

WORSHIP AND THE WORD A SERMON ON PSALM 19

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In the first sermon of this series on worship, we looked how worship is about the heart, but not ours. Worship is about God and His heart. And we saw that even though worship is about God, it is appropriate to respond emotionally. We saw in Isaiah 43 a sampling of a few emotions that arise in response to worship — conviction about sin, belonging, trust, and awe.

Today we look at the role of the Bible in worship. Mark Twain once wrote, “It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it’s the parts that I do understand.” Meanwhile, W.C. Fields said, “I have spent a lot of time searching through the Bible for loopholes.”

If you’ve been around our church at all, you know that we value Scripture. When I preach, I don’t just stand up and give a motivational talk based on sound moral principles. Rather, I try to take a particular text of scripture and explain its meaning in light of its context in the book in which it was written, literary and historical considerations, cultural considerations, and its place within the Bible as a whole. My struggle is to interpret and apply to today what the text says, rather than present my own opinions about how we should live. Of course, despite my best intentions, my opinions creep in. However, my goal is that my life should be so shaped by the text that the truths therein would mold me and my opinions. My goal is not to mold you in my image, but that you and I together would be molded by the text.

But why this concern with the text? Isn’t it enough that God works within us through the Holy Spirit? Does God give us insight enough for us to live the way He wants us to without having to explore scripture? King David explores this issue in Psalm 19. As we look at this Psalm, we see that there are two different ways that we come to a knowledge of and about God.

PS 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

PS 19:2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.

PS 19:3 There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.

PS 19:4 Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,

PS 19:5 which is like a bridegroom coming
forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

PS 19:6 It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is hidden from its heat.

PS 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

PS 19:8 The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

PS 19:9 The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and altogether righteous.

PS 19:10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.

PS 19:11 By them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

PS 19:12 Who can discern his errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.

PS 19:13 Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then will I be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.

PS 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

be pleasing in your sight,
O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Verses 1-6 tell us the first way of knowledge of and about God — through creation. Looking at verses 1-2, the first thing the Psalmist tells us is that creation declares God's glory and creativity. Here, it talks specifically about the heavens and the skies. We see the sun marching across the sky in verses 5-6 being used as an image of majesty. However, these are but symbols indicating the broader sweep of creation. Everything in creation declares God's glory and presence. Paul in Romans 1:20 makes this point: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power, his divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..." Tell me the truth — who in here hasn't been stunned by one aspect of nature of another. Have you been awed by a sunset or the array of stars on a clear night. Have you stood still before the sea and paused. Have you looked with wonder upon mountains in the distance? Have you watched the sudden turning of the seasons with delight and thankfulness? Have you marveled at the mystery of a child being born?

My friend Robert Burns and I were on a hiking trip through a Florida State park. We slogged our way through the cypress swamps and saw palmetto, and as we came away from the river we entered a narrow meadow of tall grass bordered on either side by towering pine trees. I paused and commented on the beauty of this spot, and Robert, quoting James Fennimore Cooper, simply said, "This is my cathedral".

An important thing to note is that the Psalm says, "the heavens are telling the glory of God" not, "the heavens are God" This Psalm maintains a firm distinction between creation and the creator. This is one of the distinctives of Christianity. Creation is not God. If you look around today, you see a lot of people who want to embrace spirituality, yet they make the mistake of assuming that creation contains the divine. And so we see these circles of people trying to revive paganism — running around in togas and animal skins while chanting in groves. They concoct rituals to help them connect with nature. Some may dismiss them as kooks, but many of these are sincere people who have sensed something of divinity in nature and something within them yearns for connection. That is where pure nature spirituality falls short. Creation is sufficient to reveal the glory and majesty and splendor of God, but it is not sufficient to reveal his character and personality. This brings us to the second way God reveals himself.

The first part of Psalm 19 talks about God revealing himself through creation, theologians call that "general revelation". The second part of the Psalm talks about God revealing himself in a special way — through Scripture. Verses 7-11 focus on this special form of revelation. Notice that this section gives us

more detail about how God reveals himself through his Scriptures — through creation, God reveals glory. Through the Scriptures, God reveals his will through law, statutes, precepts, commands, and ordinances. Notice the claims it makes for the Scripture — perfect, trustworthy, radiant, more precious than gold. Scripture reveals details about God’s character and his expectations of his creatures.

The claims of the Bible are that Scripture is not just the writings of men, but rather the scriptures as contained in the Bible are specially inspired by the Holy Spirit in a way that no other written material is. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 make this point clear when Paul writes, “All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every Good work.” Scripture is special, and that’s why I dwell on it so intently in worship.

Most of you know that I’m a big science fiction fan. I really like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, the show that depicts the adventures of crew of the starship Enterprise in the 24th century. In one episode, the crew goes back in time to the old west, and the captain meets Mark Twain. After a series of adventures, as the captain bids farewell to Mr. Twain, he says “I wish I had more time — I have so many questions I have to ask you.” to which the character of Mark Twain replies “Just read my books — everything you need to know about me is in there.”

Psalm 19 shows that God’s revelation in creation is enough to show that He exists and He is glorious. It also shows that God’s revelation in Scripture is trustworthy and is our guide for life.

Francis Schaeffer, one of the great thinkers of the 20th century, explained the relationship of revelation in creation and revelation in Scripture this way:

Finite man in the external universe, being finite, has no sufficient reference point if he begins absolutely and autonomously from himself and thus needs certain knowledge. God gives us this in the Scriptures. With this in mind the scientist can understand, in their ultimate relationships, the truths that he is looking at.

In other words, because we are finite creatures, we cannot grasp the foundational truths of the universe without God’s direct help.

Ultimately, then, it is God’s Word that gives us certain knowledge about his character and desires. When we come to worship seeking an encounter with this living God, it only makes sense that we hear his Word proclaimed. By hearing the word of God proclaimed in worship, we come to a deeper understanding of who God is and prepare our hearts for a deeper relationship

with Him. As we listen to God's Word, we cannot help but be affected. In Isaiah 55:11 God speaks to his people, "... my word that goes forth from my mouth, it will not return to me empty, but I accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." God will accomplish his ends through his word. Hebrews 4:12 tells us, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The Word gets inside of you and it will affect you — it will either soften you towards God or harden you against God. Therefore, the more exposure you have to the Word, the more it gets inside you, the more it shapes you into the creature God intended you to be.

Let me suggest, folks, that a once-a-week feast on Scripture isn't enough. If you were training for a marathon, you wouldn't go out for a 30-minute jog just once a week. Neither should that be your approach to The Bible. This place should be your laboratory where you learn about approaching Scripture so that when you go back home, you can explore it more effectively throughout the week. I challenge you, if you do not do so already, to spend time in this book every day. And don't be afraid to mark it up — make notes in it. Underline key passages; circle words and themes that are repeated in the same passage. Make your own cross-references out to the side. Bring your Bible to worship and make notes during the sermon. Hal Russell, a former pastor in this church, used to say, "A dirty Bible makes a clean Christian." The more you digest this book and internalize it into your heart, the richer your relationship with God will be, and the more clearly you will be able to recognize his self-revelation both in creation and in Scripture.

God reveals his glory through creation. He reveals his character through Scripture. Finally, note that God uses this knowledge to shape his worshipers. Look at Psalm 19:12-14. Here we have a prayer for forgiveness of sin. Here also we have a prayer that our words and thoughts might be pleasing to God. Here we see David praying that the Scriptures would have their effect on him — in response to God's revelation, He has repentance for his sin and a desire for doing what is right. Now he asks for God to forgive him and to empower him for Christian living. The very emotions that we talked about last week arise after an encounter with God as presented through the very Scriptures that He inspired.

We all know the story of Helen Keller — the little girl who was blind, deaf, and unable to speak. We know about how Anne Sullivan persisted in teaching her how to communicate — first by writing letters on her hand, then by reading Braille. Anne even taught her how to speak by the age of 10. Shortly thereafter, Helen Keller was introduced to Phillips Brooks, the famous Episcopal preacher from Boston. They sat knee to knee, and Brooks began to tell Helen, while writing the letters on her hand, the story of Jesus. Suddenly, Helen jumped up and croaked out, "I knew him. I knew him. I just didn't know his name!" She knew

him — she knew he was there, but only in the shadows. It took Phillips Brooks proclaiming the story from Scripture to for it to click. She would later write, “The Bible is the record of man’s efforts to find God and learn how to live in harmony with his laws.” The shadows that she knew in that dark and quiet world became clearer through the light of Scripture proclaimed to her. If it was so for her, will it not also be so for us? You think about that. Amen.