

The Skies, the Scriptures, and Our Souls

Psalm 19

Intro: Moving Toward the Target

There are three very obvious and distinct parts to this Psalm. The first part (vv1-6) describes the glory of God in creation (or as he puts it, the “heavens/skies”. The second part (vv7-11) describes God’s law—almost certainly referring to the Torah, the first five books of the OT. And then the last part (vv12-14) describes the heart of the Psalmist...in particular, he wants a heart that is pure and blameless and devoted to the Lord.

We could label the three parts like this: “the skies, the Scriptures, and our souls.” But, I want to ask: What do those three concepts have to do with each other? In other words, how does this Psalm fit these three parts together, because, on the face of it, it looks like three very different concepts that are thrown into one Psalm?

It almost feels like each part could be its own Psalm. One Psalm about the glory of God in creation. Another on the beauty and wonder and truth of God’s written word. And then finally, the last Psalm is on the importance of keeping our hearts right before the Lord.

I don’t think the three parts of this Psalm are disconnected. In fact, I think they are very much connected. They’re connected by what seems to be a progression from general to specific. From God’s revelation of himself in all of creation TO God’s revelation of himself in Scripture TO God’s revelation of himself to you. Let me show you.

Consider the theme of “words” in this passage. Notice, in the first part, the “words” of creation [vv2-4].

What’s he talking about? He’s saying, creation, in one sense, TELLS forth who God is! When you look up at the skies you should have an idea of

who God is because creation is like a book you can read that gives us some information about God.

But notice the movement towards specificity in...

- v7—law, testimony
- v8—precepts, commandment
- v9—fear of the Lord and rules

Clearly, these are referring to actual words you can read on a page. He's talking about God's revelation of himself in the Torah—that was David's Bible at that time: Genesis to Deuteronomy.

So, you have GENERAL words about God in *creation* that you cannot actually read, but they are LIKE words because who God is, is being PROCLAIMED in creation. And then you have more specific words about him...words that you can read, in Scripture. And finally, the Psalmist mentions his own words in [v14].

Do you see the narrowing? It moves from general to more specific to the Psalmist himself.

Take another theme. We can call it "exposing/enlightening." There's a progression of "bringing things into the light" in this passage.

- In v6, the sun exposes. [v6]
- In v8, law exposes [v8]
- In v14, God sees the psalmist's heart [v14]

So there's movement towards something in this Psalm...a movement from general to specific.

Let's take one more theme. We can call it "the progression of intimacy with God."

- In vv1-6, in describing the revelation of God in creation, the name for God that is used is *Elohim*, which is just the generic title for God. [v1a, “God...Elohim”]
- BUT, in vv7-11, in describing the special revelation of God in Scripture, the name of God that is used is *Yahweh*.
 - “The law of the LORD...”
 - “The testimony of the LORD...”
 - “The precepts of the LORD...”
 - “The commandment of the LORD...”
 - “The fear of the LORD...”
 - “The rules of the LORD...”

And you know by now that, whenever you see the word LORD in all CAPS in the Bible, it’s a translation of the special, covenant-keeping name of God that he reveals to his people. It’s the name of intimacy. It’s not the name he reveals to his creation in general. That’s Elohim. YAHWEH is the name he reveals to those who are his...those whom he loves with a covenant-keeping kind of love.

And it is no coincidence that, when the Psalmist begins to speak of God’s revelation of himself in Scripture, that he uses the special, intimate name of God, *YAHWEH*. There’s a progression of intimacy here.

And then we come to...

- vv12-14, where the Psalmist describes HIS personal relationship with the LORD. And how does he refer to God? [v14, “MY Rock and MY Redeemer”]

There’s a progression/movement taking place in this Psalm from general to specific. Think of in terms of a target. A target has several rings, but the goal is to hit the bullseye. And that’s where the Psalmist is heading.

- He first addresses the outer ring of God’s revelation through creation—or we can just say, “the skies.”

- Then he moves to the inner ring of God’s more specific revelation of himself through the Torah—or we can just say, “the Scriptures.”
- Until he closes by hitting the bullseye, which is God’s revelation of himself to you—or we can say, “your soul.”

So let’s follow the train of thought of the Psalmist as he moves along this target, and we’ll draw some insight and application for ourselves along the way. He begins with...

Outer Ring: The Skies [v1]

That’s a summary of this first section, and it’s interesting that David is focusing specifically on the skies. His attention really is not on the rest of creation (sea, mountains, fields, animals, etc.), but rather on what he sees in the expanse of the skies. Why?

I think it’s because the skies represent creation as a whole. He didn’t have to have the cosmological knowledge that we have today to know that the skies are massive, and they cover the entire expanse of our world. So, it seems David is focusing on the biggest part of creation because he wants to start at the largest, most all-encompassing display of who God is.

“The heavens DECLARE the glory of God, and the sky above PROCLAIMS his handiwork.” “Declare, proclaims...” that’s language we use for *speech*. And that’s exactly where David goes. [v2]

He is personifying creation, as if it talks. When you look at creation, it is SAYING something. What’s it saying? V1—“God is glorious!” That’s what it’s saying! And notice, it’s a continuous speech. V2 says creation speaks “day after day” and “night after night.” Here’s the way one person puts it: “If, indeed, we were as attentive as we ought to be, even one day would suffice to bear testimony to us of the glory of God, and even one night would be sufficient to perform to us the same office.” (Calvin, *Psalms*, 310)

But we don't just get one day or one night of beholding creation. We get it again and again and again; over and over. Who gets it? Who gets to SEE creation declare and proclaim and speak forth the glory of God? [v3] Now, some take this to mean that the voice of creation is still heard in some sense, even though it doesn't literally speak and does not literally use words. But look closer; I don't think that's David's point. He says, [v3]

What voice is he talking about? The voice that DECLARES the glory of God and PROCLAIMS his handiwork. The voice of the heavens/skies. And David is saying, "There is no speech and no words that do not hear this voice." In other words, "Every speech and every word, hears the voice of creation declaring the glory of God."

See what he's saying? He's talking about all human languages. "There is no speech or word that can't hear this voice." There is not one human language that cannot make sense of the language of creation which speaks of God's glory. It doesn't matter what language you know, you can understand that language of creation as it screams, "God is glorious!"

That's his point. And he reiterates this truth in [v4a]...whose voice? The voice of the heavens and the skies...[v4a-b]

See his point? Everyone hears the declaration that God is glorious, no matter what language they speak—even to the ends of the earth! How? Because everyone speaks the language of creation. Everyone can see the vastness of his beauty. It is very plain. It doesn't matter if you speak English or Spanish, or German or French, or Swahili or Hindi. When you look at the skies, it proclaims the truth of who God is!

In what ways? Notice the part of creation (again) that David chooses to give attention to, which describes the way in which EVERYONE can see the glory of God. [vv4c-6]

Why mention the sun? Because everybody can see the sun! If he just talked about mountains...well, not everyone lives near a mountain range, so it wouldn't make much sense to them to say, "Everyone can see the glory of God in creation—look at the mountains!"

But what about the sun? He says, "nothing is hidden from its heat." Creation is the common language that all people can speak. It screams forth, not only that there is a God, but that he is glorious.

Here's how the apostle Paul puts it in Romans 1: "What can be known about God is plain to [all people], because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. Therefore, they are without excuse." (Rom. 1:19-20)

See his point? Who God is, is CLEARLY put on display in what he has made. And that leaves EVERYONE without excuse; meaning, NO ONE can say to God when they stand before him in judgment, "I didn't know! I couldn't tell that there was a God and that he was all glorious and that I need to give my life to him. I didn't know."

And Paul is saying, "You should've known...because it is absolutely plain in creation." Now, if that's true, then why doesn't everyone believe? If creation is the common language that everyone can speak...if there is no speech or words that cannot understand the language of the skies that DECLARE God's glory, then why don't all people believe in God and follow him with their lives?

Listen to what Paul says in Romans 1:18 (just before he states that God is clearly perceived in all creation): "...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their

unrighteousness suppress the truth.” The truth about what? GOD in his creation!

The reason why NOT everyone falls on their face in worship of the one true God after beholding his glory in creation is because they suppress that truth in their unrighteousness. Our own sin blinds us to the truth of who God is revealed in skies.

And so, what do we need? We need a special revelation from God to truly know him. And that’s where David goes next. He moves to the...

Inner Ring: The Scriptures [vv7-9]

David has in mind the Torah—the first five books of the OT. That was his Bible...because the rest was either NOT written yet, or it was in the process of being written—like Psalm 19!

So, what David is focusing on here is the written word of God that is inspired (breathed out) by God for the sake of revealing himself in a special way, so that his people can truly know him.

I think, surely, we can include the rest of the Bible in what David describes here. Paul says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God...” and that includes the inspired writings of the NT. What words have been breathed-out by God that we have access to now? Right here! [Hold up Bible.]

David gives *six effectual characteristics* of Scripture in this passage. Six characteristics of God’s inspired Word that DO something. Let’s work through each quickly...

1) *The perfection of God’s written Word revives the soul.* [v7a]

God's word in Scripture is "perfect"—it is without blame. And its perfection revives us. In other words, we are refreshed by the perfect words of Scripture.

2) *The sureness of God's written Word makes wise the simple.* [v7b]
"Sure" is another word for certain...or another way of describing truth. Scripture is absolutely true. And its truth provides us with the wisdom we need to make right decisions in life.

When the Bible uses the word "simple" as a way of describing some people, it refers to those who are easily misled by what is false. Here's how Proverbs 14:15 puts it, "The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps."

One person says, "[The] trouble [of the simple person] is that he does not apply himself to the discipline needed to gain and grow in wisdom." What's that discipline? Immersing himself in God's inspired word! Because truth of the word makes wise the simple.

3) *The rightness of God's written Word rejoices the heart.* [v8]

"Right" is not so much referring to "as opposed to wrong," but rather "straight." Scripture is the right/straight path to take! And when we are following the straight path it puts us on in life, we rejoice.

That's what God's Word does—it gives us joy to obey and follow. BUT when we go off that path, joy dissipates. Staying on the straight path of the word is for our joy.

4) *The purity of God's written Word enlightens the eyes.* [8b]

This means God's word is unmixed with evil. And the "enlightening of the eyes" means that God's word helps us to see as we ought. We are alert and active against evil because we view all things through the lens of the purity of God's written word.

5) *The cleanness of God's written Word endures forever.* [v9a]

It's interesting that David refers to God's Word, here, as "the fear of the Lord." Why does he do that? It's similar to what David says in Ps. 34:11, "Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." He doesn't say, "I will teach you TO fear the Lord." He says, "I will teach you THE fear of the Lord." He's talking about God's word! "The fear of the Lord" is another way of saying, "The reverence of the Lord." Scripture is a personification of the awesomeness of who God is!

And it "is clean," David says...which is very similar to saying it is "pure," but the idea isn't so much that it's "unmixed with evil." It's that it's not open to corruption or decay. Here's how one person states it: "Corrupt things decay. That which is pure [or clean] endures. Since the Word of God is entirely [clean], being without any deficiency, error, fault, or inadequacy, it along with the God who spoke it is the most enduring of all things." (Boice, *Psalms*, 173)

You want a lasting word from God—truths that are unchanged forever? Listen to his words in Scripture. They endure.

6) *The truth (or righteousness) of God's written Word both satisfies and warns.* [v9b]

It speaks no falsehood. Everything it says is true. Ok, what affect does the truth of God's Word have? [vv10-11]

Do you see what God's word does? It satisfies, AND it warns of seeking satisfaction elsewhere! "...by them your servant is warned..." against what? Deviating from the straight path of God's word! Because when you stay on the path, what happens? [v11b]

God's word satisfies. Just ponder the way the Psalmist views Scripture. Of course, he views it as containing rules and commandments we must obey. Of course, he views it as the authority over our lives. Of course, he

views it as the content that provides us the framework of thinking by which we make decisions and live our lives.

No doubt, for him the Bible is viewed as that standard and authority and rule of faith. His mindset is, "If the Bible says it, I'll follow it!" And that should be our mindset.

BUT, that's not the Psalmist's primary view of Scripture. For him it is not a list of rules to begrudgingly follow. It's his source of life! It's the nourishment for his soul! It's the joy of his heart! It is his treasure! The Bible is not merely a guidebook to follow. The Bible is our source of spiritual nourishment.

Illustration: It's the difference between...

- *reading about how to satisfy hunger pains and actually eating a nourishing meal.*
- *reading "FRESH SPRING WATER" on the label of a cooled bottle in your fridge on a hot summer day vs. opening the lid and drinking it!*
- *Or, to use the imagery the Psalmist uses, it's the difference between reading a label of honey and tasting it on your tongue.*

The Bible is not just a list of rules to follow. It revives when we're dead. It gives us wisdom when we don't know where to turn. It give us joy when we're in the dumps. It enlightens our eyes when everything looks dark. It satisfies our souls when we are hungry. Is that what the Bible is for you?

If I had a check for a trillion dollars in my hand and told you it is yours if you just come here and get it....

- *You, your kids, your grandkids, generations to come would be set for life.*
- *You could have everything you ever wanted, everything you ever dreamed, not more worry of financial insecurity...*

- *BUT there was one condition, you only get the check if you would never read your Bible again.*

Would you take it? Don't give me the quick, not-thought-out, overly-pious, good-Christian answer. Really think about your own heart!

Is the Bible more precious to you than gold, even MUCH (like 3 Trillion dollars worth of) fine gold???

APPLICATION: Do not underestimate the value of the Bible! There's nothing else like it! You get to hear the very words of God! And there are no other words in all the world that we have access to that are "breathed-out" by God himself.

I've heard one pastor exhort a congregation like this: "Swim in the Bible every day! Don't give it a little touch as you head off to do what you really like to do! Swim in the Bible every day! It is an ocean of bright, glorious, weighty, all-satisfying truth about the One for whom you were made."

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/sex-and-the-supremacy-of-christ-part-2>

If you don't know how or where to start, ask someone else in this church who does. Get with someone else and start reading the Bible together. (Use Zoom if you have to!) If you're not the best reader, get it on audio! Listen, we have no excuse!!! Don't tell me you're too busy! The way you spend your time reveals what you prioritize! I've heard it said, "One of the great revelations of Facebook and Twitter is that prayerlessness is not due to lack of time!" And we could substitute "prayerlessness" with "Bible-reading-less-ness."

Scripture satisfies! That's clearly what this passage teaches. BUT, this is a problem, I think, because our experience might tell us otherwise. You might not be a Christian and you have tried reading the Bible and you say, "None of that happens to me when I've tried reading the Bible. No reviving, no rejoicing, no enlightening. So how can the words themselves be the sustaining meal when I don't feel sustained?"

Illustration: We had a discussion on our Zoom call during Wed. night Bible Study about this. Several mentioned that before they became a Christian, the Scriptures were just words on a page.

My dad used to tell me about my grandpa who was an unbeliever. He was a VERY smart guy, but when my dad read the Bible to him, he just couldn't get it. Something wasn't clicking.

There are people who devote their entire lives to the study of the Bible and are considered biblical scholars, but for them, it's no different than studying any other ancient/historical document.

BUT, you might even be a Christian and say, "There are many times in my life when my heart remains dull after reading Scripture." So what do we do about this?...because David tells us, this is what Scripture IS and this is what it DOES. What do we do with those who read Scripture and none of this happens to them?

Let's ask this: is David saying that, "Anyone who simply reads the Bible will certainly have his/her soul revived."? "If you just open your Bible and start reading, you'll automatically start rejoicing!" Is that his point?

I don't think so. There is an assumption in this passage about the state of a person's soul who is revived and refreshed by Scripture. It's a person who, by the Spirit of God, is either in a right relationship with God or who is being brought into a right relationship with God.

I think this is assumed in where David goes next. And that's to...

Bulls Eye: Our Souls

He's been moving here the whole time—getting more and more specific—FROM God's revelation of himself in all creation, TO God's revelation of himself in Scripture, TO God's revelation of himself to your own soul. [vv12-14]

This is the only appropriate response to the revelation of God. What is David's concern here? God's revelation of himself in Scripture leads David to reflect on his own sin.

- "O God, forgive me sins that are hidden—sins that I'm not even aware of!"
- "God, guard my heart from presumptuous sins—sins that are committed with a kind of arrogance that says, 'You'll never find out.' OR 'You're in the business of forgiving anyway, so it's fine if I sin.'"
- And then he asks that the "words of his mouth" and "the meditation of his heart" be acceptable in God's sight.

Why does he go here? After he ponders the glory of God in the skies, and then moves to the more specific revelation of God in the Scriptures...why does he start reflecting on the sins of his soul?

I think this is why (and this my answer to the question: Why is my heart not satisfied by Scripture?): Our sin is what keeps us from seeing and savoring the glory of God. Left to ourselves, we can't see it in the skies (in creation) because we suppress the truth of God in our *unrighteousness* even though it is as plain as day.

And so, what do we need? We need a special revelation from God in his written word. But there's still a problem! It will just be words on a page...IF our hearts are still given over to our sin. So, what needs to happen? God's got to overcome our sin problem—that barrier that keeps us from truly knowing him! [Gospel]

And when your heart is awakened by the Spirit to trust Christ, guess what happens? You look at the skies and say, "The heavens declare the glory of God!" And you read the Scriptures and say, "My heart is revived and my soul is refreshed."

But wait, you might say, “I’m a Christian, and there are still plenty of times when my heart doesn’t feel refreshed after reading Scripture.” Or even, “Too often, I don’t even feel like reading it at all!” So what’s the problem?

The problem, quite often, is no different. Sin rears its ugly head again and again and again in our lives, stealing from us the joy of knowing God in his Word.

- Anxiety is a joy-stealer.
- Anger is a joy-stealer.
- Lust is a joy-stealer.
- Envy is a joy-stealer.
- Covetousness is a joy-stealer.
- Self-pity is a joy-stealer.
- Gossip is a joy-stealer.
- Drunkenness is a joy-stealer.
- Discontentment is a joy-stealer.
- Laziness is a joy-stealer.

This is why David says, “Forgive me...declare me innocent of hidden sins...hold me back from presumptuous sins...don’t let them have dominion over me!” He wants to know God personally, in the Word, because he knows that sin blinds us from that.

D.L. Moody famously said, “Either this book will keep you from sin, OR sin will keep you from this book!” So pray, along with David, “Lord, what’s in my life/heart that is sucking the joy from me that I should be receiving through your Word?”

Let us know God...let us press on to know God...in the universal language of creation, but more intimately...more personally...more fully in the vast “ocean of bright, glorious, weighty, all-satisfying truth about the One for whom you were made.”