

Revelations of God Psalm 19

I went to college up in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. On winter nights, away from the lights of Lexington, the air is so dry and clear, it seems that you can just reach up and touch the stars. And there are so many of them. And you get the feeling that if you could just see a little bit farther, there would be twice as many more. Yes, standing under a cloudless sky on a clear night, in the face of such magnificence, who can doubt that the heavens are declaring the glory of God?

Of course, the closest star to us, the Sun, is also the most impressive, at least to our eyes. David describes the glory of the sun breaking forth in the morning as like that of a bridegroom coming forth from his bridal chamber. He compares the strength and the swiftness of the sun to that of an athlete running a race. Nothing can stop the sun from making its daily journey across the sky, and nothing can hide from its heat – everyone who's lived through a Mississippi summer knows that. What power it must have taken to generate such power! What authority must command its regular motions! How the sun declares the glory of God!

Of course verse 3 tells us that the sun and the stars don't speak English, or even Hebrew. But they do communicate messages to the entire surface of the earth, to the very end of the world. As Dr. Reese taught us astronomy students, the stars speak in electromagnetic radiation. The colors of the stars, the types of light they emit, give us clues as to their type, and thus how bright they would be if they were close by. Using mathematics, we can then calculate from their relative brightness how distant they are from us.

And what a story these stars have to tell! The ancients were impressed by what they saw with the naked eye, and humbled by the magnitude of the night sky, the firmament as they called it. If they could have traveled all over the globe, they might have seen 6000 stars or so.

But with our ever larger, ever more accurate telescopes, we know that there are billions of stars, a hundred times a hundred billion, stretching so far into space that it takes the light from the farthest stars a billion years to reach our telescopes, even though light travels at 186,000 miles per second. So, if the night sky could inspire David to awe and wonder, if the light of the voiceless stars could call him to worship the God Who could create such magnificence, how much more should we moderns praise God for the vastness of His power!

And if the ancients were impressed by the heat that the sun generates on earth, we know much more clearly just how large and how powerful the sun really is. We know that the Sun is actually a tremendous fusion reactor. It has 12,000 times the surface area of the earth, so large that its own gravity compresses hydrogen molecules together to form helium, releasing tremendous amounts of light and heat. Although it is almost 93 million miles away, it is still able to make us sweat – that's because it's 10,800 degrees Fahrenheit at its surface. That means it is perhaps 29 million degrees Fahrenheit at its core. What power it must have taken to create such power! How the sun declares the glory of God!

But the sad truth is that at the time of David, lots of people saw the glory of the stars and the sun and didn't give the glory to the God Who made them. Instead, many ancient people worshipped the stars. Impressed with the regular motions of the planets, they came up with the false science of astrology, inventing stories about each of the constellations, and freighting the motions of the planets with all sorts of spurious meaning.

In addition, many ancient cultures worshipped the sun, from the Mayans and Incas in America to the Egyptians and the Greeks in the Mediterranean, to the Chinese near the Pacific. Both the Incas and the Egyptians believed that their kings were descended from the sun god, and it is likely that the shape of the Egyptian pyramids was intended to mimic the rays of the sun.

But many modern astronomers give no more honor to the one true God Who made the sun, moon and stars than did those ancient pagans. Instead of honoring God for His power and wisdom in creation, many astronomers speak of the Big Bang. These astronomers are as precise in their calculations of gravitational forces as they are ignorant of exactly how gravity works, and yet in their pride they refuse to worship the Creator of gravity, the One in whom the apostle Paul tells us all things consist.

For that's the rub, isn't it? However impressive, however grand, however glorious is God's creation, because it speaks without words there are just some things that it can't tell us. The theologians would put it this way – we need more than just the general revelation of God that we see displayed in His creation. We also need the special revelation of God that we find in His Word. Science can show us what things look like and how things work, at least to a point. But only God Himself can tell us Who made those things and why He made them that way.

That's why this psalm covers two seemingly different subjects. The first 6 verses, the part that we sang this morning, tell of how God is revealed in what we would call nature. But the last eight verses tell us about the only way we can more fully understand God's creation – in the pages of the Scripture.

And so verses 7 and 8 speak of the glory of God's Word and of what it can do for us. Verse 7 tells us that the Law and the testimony of God teach us and instruct us in what is right. In so doing, they bring life to the soul and make even the most naïve person wise. In the same way, verse 8 tells us that keeping the statutes and following the commandments of God bring joy to the heart, to the innermost part of our being. Obedience to God is what gives light to our eyes, keeping us from stumbling in darkness.

And why is God's Word so reliable to bring us life and wisdom and joy and light? Because, as verse 9 tells us, God's Word is true. It is righteous, completely in accordance with God's Will. In our modern world of confusion and uncertainty, where all truth seems relative and no one seems fully able to understand anything, having an infallible source of wisdom and guidance and light and truth should be a tremendous relief. No wonder we should desire it more than the finest gold. No wonder we should consider it sweeter even than honey in the comb.

Ah, but we don't always consider God's Word so valuable, do we? We don't always think that God's law is so sweet. Yes, we can't deny that, as verse 11 says, God's word warns us away from bad thoughts and actions. We know good and well that keeping God's Law does in

fact bring great rewards – not least the life and wisdom and joy and light that we crave in our increasingly dark times.

But at the same time, the more we read God's Word, the more we realize that none of us are, in fact, capable of keeping it. Yes, verse 9 tells us that the judgments of the Lord are always true and righteous, but in our most honest moments it is precisely those judgment that inspire the fear with which verse 9 begins.

For what does God's Law require of us? The Law says we should love God with all we are and all we have, with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. Are any of us that single-minded in our devotion? The Law says we should love our neighbors just as much as and in the same way that we love ourselves. Jesus added that we should even love our enemies and do good to those who hurt us. Do any of us really practice such selflessness?

And looking at the specifics of the law provides no more comfort. How many of us really devote one whole day a week to fellowship with God? In those times when we most strongly disagree with them, how many of us really respect our parents? In our increasingly vulgar and crude society, how many of us remain pure in our thoughts and desires? How many of us even have an idea of what purity looks like anymore?

No, in so many ways every day we fall short of God's requirements. We're so focused on ourselves that when we think sinful thoughts and have sinful feelings we often don't even notice that there's anything wrong. It's no wonder that even David cries out to God in verse 12, "Who can understand his errors?"

And so at this point in the psalm, we find ourselves not much better off than at the beginning. The creation tells us of God's glory, but we have learned that we need God's Word to understand what the creation is saying. But just knowing God's Word isn't enough either – for the more we know it, the more we understand what it and the whole creation tell us about God's power and might and about God's holiness and righteousness, the more we know how much trouble we are in. No, we need more than just knowledge about God's creation. We need more than just knowledge about God's Word. We need a right relationship with God.

And David shows us that only God Himself can make that relationship possible. Notice that in verse 12, he begs God to cleanse him from the secret sins that he doesn't even know he is committing. Just so, in verse 13, he also asks God to restrain him from presumptuous sins, those things he does wrong that he knows are wrong. He asks God to break the power that sin has over him, for it is only if God frees him and makes him clean that he can be fit to stand in the presence of God. It is only if God saves him that he can bear to know what God's Word says about God's creation.

But the good news is that if we know more than the ancients did about the number of the stars and the motion of the planets and the size and distance of the sun, we also know more than they did about God's plan to save us. Oh, David had his hints – God told David that one of David's descendants would reign on his throne forever. But now we know that Son of David was none other than God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. Only Jesus was able perfectly to keep the Law of God. Only Jesus' sinless death is able to pay the penalty that all the rest of our sins

deserve. And only Jesus' resurrection can give us hope that God uses His mighty power – the same power He used to create this universe – fully and finally to crush the power of sin and death. Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we know that God will in fact answer the prayers of David, and the prayers of anyone who, like David, will trust God's promises and seek God's face, and humble himself and ask for forgiveness and cleansing.

And even though David didn't know Jesus' name, He understood what Jesus' ministry would be all about. For in verse 14, David calls God not only his source of strength that he would need to face his daily challenges. He also calls God his Redeemer, the One Who pays the ransom price to free him from sin and death. That's what Jesus was for him – his Redeemer. And that's who Jesus is for all who trust in Him.

So, yes, I encourage you to take up the challenge your session has placed before you, to read the Bible every day. Each week you'll see in your bulletin a list of readings that are coordinated to the adult Sunday School lessons in both classes. And since by doing those daily readings you'll be prepared for class, you might as well come on to Sunday School, and take advantage of the opportunity to learn even more about this Word of God, more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

But as you read and study God's Word, remember to seek God's face. Seek a closer relationship with the One Who created not only the sun, the moon, and the stars to declare His glory, but the One Who created you in His own image to have a close, personal relationship with Him. Seek to know the One Who is the strength and the redeemer of all who trust in Him through His Son Jesus Christ, the living Word of God.