

**“Sky and Scripture”**  
**Psalm 19**  
**June 24, 2018**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Psalm 19 is about two of God’s special gifts to us: creation and the Bible. These are two gifts that are very special to me. I have always enjoyed being outdoors, and much prefer it to being indoors. On really nice days, I sometimes look out my office window and envy the garbage collectors as they pass by for the simple reason that they can be outdoors. I especially enjoy beautiful landscapes like the Blue Ridge Mountains or a picturesque lake. But I also enjoy the Bible, and it is my great privilege to be paid to study the Bible and teach it to others. Today’s psalm teaches that these are two of God’s good gifts not just because there is a beauty to them in themselves, but because they are both God’s word to us.

The value of these gifts derives from the fact that they are a necessary part of having a relationship with God. Communication is a necessary part of any relationship. It would not be much of a marriage if a husband and wife never spoke to one another. If two people claim to be friends but never communicate, their claim of friendship is empty. Satan knows better than anyone the necessity of communication to relationship. The first words from his mouth that are recorded in the Bible were an attack on the communication from God to Adam and Eve. **“Did God really say?”** was the question he posed to them, thus casting doubt on this essential part of our relationship with God.

So let me ask you a question before we get into this psalm. If your relationship with God is judged by the quality of the communication between the two of you, how is your relationship with God? Do you hear from him in ways that move you, that deepen your love for him? Does he ever hear from you? Is your relationship with God like that troubled marriage in which the communication is as little and as brief as possible, and when there is communication both parties are relieved when it ends? When Satan attacked the word of God in the Garden of Eden, a deep rupture in mankind’s relationship with God occurred, because Adam and Eve came to doubt God’s word. But God has not given up on this relationship, and this psalm speaks of some of the things he has done to restore the vital communication of our relationship with him.

**I. Wordless Revelation – v. 1-6**

Theologians have traditionally spoken of God’s revelation to us in the two categories of general and special revelation. God speaks to us through two

books, the book of creation and the Bible. The first six verses of our psalm speak of the book of creation, a book that reveals something of the nature of God. Jesus was a skilled reader of creation. Do you remember his famous words in the Sermon on the Mount? **“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”** (Matt. 6:26). The word from God that Jesus took from creation in this instance was an encouragement not to be anxious, for the simple reason that creation ought to teach us that God cares for all his creation, especially those of us created in his image. The book of Job shows the same thing. Do you remember how God spent two chapters of that book addressing Job about creation? He asked Job if he understood all the mysteries of creation, such as where the rain comes from, the origin of light and darkness, and the manner of many strange animals. God’s “word” to Job through this lesson on creation was this: just as there are many things about the created world that seem bewildering to Job, so it shouldn’t surprise him that there are many things about God’s providential rule over Job’s life that he will not understand, such as why he is suffering. Job should rest in the fact that there is a God who does know and control all such things.

The first six verses of Psalm 19 focus on two aspects of creation: the night sky and the day sky. Both of these “pour out speech” and “reveal knowledge.” As some have said, they are “soundless words.” What message do they bring? They bring the same message as God’s written word. The first part of that message is that God is full of glory. **“The heavens declare the glory of God.”** Don’t you find that creation moves your soul deeply? The mountains, the oceans, the sun and the stars inspire our awe, leaving us speechless before their grandeur. Consider just the size of the universe. As you are aware, our sun is actually a star in our galaxy, the Milky Way galaxy. The nearest star to our sun is 4.3 light years away, which is the distance light travels during a year, at a speed of 186,000 miles per second. So that’s pretty far away. How many stars are there in our galaxy? Astronomers don’t know for sure, but estimate that there are between 200 and 400 *billion*. That’s just in our corner of the universe, the Milky Way galaxy. How many galaxies are there in the universe? Several years ago, the Hubble Space telescope pointed its giant lens at one point in the universe for a period of time. Scientists counted about 10,000 galaxies just in that one point. How many galaxies are there in the universe? Astronomers don’t know for sure, but they estimate that there are at least 100 billion. God knows, because he spoke them all into existence. We see the glory of God not only in the largest part of creation, but in the smallest as well. Living cells are amazing things, as are molecules and atoms. The heavens declare the glory of God.

The psalmist moves next to talk about the sun, likening the rising of the sun to a bridegroom emerging from his tent to go and claim his bride. This is a reference to the wedding practices common during this period, in which a man

would emerge from his tent and go to the tent of the bride to claim her as his wife. It's not hard to imagine the sense of joyful expectancy that would mark such a bridegroom. He adds a second metaphor, a strong man running with joy. If we are literate and know how to "read" creation, one of the messages we should take from the sun is that of hope. We have a saying about this: "the sun will come up in the morning." Every morning when the sun comes up, we should read it as God's promise of a new day, not just a literal new day but newness in the deepest sense of renewed hope.

Let's pause to apply this. We all have times when hope burns low, when we have a hard time just moving forward. Perhaps you're battling such despair right now. Hear what God says to you through creation. "Just as I know how to make the sun rise every day, so I can make new joy and hope arise in your heart.

In Romans 1, Paul reflects on Psalm 19 and points out a problem. Though God has spoken abundantly and clearly through creation, the message doesn't get through. The problem is not with the message itself, but with the receiver. We are illiterate when it comes to reading creation. The reason is that our hearts are opposed to God, and it is a universal problem. In order to know him truly, we should not need anything more than God's word through creation, but we do. Thankfully, God provides more through special revelation in the Bible.

## II. Written Revelation – v. 7-10

There are five different words used in these verses for God's written revelation to us, as well as multiple statements about the benefits that come to us through God's word. Before looking at those, I want us to go to the end of this section and read the psalmist's conclusion. "**More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb**" (v. 10). Notice the ramping up of this language. There is to be a desire for God's word that is more than gold, more than *fine* gold, more than *much* fine gold. That's a strong desire. I remember reading years ago of the march of Hernando De Soto through the southern United States centuries ago. His troops endured much hardship, risked great danger and became willing to afflict terrible atrocities on others for one grand purpose—the pursuit of much gold. De Soto's quest for gold ended without ever finding any, but there is a treasure in God's word in which we will never come up empty-handed.

Why is God's word to be desired more than gold? It is through God's word that we come into relationship with God. That is what makes it both precious and sweet. It is sweeter than the sweetest thing the ancients could imagine, honey. This brings up a very important point. The purpose of our studying of the Bible is not merely to learn more about the Bible, but to come to know the

God of the Bible. It is possible for Bible reading and Bible study to be exceedingly dry and boring. But when it brings us to know God better, it is just the opposite. So how can that happen?

Notice the many benefits that come from God's word in the Bible. First, it revives the soul. The soul is the real part of you, what makes you you. It is your true identity. When we have a relationship with God through his word, it serves to restore our true self. It releases you from your false self, that self you want to present to others. Next, it makes "wise the simple." The simple is the young, naïve person who is easily deceived. Then we are told that God's precepts bring joy to the heart and enlightenment to the eyes (v. 8). Another way to look at this is to consider what we are like apart from the benefits that come from knowing God through his word. We have souls that are dead and in need of reviving; we are naïve, joyless and moving around in the dark. Knowing God through his word is the answer to all of that.

There are five different names given to God's word in these verses. It is the law of the Lord, the testimony of the Lord, the precepts of the Lord, the commandment of the Lord and the rules of the Lord. Together, these terms refer both to law and gospel. God gives us rules and commandments, as well as promises. Both law and gospel are expressions of God's grace to us. God gives us rules and commands because he loves us. God gives us promises because he loves us. The last word of verse 9 is very important: **"the rules of the Lord are true and righteous *altogether*."** That means that benefiting from God's word and finding it to be both sweet and precious will require that we receive it all. Both law and gospel must be received, believed and obeyed. There is a promised great reward for doing so.

### **III. Received Revelation – v. 11-14**

Psalm 19 concludes not by speaking of God's words, but ours. The psalmist moves from talking about God's word to talking to God. When properly received, God's word produces words in us directed back toward God. We have a word for this—prayer. His prayer begins by praying for discernment to see his hidden faults. This is a problem common to us all. We just don't see our own faults very well. They may be obvious to others but completely hidden to us. About twenty years ago, I was on a short mission trip to Peru with several others from our church. While there, I was once asked to sign some ceremonial document to acknowledge our visit to a particular ministry there. As I bent over to sign the document, someone snapped a picture of me. When we got back to Birmingham, I was looking through the photographs of the trip and saw that particular photo. My first thought was, "Who is the bald-headed guy bending over to sign that document?" With a bit of a shock, I then quickly realized it was me. I had not seen myself from the perspective of a direct view from above, with the result that the extent of my increasing baldness had been hidden from

me. The word of God has that same effect upon us, giving us a different perspective that shows us our true need.

Why is it important that we be able to discern our errors and our sins? Does God want to shame us and make us feel bad? Not at all. He wants us to come to him with our need. It is our failures and our sin that bring us to God. We come to him as our rock and our redeemer. The last phrase of the psalm reveals the goal of God's word. God reveals himself to us that we might know him as our rock and our redeemer. Let's talk a little about these two words. God is our rock, meaning that he is the refuge in whom we need to trust. Remember the words of that hymn: "They who trust him wholly find him wholly true."

God is also described as our redeemer. It's the Hebrew word *goel*, which was a word describing a normal part of Israel's life. The *goel* was a person's nearest kin who had to accept certain responsibilities. For example, if part of the family land was in danger of being lost due to some financial calamity, the *goel* had the responsibility of purchasing the land in order to preserve it for the family. If a sister-in-law lost her husband before having any children, thus leaving her impoverished in her old age, the *goel* was required to take her as his wife in order that she might raise up children to care for her should she survive her husband. In short, the *goel* accepted responsibility to rescue his kinsmen from various calamities. God, our *goel*, accepts responsibility for his people. When they sin, he accepts the responsibility of paying for their sin. When they call out to him to deliver them in time of trouble, he does so. When they cry out and ask him to change their evil hearts, he does so. Just as the sun rises each day and speaks to us a word of hope, God's revealed word in the Bible speaks similarly. Our hope is in the Lord and in his promise. He is our rock and our redeemer. When we receive this word from God about him being our rock and redeemer, it gives us a new perspective on creation. Now we can look back at the sun rising each day and interpret it aright, seeing in it a profound promise from God that brings hope to our souls.

## **CONCLUSION:**

So let me end with the same question I began with. If the quality of your relationship with God is determined by the quality of your communication with him, how is your relationship with God? If it needs improvement, may I suggest that you plan to take some steps to improve it? Read and study God's word. Let the word of God study you and know you. And do it all in order to know God better and love him more. Like any relationship, it takes time and therefore requires patience. But it is well worth it. May God deepen your love for him! May the words of your mouth and the meditation of your heart be acceptable in his sight, as you come to see him as your rock and your redeemer!