

Psalm 19

1 The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.
2 Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.
3 They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard
4 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.

God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.
5 It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding.
It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.
6 The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end.
Nothing can hide from its heat.

7 The instructions of the LORD are perfect, reviving the soul.
The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
8 The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living.

9 Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever.
The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair.
10 They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold.
They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb.

11 They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them.
12 How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?
Cleanse me from these hidden faults.
13 Keep your servant from deliberate sins!
Don't let them control me.
Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin.
14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Season of Creation 3: Celebrating the Created Order

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD.” I often say that out loud before I give a sermon, and I also say it to myself in nearly all my conversations. And I've pretty well succeeded in making the words of my mouth pleasing to God; **I still have a lot of work to do on the meditations of my heart**, but I am working on that. You know that the ninth Commandment is “Do not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Exodus 20:16), and it was Martin Luther who interpreted that commandment to mean, “Do not think anything less than the best about anyone” (see Luther's Large Catechism). That means that even when someone does something that bothers us we should try to put the best spin on the motive behind their

actions. Well I still have a long way to go before I can really think that positively of others, and that's only working on ONE commandment.

Today, in our third week of our Season of Creation I want to talk about law, both human law, and natural law, which were both created by God and are both given to us for our well-being. The "take home" will be for you to spend time – a lot of time – meditating on God's law; **the Old Testament calls us to meditate on the law day and night (Joshua 1:8)** in order to be prosperous and successful, and I believe that we all would be prosperous and successful (which is different from materially wealthy) if we did meditate on the Law day and night.

Let's start by meditating on God's natural law, which is the law that governs the natural universe. That's what the psalmist is celebrating at the start of this passage:

**The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.
Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.**

Last week I spoke about the joy and the peace that we attain when we lie in the grass, gaze at the sky, and meditate on the beauty of nature. Of course nature does not always leave us feeling joy and peace; the destructive strength of a hurricane like the ones that struck the Carolinas and the Philippines leave is with a sense of awe rather than a sense of calm; while a cool, sunny day like today should make us appreciate God for his goodness and providence, severe weather should make us appreciate God for his power and sovereignty over all of creation. The psalmist mentions the sun and says that "nothing can hide from its heat;" no doubt the writer was familiar with the intense Palestinian summers, and *this* summer has been a clear reminder to us that the sun's heat is not always something we enjoy, but it certainly is something we must respect. There is unbearable heat and cold. There are droughts and floods. Whatever the weather, God is to be revered for the natural law that governs the entire universe, for the creative and destructive power of nature. The psalmist is certainly doing that in today's scripture lesson.

And meditating on nature should evoke in us an even greater sense of awe when we consider that we are even **able** to meditate on creation. What are the chances of life coming from non-life? The odds of randomly forming a single protein which is considered a key component of all living organisms, is **1 out of 20 the 1000th power**. One person described it as the same probability that a tornado going through a junkyard could produce a perfectly functioning automobile from all the different parts. That's the odds of forming ONE protein; **Imagine what the chances are of such a protein combining with other proteins, becoming alive, and eventually forming a simple organism, which, when you examine it you discover is not so simple after all.** Yet here we are, complex as we are, feeling the heat generated by the sun, able to think about it, able to understand *why* it radiates heat. What are the chances of that?

But we get distracted from the act of worship – from recognizing and appreciating and praising and thanking God for the wonders of nature and the wonderful way that we have been created – and the reason we get distracted is that we fail to sustain a passionate spiritual relationship with God. We're too busy thinking about what's on our schedule, about what our immediate plans are, too busy thinking about ourselves, and too busy analyzing creation to take the time to be in true awe of creation. We enjoy the thrill that creation can provide us, but we don't spend time writing psalms about the author of this creation that supplies us with such thrills. The next time you go swimming or ride a roller coaster or go skiing down a hill and feel that thrill will you take time to say, "Thank you, God"? Because it's God who created you with a body and senses that are able to feel that thrill that you enjoy so much. Make it a point to thank God for that, and maybe you will help others recognize the God that is the foundation of all our joy.

Well, just as we should be amazed at the laws that govern the natural world, we should also be amazed at the laws that are meant to govern human behavior. Our ancient ancestors, the children of Abraham and Moses understood and appreciated the Laws that came down from Mount Sinai as laws no less important than the law of gravity or the law of centrifugal force or the law of biogenesis. These Laws that came down from Mount Sinai were laws that govern God's children, children that were created in God's own image to be able to celebrate beauty and wonder about nature and even create beauty on our own – music and poetry and paintings and soufflés. These Laws were made to guide our lives, the way we deal with God and with one another. The whole midsection of this psalm that we read today was about God's laws and ordinances, something that many people think of as oppressive or restrictive and not something that we find joy in doing, but see the way the writer describes the word of God:

The instructions of the LORD are perfect, *reviving the soul.*
The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, *making wise the simple.*
The commandments of the LORD are right, *bringing joy to the heart.*
The commands of the LORD are clear, *giving insight for living.*

And yet I wonder if we can even name the commandments, let alone obey them. And we wonder why we can't get no satisfaction, why we lack joy or lack peace. GOD HAS PROVIDES US THE ANSWER but we just haven't bothered to take the time to look at it. How many of the commandments do you obey?

- 1. You shall have no other gods before me.** – that means that I do not make myself God, or financial success or popularity or cars or hobbies or personal power or authority, because those are idols, and..
- 2. You shall not make idols.**
- 3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.** – that means to misrepresent God, to think of God as your personal genie or one that is out to prove YOU right – THAT is taking God's name in vain.
- 4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.**
- 5. Honor your father and your mother.**

6. **You shall not murder.**
7. **You shall not commit adultery.**
8. **You shall not steal.**
9. **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**
10. **You shall not covet.** These last two have to do with our thoughts. That's why we need to meditate on the law – we need to train our minds to stop bearing false witness and to stop coveting.

These are the Laws God gave us to live by, and yet how seriously do we abide by these laws? Meditating on these laws is no less inspiring and no less important than meditating on the beauty of the natural world. The psalmist describes them as more desirable than gold, even the finest gold.

Amen to that. Too many people spend too much of their time and energy pursuing gold...or money thinking that joy can be bought with money. Let me just end this short sermon by imploring you once more to meditate on the God's law, natural and divine. The Law gets a negative spin in the New Testament as Paul criticizes those who misinterpret the law, but God gave it to us for our own good, so that our life would be not just good but exactly as God intended it to be. Jesus says of himself, "I have not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Therefore we look upon Jesus as our example of how to live so that our lives would fulfill the Law as well.