

Summer Psalms

*¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
(Psalms 1:1–2 ESV)*

*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.
(Psalms 29:2 ESV)*

He Is Not Silent
August 7th, 2016
Psalm 19
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Psalm 19; that's on page 456 in your pew Bibles. This is a Psalm about the God who is there and who is not silent.

Perhaps you've heard the old story about the elephant and the blind men? The story is meant to suggest that all religions are basically the same – or at least basically complementary. They are all describing – imperfectly – the same essential reality from their own limited perspective. One blind man touches the elephant's trunk and says that the beast is some sort of snake; another touches his leg and says that the beast is more like a tree. Another touches his tusks and declares the beast to be made of stone. They are all right – in their own way. That is the favourite parable of the religious relativists but the Bible says something that blows that parable away. The Bible says that the elephant SPEAKS! The Bible says that God SPEAKS! He reveals himself IN NATURE and in Scripture.

Psalm 19 has a very simple outline. In verses 1-6 the focus is on natural revelation. In verses 7-11 the focus is on special revelation – on Scripture - and then in verses 12-14 it offers an appropriate prayer of response. We will read the Psalm and discuss it according to those categories. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

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.

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, 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 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. (Psalms 19:1–14 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

There are three statements in verses 1-6 that effectively summarize what the Bible says about natural revelation. The first statement is in verse 1.

Natural Revelation

1. The heavens declares the glory of God

The word David uses there for “heavens” could refer to the universe generally but it could also refer to the sky – specifically the night sky. David is probably drawing our attention to the stars in the heavens and he is saying ‘those stars say something about the beauty and the character and the power of Almighty God.’

Astronomy communicates. There is a message in the heavens for all with eyes to see it. The English poet Edward Young who wrote “Night Thoughts” said it best:

An undevout astronomer is mad. – Edward Young

The Apostle Paul believed that the stars communicate. He said:

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. (Romans 1:20 ESV)

Paul said that when you look at creation – when you consider the night sky – you should be impressed by two things: God’s power and Divine Nature – or as David said, “God’s glory”. The Hebrew word translated as “glory” can also mean “splendour”, “elegance” or “gravity”. That’s a good term. When you put all of that together the Bible seems to be saying that through contemplation of nature we should be able to determine that God exists, he is beautiful, he is orderly, elegant, powerful and central. He is the source and focus of all life.

The second statement is also in verse 1. In the second half of verse 1 David says:

2. The sky above proclaims his handiwork

When you look at the sky David says, you should see convincing evidence for intelligent design. This world is not an accident. The universe is not the product of random events. It has an obvious and intelligent cause. Philosophers generally agree that the most important question that any potential worldview must answer is this: why is there something rather than nothing? That is the foundational question behind EVERY rational worldview. Why is there something rather than nothing? Because really, if you think about there shouldn’t be anything. Nothing is far more likely than something and to have something is really, quite a marvel. You see, everything in this universe that we see on a daily basis has a cause. Babies come from mummies, apples come from trees, eggs come from chickens, watches come from watchmakers – things don’t come from nothing – complicated things in particular do not come from nothing – so why is there something rather than nothing? For there to be anything there must have been something that had no beginning and that has the power of life within itself – something miraculous must lie at the start of this causal train; every rational worldview concedes that logical fact. There has to have been something that has existed forever and that has the power of life within itself – there must be an UNCAUSED CAUSER.

Historically, philosophers have only admitted two possible options. The universe. Or God. Either the universe is eternal and has the power of life within itself or GOD is eternal and has the power of life within himself – those are the only two options. Hinduism for example believes that the universe is eternal and that it has the power of life within itself – most forms of paganism adopt that approach as well – so did modern western science until they discovered that the

universe had a beginning and if it had a beginning then..... well they didn't want to finish that thought.

The Bible on the other hand, builds its worldview on the foundation of option 2. The Bible begins with the words:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

No confusion – no ambiguity. The Bible begins where every coherent worldview has to begin; by explaining why there is something rather than nothing. Because God exists – and has always existed and has within himself the power of life and creation. That's why there is something rather than nothing and Psalm 19 says, you ought to be able to figure that out just by looking at the stars. They're beautiful, they're unnecessarily beautiful, they're ARTISTIC and they give convincing evidence of intelligent and benevolent design.

The third statement is actually made several times in slightly different ways. Perhaps the clearest version comes to us in verse 4:

3. Their voice goes out through all the earth

Scholars go back and forth as to whether this should be “voice” or “line”. The KJV renders verses 3-4 this way:

³ *There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.* ⁴ Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. (Psalms 19:3-4 KJV)

Either way, what the Psalmist is saying that creation is like a book that God is writing in a language that all people, everywhere can understand. You don't have to speak Greek or Hebrew or English or anything else to learn that there is a God who created everything. You just have to look at the night sky and you should be able to figure out that there is a Wise and Powerful God out there and he is good.

Now the verses concerning the sun serve as a sort of bridge between section 1 and section 2. On the one hand the sun represents the climax of God's self-disclosure through the book of nature.

The sun is the most significant star in the sky. It – better than any other star – speaks to God’s power, universal interest and particular care. It goes all the way around the world – phenomenologically speaking – and it provides heat, light and life to all people. It is in that sense the climax of God’s creative disclosure. The sun is also used as an analogy for God’s self disclosure through the Scriptures. In the same way that the sun brings the earth back to life – so the Bible bring people back to life. That’s the bridge that takes us into the section on Special Revelation. Verses 7-11 contain David’s meditation on the Bible.

Special Revelation

He presents his meditation in the form of 6 particular statements. Each one uses the personal name for God. You will notice that in the verses above God is referred to by his impersonal descriptive. He is referred to simply as “God” or in the Hebrew as “El”. That word means “Power” or “Majesty” – this is the God of Alcoholics Anonymous – this is the Higher Power God. That’s the God we can know through nature, but through the Bible we can know God personally and savingly – we can know him as YAHWEH – L-O-R-D. And so each of David’s statements about the Bible includes a reference to the personal name of God. The first statement is in verse 7. David says that:

1. The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul

The word translated as “law” there is the Hebrew word *torah* which means “instruction”. While it sometimes refers to the legal sections of the Bible in particular it is also used regularly to refer to the Bible as a whole. All of the Bible is God’s instruction and according to David that instruction is PERFECT! The Hebrew word for ‘perfect’ means “without defect” or “whole”. It will not lead you astray, it does not leave anything out and it can be trusted to do what it intends. And what it intends to do, according to David – is to revive and convert the soul! David uses the Hebrew word “*shuv*” which means to turn around, or to transform. William Plumer says:

“There is no good reason for limiting the meaning of the word, *converting*, to anything short of a saving change of heart. God’s word is not the agent but only the instrument in the renewal of the soul.”¹

¹ William S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust, first printed 1867, reprinted 2016), 257.

Now some people get nervous when we seem to talk about the Bible converting people because of course— only Jesus, only the Spirit of Jesus can convert somebody. But Plumer is just saying that we probably don't need to be that careful. The Bible calls Jesus the Word of God. The Bible calls Jesus the Spirit of prophecy – meaning he wrote the Bible. Further the Bible says that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus – so its all Jesus. Jesus uses the Word of Jesus and the Spirit of Jesus to bring people to Jesus – or as Romans 10:17 says:

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17 ESV)

Its all Jesus! Jesus speaking to us in the Word of God and Jesus speaking in us through the Spirit of God. That's how people get saved, Old Testament and New, thanks be to God!

The second thing David says is that:

2. The testimony of the LORD is sure making wise the simple

The word used here for “sure” has the sense of trustworthiness. David is saying, “You can take God at his word.”

At the end of the day everyone has to decide who they trust to tell them the truth. There are three options. You can believe in yourself. You can trust your instincts. You can be like god deciding right and wrong for yourself. The problem with that option of course is that human beings are massively self-deceived.

“The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)

Human beings are awesome – at lying to ourselves. We suppress the truth, we avoid the truth, we distort the truth. We are not reliable counsellors - even when counselling ourselves.

The second option of course is that you can trust the smart people. You can trust the educated elite to think and decide for you. The problem is that those smart people often don't tell you what they're really up to. They don't share all the data and all the motivations that lie behind the decisions that become social and cultural dogma.

Take atheism for example and its ugly step-child naturalistic evolution. One of the architects of that worldview, Aldous Huxley, in his book *Ends and Means* revealed his motivations for espousing the ideas that he did – they might surprise you. He said:

"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption... The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in metaphysics, he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in the way that they find most advantageous to themselves... For myself... the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation... sexual... [and] political."²

Did you hear that? The architects of atheism and naturalism were not working from fact to conclusion – they were working backwards from a desire for political and sexual liberty. They wanted to be in charge and they wanted to have sex with whomever they pleased. But they didn't tell you that until after they'd won the day. That's the problem with letting the smart people do your thinking for you. They're not interested in educating you – they are interested in recruiting you as beasts of burden in their utopian society.

The third option of course is, you can trust in God. You can believe what he tells you. You can believe that he is good and that he does not lie. You can believe that the Word of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

Now maybe you don't like that word "simple". The Hebrew root there, *pethach*, means to open, as in to open a door. It means similar to what we mean in English when we say that someone is open minded. According to the Bible everyone is open-minded – what matters is what you open your mind to. The Bible doesn't credit anyone's claim to independent thinking. You are nowhere near as free thinking as you suppose. You believe what is put in your mind. If you watch the CNN, if you watch Fox News, if you watch CBC – if you watch the Daily Show then you are opening your mind and you are being told what to think. So don't tell me how open minded you are because you can parrot Oprah Winfrey or Bill Maher – that's not impressive. You haven't thought these things through on your own – you are repeating what you have heard the smart people say that best supports and justifies how you want to live. That's what the

² Aldous Huxley, *Ends And Means*, internet citation: http://www.update.uu.se/~fbendz/nogod/ah_quote.htm. Huxley later repudiated his own embrace of sheer meaninglessness, though he remained an atheist. Nevertheless, his analysis of the original motivations behind the intellectual movement remain relevant.

Bible says. So you choose carefully whose voice you listen to. Choose carefully what words go in your mind and come out your mouth. Blessed are those who DON'T suck in all that nonsense – David said in Psalm 1 – rather blessed are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord. It makes one wise and good because it comes from a very wise and very good God.

David's third statement about the Bible is found in verse 8:

3. The precepts of the LORD are right rejoicing the heart

The word “precepts” means “directions” or “orders”. Hebrew poetry involves a lot of what is called overlapping parallelism. These words – precepts, law, commandments – these are all synonyms for the word “Bible” but by using this range of synonyms David is able to emphasize slightly different things about the Bible. Now to say that the ‘precepts’ of the LORD are “right” means that they reflect – directly – the character and nature of God.

Let me say that another way. The 10 commandments, for example, are directions for human life that flow directly out of who God is – therefore – if you follow them they will make for healthy and glad human society. That's what David is saying. If your society is falling apart – if everyone is unhappy and if everything is in conflict - then it is probably because you are not following a standard of conduct that is true to God's character and nature. You must be out of line - the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The fourth thing David says is that:

4. The commandment of the LORD is pure enlightening the eyes

The word “pure” here means free from injustice, error and sin. There are no mixed motives, no parts of the Bible that are less helpful than others. Every word of it comes from God and is useful. The New Testament version of this of course, would be 2 Timothy 3:16:

All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable (2 Timothy 3:16 NKJV)

If you want to live in the light then you want to live in the Word of God – every piece and part of

it. Every jot and tittle – your grandparents would say is inspired by God and is gloriously profitable – thanks be to God.

David's fifth statement is found in verse 9. He says:

5. The fear of the LORD is clean enduring forever

Now of all the overlapping synonyms that David uses to refer to the Bible this is the one that sounds a little bit out of place to our modern ears. In English the word “fear” generally means something bad but in Hebrew this word can be good or bad depending on the context. In a religious context it tends to refer to “reverence” and “worship”. What David is saying here is that the Bible – among other things – is a manual for appropriate worship. We forget that sometimes. We know that the Bible has laws and instruction and guidance but we forget that it also has a large section on worship. The Psalms are intended to serve as an example of and an inspiration for Christian worship. This is what our grandparents referred to as the regulative principle. For example, in the original Statement of Faith for this church it was written that:

“the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.”³

In street level English what they meant was that we should only do in our corporate times of worship things that are commanded in the Bible – like teaching Scripture, praying, singing, giving tithes and offerings etc – or things that are positively instanced in the Bible. No one can say that dancing in church is sinful – because we have the example of David doing it. David danced before the Lord and David played instruments and David sang songs so our great grandparents said – all of that should be considered licence and permission. Whatever is commanded or positively instanced in the Bible can be practiced in corporate worship – but whatever is not should not be practiced in corporate worship.

Now of course this doesn't apply to silly things like whether we read the words to a song out of a book or on a screen. No one cares about that. Our grandparents had a word for that – adiaphora

³ The Baptist Confession, Section 22.1. Online citation:
http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/baptist_1689.html

– which means things that are spiritually neutral. So we’re not talking about that. We’re talking about the substantial things we do in worship. Those things should be guided by and suggested from the Scriptures.

If we do that in this place our worship will be clean. Let’s just take a minute and admit that much of what passes for worship in modern day Evangelical churches is far from clean. I’m not going to go into detail – but you know what I’m talking about. I think it would be fair to say this – the more authority the Word of God is given in a church the less likely it is that silliness and worldliness will take over the worship. Let’s leave it at that. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.

David’s last statement is found in the second half of verse 9.

6. The rules of the LORD are true and righteous altogether

The word translated by the ESV as “rules” is actually the Hebrew word for “judgments” – the “rulings”. What David is saying here is that God always puts the boundary markers in the right places.

So if God says that sex should be done thusly and not thusly then that boundary will never move or change. It was right when God said it, it is right today and should the Lord tarry it will be right 10,000 years from now. The judgments of the LORD are TRUE and RIGHTEOUS ALTOGETHER.

They are more to be desired than gold – yea than much fine gold. They are sweeter than honey on the tongue and in keeping them there is great reward.

Psalm 19 ends with a prayer of response in verses 12-14

David’s Prayer Of Response

As David considers the revelation of God in nature and Scripture David becomes of aware of two urgent needs in his own life. His prayer is arranged around those two needs. He asks first of all

for forgiveness:

1. David asks for forgiveness

Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. (Psalms 19:12 ESV)

When David considers how precisely God has determined the boundaries of right and wrong and when David considers how holy and how righteous is the LORD who sets the boundary he immediately becomes aware of his own precarious position – David has not lived according to the Word of the Lord! He couldn't even begin to count the number of times he has transgressed God's commandments. He is a sinner and he doesn't want to stay as such.

The word translated “declare” isn't even in the Hebrew. In the Hebrew the word “innocent” is simply put in the imperative – meaning David begs God to MAKE HIM INNOCENT. David's prayer is basically: “God I am incalculably guilty. I am some kind of sinner! MAKE ME INNOCENT! MAKE ME CLEAN!”

Secondly, David prays for strength:

2. David prays for strength

Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me!
(Psalms 19:13 ESV)

Help me live the way I should! Give me the strength to walk according to your commandments!

That's a good prayer. That's a prayer of faith.

David does exactly what you supposed to do when you consider the Word of God. The Bible is supposed to teach you who God is and who you are in order to turn you in repentance and faith towards the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. For David that was a future oriented faith while for us it is a historically oriented faith. David looked forward and trusted God to address his sin issue and his moral inability issue. David believed that God would provide a means for forgiveness and he would send help and strength. We look back upon how God actually did

those things. He sent Jesus to die on the cross and he poured out the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts through faith.

That's the Gospel! That's the Christian faith in a nutshell – that's Psalm 19 and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let's pray together.