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Text: Psalm 19
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File: Psalm 19

Introduction

Charlie Brown and Lucy and Linus are lying on the ground, looking up into the sky. Lucy says, "If you use your imagination, you can see lots of things in the cloud formations. What do you think you see, Linus?" Linus responds, "Well, those clouds up there look like the map of the British Honduras on the Caribbean. And that cloud looks a little like the profile of Thomas Eakins, the famous painter and sculptor. And that group of clouds over there gives me the impression of the stoning of Stephen. I can see the Apostle Paul standing here to one side."

Lucy replies to him, "Uh huh, that's very good. What do you see in the clouds, Charlie Brown?" Charlie Brown replies, "Well, I was going to say I saw a ducky and a horsie, but I've changed my mind."

So I wonder, what do you see when you look into the skies? King David looked into the heavens and whatever direction he looked, he saw, God. So he writes in Psalm 19:1, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies declare the work of His hands*"

Is that what you see when you are out in the country at night and look up at the stars? Is that what you think about as you walk along the beach and see the surf pounding onto the sand? Is that what comes to mind when you see a picture of Mt Everest or the Great Barrier Reef or Uluru?

I was reading this week about a guy called Wally Amos, as he described his experience a few years ago as he stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon. He said, "The setting sun orchestrated a symphony of subtle hues on the canyon's walls ... It took your breath away. It was so splendid, so overwhelming, that I stood there awestruck. All I could think of was God. For the first time in my life I could feel Him, His power, His majesty, and those puny feelings of staleness and discouragement seemed to drop away from me. It was as if God had handed me His calling card."

In nature, God hands us his calling card. In creation, God goes public. David in this Psalm is picturing nature as a preacher, standing behind a pulpit with a sermon to preach. The sermon being preached by the heavens is all about the glory of God.

The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge. This sermon of nature is continual. It is never ending - day after day - now that's a bit scary isn't it? A never ending sermon! Its there all through the day, as the sun goes across the sky, magnificent, exultant, obedient. Science tell us that the sun is the most important body in our solar system, everything goes around it, everything is dependent upon it. But David reminds us that the sun does God's bidding.

There it is every morning like a bridegroom, champing at the bit to get married. There it is during the day like a champion showing off its power, its strength, its penetration.

But it was placed there by God. It was created by the Creator. The sun is then not to be worshipped, it points instead to the glory of God!

And when the sun goes down, there is still the moon and the stars displaying the knowledge and the power of God. Sailors for thousands of the years, have looked up to the night sky and been guided by their trustworthiness. People of all generations have looked up at the milky way and felt so small and insignificant in comparison to the world that they live in. How great and mighty and glorious must be the one whose hands flung those stars into place?

Yes this message is continual and this message is universal. Because the voice of nature goes into all the earth. Their words to the very ends of the world. As John Calvin once wrote, "...there is not a spot in the universe wherein one can not discern at least some sparks of his glory." So from Moscow to Memphis, from Rome to the rainforest, from Australia to Antarctica – everywhere there is evidence of God. If a picture paints a thousand words, the picture of creation shouts a billion words, to each and every inhabitant on this earth.

The poet Christ Tomlin, puts it this way,
*From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea
Creation's revealing Your majesty
From the colors of fall to the fragrance of spring
Every creature unique in the song that it sings
All exclaiming*

*Indescribable, uncontainable,
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.
You are amazing God
All powerful, untameable,
Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim
You are amazing God*

*Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go
Or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow
Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light
Yet conceals it to bring us the coolness of night
None can fathom*

*Indescribable, uncontainable,
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.
You are amazing God
Incomparable, unchangeable
You see the depths of my heart and You love me the same
You are amazing God
You are amazing God*

Here we find the first way God speaks. Through nature God communicates his greatness. I think that is why people feel close to God when they're close to nature. A breathtaking sunset or a snow capped mountain inspires us to think about God. Some are so awed by nature that they worship nature itself, much like we might be

tempted to idolize a great preacher rather than worship the God the preacher is speaking about.

Others in the words of Paul in Romans 1, suppress the truth of God's power and majesty in nature. They know that God exists, but refuse to glorify him, or give thanks to him. They hear the message of the sermon of nature but refuse to acknowledge the Creator God. Instead they follow their own will, desires, plans. Or they serve created things rather than the creator.

So the book of nature is limited; for it only tells us about God as our creator. We *can know* about God through nature, as we're confronted with his greatness, his majesty, his awesomeness, but *we can't know* God personally through creation. So that is why nature is Volume 1 of God's revelation. And Volume 2, is the Scriptures. For the heavens may declare God's glory but the Scriptures tell us what God did so that we might share his glory. The *world around* us might point us to God. But it is the *word before* us that points us to the Lord God Almighty.

2. The Lord v.7-10

For the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. God's law is complete, there is nothing left out. It is comprehensive, it does everything that we need it to do. There is no part of your life, no problem that you will ever face in your life, no question with which you will ever be troubled, that the Word of God does not speak to and illuminate and meet. So it is perfect, "reviving the soul."

And the statues of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. You can count on what God says. It will give you wisdom to live the good life. It will instruct you about what God is really like.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. By reading about God's ways, his nature, his grace, we are not consumed by fear or overcome by doubts, we experience God's joy.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. Following God's commands doesn't squeeze all the goodness out of our lives, it helps us to live the way we were created for. It gives us a purpose in life, it allows our life to experience meaning and direction. Our eyes can now be focused not just on what is happening in my little part of the world, I see what God is doing everywhere.

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. So that allows me to live in reverent fear before my Creator. I am not scared of him, but I am full of awe for him. I respect what he has to say. I am aware of his constant presence. He will always be with me and so I will want to be seen doing what is right and true and admirable.

So that will encourage me to follow his word. Because *the ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.* They will show me what is right in God's eyes.

That is why God's word *is more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.* For God's word when it is added to God's works shows God's power *and* his compassion. His divine nature *and* his grace

toward us humans. The fact that he is the creator *and* the Saviour and the Sanctifier.

In *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, Kathleen Norris recounts the story of a South Dakota rancher and his bride who received an expensive Bible as a wedding gift from his grandfather. They wrote a thank-you note and stowed the Bible away on a closet shelf.

As time passed, the grandfather repeatedly asked the couple how they liked the Bible. The rancher was confused as to how to respond. Hadn't he already expressed his appreciation? But the grandfather persisted. Eventually, the young man dug out the gift. As he leafed through it, \$20 bills fluttered out, 66 in all—one at the beginning of Genesis and in each succeeding book.

For the riches of the world are great. But the riches of the Word are even greater. Without the Bible, we hear nature's sermon, but we have no idea which road to take to establish a relationship with God. Nature's sermon then is unable to convert our soul. We need the Bible for that.

And the Bible does that by giving us the Law, to show us our need for God's grace. By giving us the history of the people of God, to show us that like them, we need God to step into our lives and rescue us from our sin. We need the prophets, to call us back to our Father, when we have wandered away. We need the gospel to show us that the invisible God, was made visible in the form of his one and only Son Jesus. We need the death of Jesus to show us that the only way our sins could be paid for was when he swapped his life for our lives. We need the resurrection of Jesus to show us that God has now defeated our greatest enemy, death. We need the letters of the NT to show us how the coming of Jesus will change our lives. And we need the book of Revelation to remind us to live lives of readiness because we don't know the day or the hour when Jesus will return to end the world.

That is why we need to come to Church and hear the Word of God read and preached. That is why we need to open up these pages on a regular basis and allow them to speak to our lives. That is why we need to meet together in small groups so that we are serious about hearing what God is saying to us. And yet we are so blasé about the Word of God that we would prefer to watch the Vicar of Dibley, the news or Big Brother before we would open ourselves up to what God wants to say to us.

You see once you understand that for Christians the value of the Bible is beyond measure, you can understand the great sacrifices Christians have been willing to make for the Bible. I think of a guy named William Tyndale. Tyndale lived in England in the 1500s and was the first person to translate the Bible from its original languages into the English language. That lifelong project cost Tyndale his career, his freedom, and ultimately his very life. It's hard to imagine, but he was burned at the stake for translating the Bible into English.

I think of one of our missionaries Steve Lilley, he has left his home nation, his own culture, his own family to go to Northern India and translate the Scriptures into that culture's mother tongue. He will be there for decades, maybe even half his life, but he knows the people of this region need both God's works and God's word.

That is why during times of persecution, Christians from nations all over the world, one by one descend on a house at different times during the day. They wait almost all day for the full set of believers to arrive without drawing attention to themselves. And then they study the Scriptures and pray and worship God and then spend half the night leaving at different times so they can get home safe and secure.

For the world around us speaks of a God. The word before us describes the Lord and verses 11 to 14 teach us that the witness through us will show others who is

3. My Redeemer (verses 11 to 14)

Because in the last couple of verses David moves from what we see and what we hear, to what we should do. For the knowledge of God and the word of God in the end is extremely practical.

There was once a physics professor who was teaching his class the theory of the pendulum. He knew they responded well to physical demonstrations of theory so one day he held his class in the university gymnasium. The class gathered in the gym to discover that the professor had rigged a large, heavy ball on the end of one of the ropes that hung along the centre of the gym. He pulled the ball back and then asked the class, "Who can tell me what will happen when I let the ball go?" Well several hands went up and the correct answer was given: "The ball will swing backwards and forwards in an ever-decreasing arc. The effect of friction will be such that the pendulum will slow down and eventually stop."

"Do the rest of you believe that?" asked the Professor. There was general nodding around the room. "Excellent" said the Professor. "So, who'll volunteer to come out here, hold the ball against their nose and then let it go?"

What do you think? Would you have volunteered? Would you have put your nose on the line? Can you see what the professor in that story has done? He's moved the question from being simply theoretical to being life changing. I mean if the theory's wrong your going to get a nose job aren't you?

And that what David does as well. If the law of the Lord, the statutes of the Lord, the precepts of the Lord, the commands of the Lord, the fear of the Lord, and the ordinances of the Lord are so valuable, then surely these things need to warn God's servants. And these words need to not just be heard but obeyed.

And if I am going to obey this Word, then I need to be able to discern my errors, the way God sees my errors. I know, left to myself, I will justify a lot of my bad actions, I will find excuses or mitigating circumstances. But I need to not look at myself in my own mirror but in God's mirror. For he will see my hidden thoughts. He will keep me from wilful sins. He will not let my wrongdoings enslave me. He will lead me to Jesus who will enable me to innocent of great transgression.

For in the end, that is where I need to be led, to Jesus. He is the one who in the beginning helped make the heavens and the earth. He is the Word of God that helps revive the soul and helps make me altogether righteous. And he is the only real example in Scripture, put before us, of someone who was blameless, whose words of

his mouth and the meditations of his heart were completely pleasing to God sight. The only one who always had God as his Lord, his rock and his redeemer.

Put it another way. The skies show God's fingerprints everywhere. The Scriptures explain God's blueprint for our lives. But it is the Son whose footprints we are to follow in. It is Jesus who leads us not just to a God, or onto the Lord, but shows us what it is like to have him as our rock and redeemer.

And an example of how this all works in practise is the wise men. Remember they are looking at the sky and they see God's special star, and they follow it. They end up in Jerusalem where they are pointed to the Scriptures and told that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. And so they go to Bethlehem and there they find the baby Jesus and they bow down and worship him and give him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

You see the skies point them to a King. The Scriptures points them to the king. And then they Jesus and worship him as their king. So as Warren Wiersbe once said "the word in the heavens is fine, the Word in the head is better but the word in the heart is what transforms and matures us in Christ."

Which just means that we need to get out into nature and enjoy the wonder, the power, the majesty of our God. We need to walk along the river, climb that mountain, visit that island and remember how great thou art. But we need to do more than get out into nature, we need to Get into the word. We need to listen, meditate, ponder, consider, reflect and trust God's word. Allow it to revive our soul, make us wise, give us joy, and make us righteous. And last of all we need to get the word into us. To change us, to mould us and make us into the people we were designed and made to be. We need to follow Jesus footprints so that all that we are and all that we think and all that we do is pleasing to God and brings him the glory that he deserves.

In conclusion, the man on the Golf Course looks around and sees, "There's a God out there. But what God?" The astronaut looks out into space and says, "There's a God out there. But what God?" The poet sees the sunset and says, "There's a God out there. But what God?" You can feel the presence of God anywhere, but you have to come to the word of God, to actually know God. For it is never enough to know that there is a God. You have to learn how to trust God.

So for the tired soul, watching a sunset is nice, but it's not enough. It takes the Word of God to revive the soul. For the confused mind, playing a round of golf and feeling the presence of God in nature doesn't give guidance. It takes the Word of God to make wise the simple. For the grieving spirit, it is not looking at the ocean or the stars that gives comfort, it is the Word of God that gives joy to the heart. And when that word of God changes you, that God becomes personal, my lord, my rock, my redeemer. So today as you look out at God's works and as you listen to God's word, be determined to become God's worker.

