

'Making Sense of the Psalms No.4'
Armagh: Wednesday 17th June 2009
Psalm 19:1-14
"God Has Spoken"

Introduction

I have chosen Psalm 19 to be part of this series, because it is again a foundational Psalm, this time making the point to us that **God has spoken** – God has revealed himself to us, and therefore all of us are without excuse. We not only know that God exists, but He has also revealed Himself to us (i.e. what He is like), and the way for us to get to know Him in a living and personal way. We don't have to dream up our own way to get to God, He has revealed to us the only way – it's through faith in his Son, and his death for our sins.

Psalm 19 follows on very nicely from Psalm 8 that we looked at last time. Psalm 8 asked the question, "What is man?" or "Who am I?" The Psalmist answered that question by first of all revealing to us something of what God is like, from His Creation. He began by saying,

*"O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.
You have set your glory above the heavens....*

*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, the son of man that you care for him?"*

In Psalm 8 David was obviously looking up at a night sky - at the moon and the stars, and marvelling at God's handiwork in the vast universe that he had created. But he didn't mention the largest body in the universe – the sun. He didn't mention it at all! Well he makes up for it in Psalm 19. He must be writing this one in the heat of the day, because in Psalm 19 he thinks about what the sun tells us of what God is like.

He sees the sun as a picture of the glory of God (vs.4b-6).

*"In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,
which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other;
Nothing is hidden from its heat."*

As the commentator H.C. Leupold says (EP, 1977, p.179) about Psalm 19:

"The approach is like that of Psalm 8: it is as though the word 'glory' were written in capital letters across the very heavens and the firmament."

That's the first thing that I want you to see this evening from Psalm 19, that...

1. God has spoken to us through His Creation (vs.1-6)

Psalm 19 begins by saying:

***'The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies (or 'the firmament' cf Gen.1) proclaim the work of his hands.'***
Or *"and especially the firmament"* (Leupold) – i.e. the sky we can see.

David is obviously looking up at the bright blue cloudless skies over Israel, perhaps as he was taking a rest from tending the sheep in the heat of the day. Without any clouds, he is able to take in the sky from one horizon to the other. The only thing then that stands out against this blue back-drop is the brightness and warmth and heat of the sun itself.

So in vs.4-6 he says that: Out of sight beyond the horizon of the early morning – in the heavens, God has pitched **a tent** for the sun – a temporary residence or a place of shelter. In the early morning the rising sun is like **a bridegroom** coming forth from his pavilion – eager to be up to claim his bride. Or at the end of the day as the sun goes down on the opposite horizon it is like **a champion** rejoicing to run his course – glad that the day is over. So it rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat. That's what strikes David about the sun – the very fact that it rises at one end of the earth and travels throughout the day to the other side of the world. The very fact that **'nothing is hidden from its heat'** means that the whole world experiences this phenomenon every day. That's why he says what he does in the earlier part of this section:

*"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.
There is no speech or language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
Their words to the ends of the world."* (vs. 1-4a)

Do you get the point of what David is saying? He is saying that what we see in the sky by day (Ps.19), and by night (Ps.8) tells every single human being that has ever lived anywhere on this planet that **there is a God!**

God has revealed Himself to us in nature, but especially in what we can see of him from the skies above us. **We only have to look up to know that there is a God! Day and night the skies are shouting it at us!**

What's more the sun, moon and stars speak a universal language. They say the same thing to every man, woman and child that lives on this planet - no matter what language they speak.

"There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard." (v.3)

And something else, this message knows no political or geographical boundaries:

*"Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."
(v.4a).*

Today there are what are known as **'restricted access countries'** i.e. Countries into which missionaries or Gospel preachers cannot go. They are not allowed, they are forbidden. Yet God still has a witness there.

The heavens, even over those countries, still declare the glory of God; the skies even over those lands still proclaim the work of his hands. This is God's universal revelation of Himself to all men, telling them that He exists!

Paul believed this in the New Testament – See Romans 1:19-20 –

He believed this so strongly that he said because of this universal revelation **'men are without excuse.'**

i.e. They should have long ago stopped debating or arguing over the existence of God! They should know from Creation that a Creator God exists.

Now that does not mean that they will know the way of salvation from looking at the heavens. e.g. They will not know from Creation that this God is called the LORD (Jehovah or Yahweh), or that he sent his Son Jesus to die for our sins, and to be our Saviour. For this further revelation they will need to know that God has also spoken through His Word the Bible and then be able to read it for themselves to find out what God is like and what God requires of them. Paul also quotes from Psalm 19 in Romans ch.10, in the context of talking about preaching that will take the Gospel not just to Israel, but to all the nations of the world. See Romans 10:14-21.

...and that brings us to the second part of this Psalm:

2. God has also spoken to us through His Word (vs.7-11)

Some critical commentators try to make out that Psalm 19 is in fact two Psalms stuck together. They cannot see how vs.1-6 can fit together with vs.7-11. But that's because they miss the whole point that this Psalm is talking about the fact that *God has spoken*. He is a God who has revealed himself to us, not only in nature, but more importantly, and in much more detail, through his written Word the Bible i.e. He began by using **pictures** in Creation, now he is using **words** in the Bible, to communicate with us.

The theme of the Word of God in the Psalms begins in the very first one – Psalm 1:2. When we looked at Psalm 1, I referred to this verse as **'the secret of the man of God.'** It's the secret of his strength – that *'he delights in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.'*

If you want to be strong as a Christian, do not neglect God's Word – read and study it for yourself – feed upon it every day, then you'll be ready for anything! If you're weak as a Christian, then this is probably the root cause!

Psalm 19:7-11 is like a condensed version of the longest Psalm in the Bible – 119. It has 176 verses and every one of them talks about the Word of God! It is an example of how much David, the Psalmist delighted in God's Word. This evening we're looking at the condensed version! – Psalm 19:7-11.

(i) Note the 6 References to the Word of God:

The Law of the Lord – The word ‘Law’ is used in a more general sense, meaning not just the Ten Commandments (e.g.) but all that God has said about himself in his Word, the Bible.

The Statutes of the Lord – The word ‘statutes’ reminds us that the standard that God requires of us is clearly revealed to us in God’s Word – it is perfection! This is a standard that he wants us to measure up to, yet we all fall far short of it (Rom 3:23).

The Precepts of the Lord – Precepts are guidelines to live by. Wisdom to live by. That’s exactly what God’s Word is. Read the Bible and apply its principles to your life if you want to live a good life.

The Commands of the Lord – But God’s Word is much more than good advice, we must always remember that it contains commands – Commands from the only one who really has the authority to command us to do anything – the God who made us! He expects obedience – anything less is sin.

The Fear of the Lord – From studying God’s Word we find out so much about Him. And if we are reading the Bible right, we should be learning to fear the Lord. As the writer of Proverbs says, again and again, *“The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* We need to study the Bible with a healthy fear of God in our hearts.

The Ordinances of the Lord – The Bible tells us of many things, which God has ordained: His Ways, in which we are to walk. Things we are to practice in his church - Order within society, within families, within the church. Chaos will result if we fail to put into practice and to live by those things that God has ordained for us.

So these are some of the words the Psalms use to describe the Word of God, the Bible. Psalm 119 has so many more, but these 6 give a flavour of what we should expect to find as we read the Bible.

(ii) Note the Qualities of the Word of God:

It is *perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, enduring forever.*

It is *sure, and all together righteous.*

What other Book, or piece of literature could you read today, that you could say that about? There aren’t too many! God’s Word is unique, it is special – it is absolutely trustworthy and true. It is pure and perfect!

And so, the Psalmist David says it is *‘more precious than gold!’* The most valuable thing he possesses. Is that what you think of your Bible?

To him God’s Word is *‘sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb!’*

Have we lost our love for the Word of God? Have we begun to take it for granted? Do we need to rekindle that love this evening? And value this book God has given us!

(iii) Note the 6 Benefits of the Word of God:

'The Law of the Lord is perfect - Reviving the soul.' Does your soul need revived? Woken up from its sleep, set on fire again for the Lord? Then get back to the Bible!

'The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy - Making wise the simple' – Do you need wisdom this evening? You'll only find it from God (James 1:5). Some need to be made wise unto salvation? Well, according to 2 Timothy 3:15, it's God's Word that will show the way to Jesus and help people to trust in Him.

'The precepts of the Lord are right - Giving joy to the heart' – Have you lost your joy? Have you grown cold in your walk with God? Well maybe this is why – it's time to get back to God's Word – it's time to feed your soul again!

'The commands of the Lord are radiant - Giving light to the eyes' – Have you become blind to the seriousness of sin, and the effects of sin? In today's world with all its new morality, and its maze of ethical issues, don't we need more than ever to get back to God's Word as the ground for all our decisions as to where we stand in matters of ethics and morality. *'The commands of the Lord give light to our eyes!'*

The commands contained in God's Word do two things for us:

(i) By them is your servant warned – They warn us not to do wrong.

(ii) In keeping them there is great reward – They show us the benefit of doing what's right. When we do, there is great reward!

N.B. God – LORD:

Just notice something before we move on to the end of this Psalm.

Notice that in vs.1-6, Creation tells us that God exists – There is a *God* behind all this! But it takes God's Word the Bible, to reveal to us *who* this God is – He is the *LORD*! The God who made the heavens and the earth is the LORD - Jehovah or Yahweh. Creation couldn't tell us his name or what he is like, but God has - through His Word. (N.B. LORD appears 7 times in vs.7-14. God only appears once in vs.1-6, not LORD.)

3. So what should Our Response to God be? (vs.12-14)

Since God has spoken to us in both of these ways. Since he has taken the trouble to reveal himself to us in Nature and in His Written Word the Bible, how should we respond? Well look at how the Psalmist David responds in this final section:

(i) In the light of God's perfection we should seek God's forgiveness for our *'hidden faults'* (v.12). Deep within each one of us there are secret sins. Nobody else knows about them, sometimes we hardly know about them ourselves -They are *hidden* faults.

But God knows about them. Just as there is nothing hidden from the heat of the sun (v.6) likewise there is nothing in our lives that is hidden from the searchlight of God's Word. So we should admit that we are sinners, and seek

God's forgiveness even for sins we don't even know about that lurk deep beneath the surface of our hearts.

It goes without saying then that if we should ask forgiveness for our hidden faults, we should certainly own up and confess and seek forgiveness for those sins we do know we have committed, the things that we know we have done, said or thought wrong!

(ii) We should pray for help not to be led into temptation or wilful, rebellious sins (v.13) – wilful sins / open sins. Things that we might wilfully or deliberately do that we know are wrong - in outright rebellion against God and our consciences.

Do we need to pray about this? Well, Jesus thought we did.
(See 'The Lord's Prayer' in Matthew 6:9-13). Notice v.13:

'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

Prevention is better than cure. Instead of deliberately walking into things that we know to be wrong, wilfully and blatantly disobeying God's Word, we should be praying for help not to give into such temptations in the first place. We should pray that the Lord would deliver us from, or protect us from, the evil one – the devil, who tempts us.

(iii) We should pray (as in v.14) that:

"The words of our mouths (what we say) and the meditation of our hearts (what we think / what we are) would be pleasing (or acceptable) in God's sight – remembering that He is The LORD, our Rock, and our Redeemer"

This is a prayer that every believer should pray regularly and often. If Jesus is your Redeemer, if he has cleansed you from your sins already, then you should pray this.

Remember that just as nothing is hidden from the sun's heat (v.4), so with God, nothing is hidden from His sight (v.14). He sees into every nook and cranny of our being. Just like the sun on a scorching hot day even heats up those places that are usually in the shade, so the searchlight of God's Word shows up the dimmest recesses of our souls that we think we have managed to hide from everybody else – God still knows! We can hide nothing from him.

Maybe sometime today you need to get alone with God and tell Him what he knows about you already – what's in your heart, in your mind, in your thoughts.

Tell him what you have been doing recently that you know grieves Him. That's confession. It's good for the soul. But we should tell it to God - and to God alone. How do you need to respond to God as a result of what you've heard this evening?