

Psalm 19 – God who reveals

Psalm 19 has inspired composers like Beethoven and Haydn

CS Lewis once said: I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world. So let's pray that we might get the most out of Psalm 19 from God.

"I'm not religious, but I am spiritual"

That's a statement I hear from time to time.

On one hand I agree with the first part of this statement

If by religious you mean institutional, ritualistic, legalistic

If by religious you mean people trying to be good in order to impress God

Well then I'm with you

I'm not religious either

But it all depends on what you mean by "spiritual"?

You see spiritual means different things to different people

Spiritual could just mean non-material or supernatural

Something beyond what we see or normally experience

Spiritual could also mean believing in some sort of divine force or energy

But Spiritual could mean having a personal relationship with God

God who is Spirit without a body

So you see the crucial questions are these:

If there's a God, how has he revealed himself

And if He has revealed himself to us

Then how should we respond?

These are the two questions we will be addressing today as we look at Psalm 19

How has God revealed himself?

And How should we respond?

Well when you think about getting to know someone

There are two ways

One is by observing them

Stalking them online

Maybe talking to others about them

And you could do this without them ever revealing themselves to you by talking to you

The other way is for them to talk with you

And reveal themselves to you

The first method doesn't work with God

Because he is so different to us by so many magnitudes

God is all powerful, all knowing,

God is Spirit and is present everywhere

He cannot be touched or seen physically

We can't simply observe Him to know what He's like

So God *has* to reveal himself to us

God has revealed himself to us

In His works (vv.1-6)

And His words (vv.7-11)

Firstly, God has revealed himself in his works

Verse 1

¹The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour out speech;
night after night they communicate knowledge.
³ There is no speech; there are no words; their voice is not heard.

The Psalmist David says that creation reveals something of God to us
When we gaze at the stars in the night sky
When we see the light from a galaxy a thousands years ago
That says something of the glory of God
His glorious power that created and sustains the universe
As David says in verse 3
This is speech without words

Verse 4

⁴ Their message has gone out to the whole earth,
and their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun.
⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming from his home;
it rejoices like an athlete running a course.
⁶ It rises from one end of the heavens
and circles to their other end; nothing is hidden from its heat.

This non-verbal communication is a universal message
It doesn't matter who you are and where you live
Everyone on earth can witness the light of the Sun
And experience it's warmth

As it rises and sets with ordered regularity
The sun according to David
Is like a bridegroom emerging radiant from the bliss of his wedding home
Or like the power of the athlete embarking on the course of his race
God has set the sun in its place to run its course
To life light and life to every person on earth.

Nature reveals God's majesty to us
This is what Christians call natural revelation.
Romans 1 verse 20 says

²⁰ For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse.

The James Webb Telescope cost \$10 billion US dollars
And its taken more than 20 years to build
And it was just launched on Christmas Day last year
It's going to orbit around the sun about one and a half million miles from earth
In the Scientific community, this telescope is a big deal
One of the major purposes of this telescope is to look back in time
So we can understand the origin of our universe
We're expecting the first images to come back from the telescope in a couple of months
Former astronaut, Bill Nelson, the head of NASA gave a speech just after the launch
Thanking the many members of his team
But he also quoted Psalm 19
Bill Nelson pointed people to what he saw as the ultimate point of this endeavour
The handiwork of God as we peer back in time over 13 billions years ago
Capture the light from the very beginning of creation

God reveals himself through His works

I wonder when was the last time you stopped to look up?
To admire God's handiwork – the stars in the night sky
The sun reflecting the glory of God
What I want you to do today after the service
Is go outside and I just want you to stare at the sun for a minute
Don't blink either
Just kidding.
But it's not just looking up is it

When I held each of my newborn children for the first time
I didn't think "Emma and I are so clever to make this"
I was in awe that God made this little person in his image
And entrusted them to me for a while

Last year when I was trying to understand the mRNA COVID vaccines
I was reminded once again
Of the incredible complexity and ordered regularity
that is taking place in every single one of the trillion cells in my body
God is incredible and his works tell me so

But God works are not the only way God has revealed Himself
For although everyone in the world can see the works of God
Not everyone reaches the same conclusion
Instead of worshipping the God of creation
Many worship creation as God

As Paul says in Romans 1

²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

We need not only the works of God

So God reveals himself in words

Psalm 19 Verse 7

⁷ The instruction of the Lord is perfect,
renewing one's life;
the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy,
making the inexperienced wise.

⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right,
making the heart glad;
the command of the Lord is radiant,
making the eyes light up.

⁹ The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the Lord are reliable
and altogether righteous.

The eternal, all powerful God speaks
His word is instruction and testimony (verse 7)
Precepts and commands (verse 8)
And fear and ordinances (verse 9)
For David's original hearers,
All these different words are used to describe the law of God

The law that God gave to His people through Moses
And when we think of law we normally think of something that restricts our freedom
Something that stifles life
But here David says God's word is life-giving
God's word is trustworthy because God is consistent and reliable
God's word instructs us how to conduct life in loving God and loving others
God's word gives wisdom that starts with a healthy fear of God rather than foolish self-absorption
God's word brings joy and peace to the hearts of those who listen and obey
In fact, God's word is of the greatest worth

¹⁰They are more desirable than gold—
than an abundance of pure gold;
and sweeter than honey
dripping from a honeycomb.

¹¹In addition, your servant is warned by them,
and in keeping them there is an abundant reward.

God's word is worth everything
And it's not just the Old Testament Law that is God's word
The apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

While creation is God's natural revelation
Scripture, The Bible is God's special revelation
Special revelation includes
God speaking directly to individuals
And God speaking through His messengers like angels
And God can and does reveal himself through dreams and visions
But Scripture, His written word is God's special revelation for all people
In every culture and every part of history.

And all parts of the Bible is God's word
Whether that is law or prophecy
History or wisdom
Gospel accounts or epistles
Poetry or songs
Every book of the Bible is God revealing himself to us
All of it for our benefit
Equipping us to know and to love God and others

God's word reveals his attributes
His power, His creativity, His majesty
His faithfulness in keeping promises
His compassion and mercy
His steadfast love for His people
His righteousness

God's word explains his works
Think of Genesis explaining God's process and purpose in creation
Or Exodus where we read of God rescue of Israel from slavery

God's word, just like our words, form the basis of relationship
It is only through His word we can know and relate to God rightly

I want you to imagine what it would be like

If God never spoke?
What if there was complete silence?
What if we were left entirely in the dark?

You see that is effectively how most people live
As though God has never spoken
As though reality was entirely up to us to determine
What if it was left up to us to work out what is truth and what is not
What the meaning and purpose of life is.
How incredibly confusing and messy life would be if God never spoke
I suspect that some of you are feeling the consequences of living like this

But you see God has spoken
Life comes with the Manufacturer's instructions
God has revealed how to live wisely in His world.
God has things to say about how you use your money
God has things to say about how marriage and sex should work
God has things to say about being parents and about being children
God has things to say about anger and forgiveness
God has things to say about your worth
Are you listening to the God who speaks?

This is a photo I took when I went to visit one of our missionary families
The Shorts in West Africa
Every morning, Warwick would read the bible with Ardo
A Fulani chief who left Islam and became a follower of Jesus
When I took that photo, it was dawn
It was still dark outside
And I thought of that verse from Psalm 119
The longest Psalm in the Bible
All about the goodness of God's law
Your word is a lamp to my feet
A light to my path
And for Ardo, God's word really is
God's word is more precious than anything
It has brought him hope and freedom
It had brought him forgiveness and peace
Ardo has been threatened for his faith
The Muslim leaders have said to him that they will not bury his body if continues to believe in Jesus
A great dishonour for Muslims
And Ardo told them,
What does it matter what you do with my body
For I will be with God.
When you listen to God's word like Ardo
God's word is more precious than anything

We've seen that God reveals Himself in works and words.

How should we respond to the God who reveals Himself
We should turn and trust

When David writes about God's works in creation
You get this impression that he is humbled by the sheer difference in scale between He and God
Take for example Psalm 8 where David says

³When I observe your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you set in place,
⁴what is a human being that you remember him, a son of man that you look after him?

God is so much bigger than we are
We are so tiny, so insignificant
And yet God is mindful of us.

But here in Psalm 19 David is conscious of yet another big difference
God is holy and without sin
And we are sinners
Just as no one is hidden from the heat of the sun (verse 6)
No one is hidden from the exposing purity of God's holiness
And therefore our sin against God is a huge problem.
So that is why David's response to the God who reveals
Is focussed on the problem of sin
Because we are by nature - lawbreakers

Verse 12

¹²Who perceives his unintentional sins?
Cleanse me from my hidden faults.
¹³Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins;
do not let them rule me.
Then I will be blameless
and cleansed from blatant rebellion.

We respond to God by turning from our sin

God's word is living and active
It cuts us to our hearts exposing our sin
And the godly respond with humility
The godly recognise that our sin is an offense to God
David's response is the godly response
He wants to live a godly life before His maker
He doesn't want to live as a rebel doing His own thing
He asks for God's cleansing, for forgiveness for his unintentional sins
He asks God for help to spare Him from intentional sins
Cleanse me from my sins, David says?
But how?
How can we be cleansed from the shame and the guilt of our sin?

David who wrote this psalm
Was described the King after God's own heart
But he knew firsthand the stain of his own sin
He committed adultery with Bathsheba
Then had her husband Uriah killed in battle
And David was going to sweep his sin under the carpet
Until the prophet Nathan exposed David's heart
And then David wrote Psalm 51
Where he cries out to God about his horrific sin
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

But how can David be cleansed from sin?

Well God has a final word to say and it's not in Psalm 19
And here we stand in an even more privileged position than David

Because David never knew God's final word who came after him

God's Son – Jesus Christ

Listen to Hebrews chapter 1

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. ²In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him. ³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high

The God who spoke to David

Has spoken His final word by sending His Son Jesus

In John chapter 14, Jesus says of himself, if you know me, you have known my Father.

God cannot reveal more of himself than he has revealed in His Son

His Son - Who is the exact expression of his nature

His Son is the one through whom God made the universe

As the James Webb Telescope peers back in time to the origin of the universe

The fingerprints of Jesus were already there all over the glory of the heavens

But let's come back to our question

And how can we be cleansed from our sins?

Verse 3 "After making purification for sins" Jesus Christ sat down at the right hand of God

The death of God's Son on the cross

Is how we are cleansed from our sin and shame

Even the forgiveness that David experienced was paid for by Christ's death on the cross

Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered

For you and for me

I want you to take a moment to grasp the magnitude of this

Think of the tiniest insect you can

Maybe an aphid

The gulf between you and the tiniest insect

Is nothing compared to that between you and God

And yet God reveals Himself to you through His Son Jesus Christ

His eternal Son who took on flesh and blood and bone

His Son crucified on a cross

Where He bled and died

So you could be washed clean for your sin

When was the last time you did anything for the insects?

The gulf between you and God has been reduced to zero

If you would trust in His Son

That's the second response to God's revelation

If Christ is His final word

Then trust His final word

In Psalm 19, David knows that God has done all the heavy lifting

And His prayer reflects this, God must be the one who saves us

Cleanse me God

Keep me from Sin God

Do not let sin rule over me God

You can trust this God

He's got it

Why? Because he is our Rock and our Redeemer

He is our sure foundation

When God reveals
He is always trustworthy unlike us
We can depend on Him for our security
But God is also our Redeemer
When we are in grave trouble because of our sin
Enslaved by guilt and shame
Facing certain destruction
It is Christ alone who pays the price for our freedom from sin and death
We can depend on him for our redemption.

If you are listening to this today
And you're on the fence
Maybe you're here because you're trying to figure out if there's a God
And if He has revealed himself
Let me tell you about Guillaume Bignon - a Christian Theologian
But formerly an atheist

But as a teenager Guillaume rejected the Catholic beliefs of his parents
As a young man, He lived as a committed atheist pursuing his career, his sport and women
In his own words, he was pretty happy in his life
In his attempt to persuade his girlfriend that God didn't exist he started on an investigation
I'm quoting him here:

If any of this is true, then the God who exists presumably cares greatly about this project of mine. So I started to pray into the air: "If there is a God, then here I am. I'm looking into this. Why don't you go ahead and reveal yourself to me? I'm open." I wasn't, but I figured that if God existed, that wouldn't stop him.

I decided I would go to a church to see what Christians do when they get together. I drove to an evangelical congregation in Paris, visiting it as I would a zoo: to see exotic animals that I had read about in books but had never seen in real life. I remember thinking that if any of my friends or family could see me in a church, I would die of shame.

I don't remember a word from the sermon. As soon as the service ended, I jumped up and hurried to the exit door, avoiding eye contact so I wouldn't have to introduce myself. I reached the back door, opened it, and literally had one foot out the door when a chilling blast went up from my stomach all the way to my throat. I heard myself saying: "This is ridiculous. I have to figure this out." So I put my foot back in, closed the door, and went straight to the pastor.

"So, you believe in God?"

"Yes," he said, smiling.

"So how does that work out?" I asked.

"We can talk about it," he said. After most of the people left, we went to his office and spoke for hours. I bombarded him with questions, and we met again over several weeks. He patiently and intelligently explained his worldview. And I nervously started to consider that all of it could be true. My unbelieving prayers shifted to, "God, if you are real, you need to make it clear so I can jump in and not make a fool of myself." I started to hope that he would open the sky and send down the light.

At the same time I had started my investigations, I had also come to commit a particularly sinister misdeed, even by atheistic standards. Though I knew exactly what I had done, I had shoved it down inside. But God brought it back to mind in full force, and I finally saw it for what it was. I was struck with an intense guilt, crippled with chest pain, and disgusted at the thought of what I had done and the lies I had covered it with.

I was lying in pain in my apartment near Paris, when all of a sudden the penny dropped. That is why Jesus had to die: me. He who knew no sin became sin on my behalf, so that in him I might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

He took upon himself the penalty that I deserved, so that in God's justice, my sins would be forgiven—by grace as a gift, rather than by my righteous deeds or religious rituals. He died so that I may live. I placed my trust in Jesus, and asked him to forgive me in the way Scripture promised he would.

I was passionate about studying my newfound faith in order to explain it to friends and family. I read book after book, watched lectures and debates, and loved every moment. Eventually it was all I did in my free time. I figured that if I was going to spend all my time and energy studying Christianity, I might as well get a degree out of it. So I applied for seminary, and eventually obtained a master's in New Testament studies.

If like Guillaume God is convicting you today
Convicting you of your sin
As though his word is speaking directly to you
Then you ought to listen and turn to him and trust in Jesus
But if you are still undecided
Then like Guillaume, you should not rest until you sort it out

For those who already trust in the Lord as your Rock and your Redeemer
Let me encourage you

I spoke two Sundays ago of Ray Davidson
Who recently died at 91, trusting in Christ her Saviour
I went to visit her husband, Harold, this week at the nursing home
Harold is another of my heroes
He was excited to see me
To show me his new room
Smaller than the one he shared with Ray
Simple and modest
And Harold was content with it, "it has everything I need" he assured me
He was very happy with the view he told me
He was thankful for the meals they provided
So appreciative and respectful of the staff
And he knows that being there makes life easier for his family

He showed me around the nursing home
And introduced me to a couple of the residents
The staff, I could see, love dealing with Harold
I wonder if he is so different from those who hate being there
Those tormented by anger and bitterness,
Those who face death with fear and regret
I asked Harold if he missed Ray
He said, "Of course you miss someone you've been married to for 66 years"
"Sometimes I wake up and think she is still here"
"But she's in a much better place now", he said

Harold makes the most of his time to point the staff, the residents and his family members
Towards the God He trusts
Recently on Mother's Day he took the opportunity to share about Ray
And read Proverbs 31 – the wife of noble character
To point others to the God who made Ray the woman she was

I told Harold I was preaching on Psalm 19 today

We read it together and talked about it
And he told me that verse 14 was one of his favourite verses
He has prayed it for much of his life
And when I left I thought to myself
If you want to live well – like Harold
Right to the very end
With purpose and peace, with thankfulness and other-centredness
Then you ought to make that your prayer too

¹⁴ May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.