

Scripture Reading: Psalm 19

“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. 2 Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, 5 Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, And rejoices like a strong man to run its race. 6 Its rising is from one end of heaven, And its circuit to the other end; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. 7 The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; 8 The statutes 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 judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward. 12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. 13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be 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 strength and my Redeemer.”

“Making Wise the Simple”

For the next three messages I will be continuing our review of the elements of our covenant renewal worship while also celebrating the 500th year anniversary of the Reformation!

- I trust we will be challenged by some of the great truths which those men focused on!

In doing so I am striving to follow Apostle Paul’s challenge to young Timothy:

“If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.”

- My hope and prayer is that this short series of sermons would remind us again and again about the importance of our worship, the importance of good doctrine and the importance of right living.

Last week we considered the importance of confessing our sins as we enter God’s presence and the Doctrines of Grace traditionally articulated with the acronym TULIP. I suggested an alternative using PRAISE and reminded us that these were formulated about a hundred years after John Calvin. They were used as a response to the false teaching of a man named Arminius who rejected much of the historic view of God’s sovereignty. The authors of the doctrines of Grace applied what Paul had also admonished young Timothy to do in his First Epistle:

I Timothy 1: “remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”

- This should remind us that we are called to live in the moment of history where God has placed us.

None of you here was alive 500 years ago! Many of you were not even alive in the 20th Century.

And of course a lot has happened in those 500 years! Martin Luther and those other reformers were excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church. They launched what we know as the Protestant churches because they were protesters! Rome later went through what some called the counter-reformation where many of the changes called for by the reformers were instituted. Those who follow Luther today would argue that they are not Protestant because the protestants went too far with regard to the Sacraments and some of the Doctrines of Grace which we studied last week!

And down through the centuries some protestants have called the Pope the anti-Christ and Rome has declared protestants to be accursed. And all of this does not even take into account the Orthodox Church that dominates in the other half of the earth! And now there are rumors that the Roman Catholic Church is considering Sainthood for none other than that Monk who started all these discussions and disruptions: Martin Luther. When we look at the state of the Church today, it seems to stand in stark contrast with what the Apostle Paul taught the Saints in Ephesus regarding the Church...

“4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

- We could throw up our hands and think all is hopeless, right?

But there are two pretty important things to remember here: First and foremost, the unity of the Church that the Apostle described, is the work of the Holy Spirit and not something that we can work out in our flesh or on our timetables.

- Secondly, we must as I mentioned just a moment ago: Remember where God has placed us in history:
- Some things that would have been quite easy to argue for five hundred years ago are more complex or have shifted greatly today.

For example, as we saw Tuesday night in the Schaeffer film, Martin Luther posted his 95 theses to challenge the use of indulgences by Rome in that day.

- What were those indulgences?

Here is a passage from a sermon by John Tetzel, the monk who sold indulgences in Germany and inspired Martin Luther's protest in 1517: “Don't you hear the voices of your dead parents and other relatives crying out, 'Have mercy on us, for we suffer great punishment and pain. From this, you could release us with a few alms . . . We have created you, fed you, cared for you and left you our temporal goods. Why do you treat us so cruelly and leave us to suffer in the flames, when it takes only a little to save us?’”

- So if you lived in that time, it would be pretty easy to say that you supported Luther & opposed the error taught by Tetzel.

Protestants right & Catholics wrong! Seems simple enough, but today I can find what some call hyper-calvinists who think we should not evangelize and many protestants who teach that the Table before us has very little meaning or significance, & don't even partake more than once a month. On the other hand, I know faithful Catholics who affirm all 95 of Luther's theses without exception!

- So how do we navigate such trouble waters?

I would suggest that it leads us to the next portion of our worship service and those five solas that I promised to discuss. So, kids let's first review the movements or parts of the worship service:

Call to worship
Confession of our sins
Consecration
Communion
Commissioning

Having been gathered and cleansed, God now consecrates us or changes us. As the Apostle Paul told the Saints in Rome, it is our reasonable service to present ourselves as living sacrifices!

In the Old Testament after the sin offering the Priest would prepare the next animal for the ascension offering. There were extensive instructions about how the animal was to be divided and placed on the altar where the smoke from the offering would ascend before God as a sweet-smelling savor.

- We no longer sacrifice animals because those all looked forward to THE Lamb Who would come as THE sacrifice for sin to set His people free.

But the Apostle draws on the imagery of those sacrifices to remind us about what happens as God uses the Word of God to transform or change us...

- Or using that big word that starts with “c”, to consecrate us!

This is why the Word is referred to as a sharp two-edged sword, like the sharp sword the priest used on those animals. This is why I chose Psalm 19 as our text this morning and why I would encourage us all to regularly study this Psalm along with the longest Psalm, Psalm 119, a portion of which we will sing in response to this message. All but two or three of the 176 verses in that Psalm make reference to the laws, commandments and statutes of God and how they impact our lives!

- In our text we were reminded that God revealed Himself in two very important ways to us as creatures who are made in the image of God...

Verse one speaks of the voice of God in the Creation: ““The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.” *[mention Hubbell photos]* As the Apostle Paul says in Romans, man is without excuse because everyone of us live in God’s world!

But Psalm 19 does not stop with just the natural revelation that surrounds us because that would not give us meaning for man nor answers to the big questions such as why are we here, where are we going & why is there evil in the creation? The vastness of space makes man insignificant and the cruelty that we see in both nature and man would leave us to conclude that this is the way things have always been and the way they will always be. Thus we rejoice that the Psalmist continues in verse 7,

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; 8 The statutes 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 judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

- We are not left to search for answers only in the created order!
- We can know God, we can know His character and His purposes.

Because as Francis Schaeffer often pointed out God is there and God is NOT silent: We have true truth given to us by the living God! AND we can know what our response is supposed to be to these revelations: 10 “More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward. 12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. 13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.”

[remind them about the reference to gold with both instruction here in the service and private or family devotions]

So yes, this portion of our service is important and in many ways it was at the center of the Reformation...

- However, as we saw earlier it can be abused, especially when all of the other portions of the service are largely set aside.

The Roman Catholic Church was wrong when it told Luther that he must follow the teachings of the Church no matter what the Bible had to say. Today there are far too many protestants who argue that ALL they need is the Bible and have little or no use for the Creeds or traditions of the Church down through history. *[discuss starting from scratch]*

And this brings us to those five solas that came from the reformation: Remember, sola simple means alone!

The “five solas” is a term used to designate five great foundational rallying cries of the Protestant reformers. They are as follows:

“Sola Scriptura” (Scripture Alone);

“Sola Gratia” (Grace Alone);

“Sola Fide” (Faith Alone);

“Solus Christus” (Christ Alone);

“Soli Deo Gloria” (To God Alone Be Glory).

The teaching of the reformers tended to center around these “five solas” as they confronted specific perversions of the truth that were taught by the Roman Catholic Church at that time. Now of course it took hundreds of years to formulate all of these important doctrines and they have now been studied for hundreds more so I am not going to exhaust any or all of them this morning!

What I do want to do is consider the question I asked us to ponder:

- Why are there five alones and which of the five solas is the most important?

Just like the doctrines of Grace that we studied last Lord’s Day, they are interrelated and must all be held together if we are to understand the great love that God has for His people!

Yes, our faith can be as simple as the children’s song Jesus Loves Me...

But the writer of the Hebrews encourages us to move on from the milk and grow in our understanding of all that God has done for us!

This is why in the second letter to young Timothy the Apostle Paul stresses the importance of God’s Word in our lives, “14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

- This is why the truths revealed in Psalms 19 & 119 are so profound!

The Word of God, whether studied here or at home is that gold that the Psalmist and many of the Proverbs encourage us to desire: “10 More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;”

- That certainly points us to the first sola, we look to Scripture alone as our final authority.

And the Scriptures clearly teach that God is the author of our salvation which brings us to the next three solas because otherwise we could have the Bible as an idol or the basis of our salvation, which is not true.

We are saved by grace alone, with no merit or worthiness on our part: As the Apostle Paul told young Timothy, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” God did not look down through time and see some spark of goodness in Paul, nor even how he made a ‘good’ decision on that road to Damascus.

- God sent His Son to save Paul because he was a sinner!

Related to this is sola fide, we are saved by faith alone, remembering with John and Paul that even our faith is a gift from God!

- **Paul's decision on that road, nor the faith that any of us have placed in Jesus, can be claimed as something that we did!**

Listen carefully to how the Apostle John introduces salvation in John 1: "12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

And we see this again with the Apostle Paul writing to the Ephesians,

"8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."

- **I have never understood how an adherent of Arminianism gets around those verses, and you can see why I was such a pain to that early Arminian teacher I had!**

And of course that brings us to the next sola: Christ alone! Clearly Jesus taught that He is the Way, the Truth and the Light and there is no other way to the Father:

- **None of our works, no power of the church, no family heritage nor any other things can add to the work that Jesus accomplished for us!**

The Apostle Paul brings all of these together as he opens his epistle to the Romans:

"1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Clearly there we see, grace alone, faith alone and Christ alone and then after eleven chapters of explaining what all of this means and how our salvation is accomplished the Apostle concludes with the clearest pronouncement of the final sola: To the glory of God alone:

Romans 11: "33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

We have a lot to ponder and consider as we study our order of worship, the Doctrines of Grace and the solas of the Reformation, and as we do may we continue to be good Bereans taking all that is taught back to the Scriptures and always keep in mind the conclusion of our morning text:

Psalm 19:14 "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."

Communion Meditation: Luke 22

"14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him...

19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."