time a person gives in to the personal desire, it becomes easier for the sin to be repeated. This is the reason that David wrote: “may they (these willful sins) not rule over me.”

David concluded his writing with a prayer. He wanted his words and thoughts to please God. God wants each person on earth to learn from both kinds of His communications — the works of nature and the words of Scripture. He wants each person to meditate on the information which is communicated.

The acceptable response of each person is praise given back to God, an acknowledgement of the glory of God. This is what David wanted to do. After he reflected on nature and the Word and applied truth to his life, he prayed that his response to God, through the words of his mouth and the meditation of his heart, would be pleasing to God.

Notice that David’s prayer is addressed to the LORD, Yahweh, the Rock and Redeemer. The word “Rock” refers to a place of refuge; a place of protection and safety. This is the kind of place which God, with all His power and authority, will provide to those who are “blameless, innocent of great transgression.” The word “Redeemer” refers to a person who rescues another from bondage and slavery by paying a required price. This is what the Word of God explains to us.

Let’s make verse 14 our prayer each day: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

Appendix

Verses 7 through 9 are one of the most remarkable examples of parallelism in Hebrew writing. In these verses David wrote six synonyms for God's Word, followed by six descriptive adjectives, followed by six verbs.