

## A Sermon that Needs to be Spoken

### Psalm 19 (NIV)

*For the director of music. A psalm of David.*<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.<sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.<sup>3</sup> They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.<sup>4</sup> Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.<sup>5</sup> It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.<sup>6</sup> It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.<sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.<sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.<sup>10</sup> They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.<sup>11</sup> By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.<sup>12</sup> But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.<sup>13</sup> Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.<sup>14</sup> May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

As the saying goes, pictures are worth 1,000 words. Even as expressive as that is, a photo never truly captures what it's like to see something in person. Take a picture of the mountains standing tall in the East behind us and show it to people. Yeah, they'll say "cool" or "pretty," but it's a while different experience to drive towards one, hike one, reach the summit of one. Nature preaches a sermon that is experienced by all.

That's what David was expressing here in Psalm 19. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (verses 1-4) Nature preaches a wordless sermon. You can step outside and gander at our mountains and be struck with how grand they are. You can take a little vacation down to Moab and marvel at the arch formations God crafted by using wind. You can head north and feel as if you are on another planet as Old Faithful in Yellowstone goes off. Tranquility overcomes you on the beaches as you stare and wade into the mesmerizing waves of the ocean. Pretty much every aspect of nature tells us without words that someone created this, and that they are so much bigger, so much more powerful, so much more creative and imaginative than I am. Without words, nature proclaims itself the handiwork of a powerful being.

Others look through a telescope and at satellite pictures and think that this vast universe with planets and stars and galaxies is simply too big for us to be the sole inhabitants. What if, though, the sermon being preached is not one of the probability that other life exists because of the vastness of the universe, but that it's a message of extravagant design and luxury for the inhabitant of earth? What if it's all for us? What if all of space and all the planets and all the stars exist for us to gaze at, to marvel at, to enjoy their beauty? What if the existence of the universe is a sermon of the lengths that this intelligent, powerful Creator will go for his creation, for us, to enjoy what he has made, to invoke our curiosity, to allow us to study it, all for our care and pleasure?

The wordless sermon of power and care that nature preaches gets more pointed when observing the sun. "In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth." (verses 4b-6) During the freak extreme winter weather in Texas where people went without power for days, struggled to stay warm, had pipes burst, and many are still recovering from it, it's a simple thing - but was maybe overlooked by many of us - that the sun kept shining throughout that extreme cold. It didn't stop. Even on the coldest, darkest, most overcast days of winter, the earth continues to revolve around the sun and the sun continues to indiscriminately provide warmth to our planet in order to sustain all life - whether you believe in this Creator's unspoken sermon or not. The sun always does what it's supposed to do, day in and day out, whether we appreciate or not. It's no wonder people observe nature and say that they're worshiping God just by being in it, that it's their church.

But the wordless sermon of nature leaves many things not preached. What's my purpose? Who am I? What can I do? I can build stuff, sure - a fence, a house, maybe a skyscraper, but I can't compete against whatever force or being designed all of this nature stuff and keeps it going. I look around and realize that there is so much that I never would have thought of, that my imagination and creativity does not match what I see in nature. I can't be whatever made all this. I could never be. That makes me feel very small and insignificant, as if I am just a speck of total unimportance that the universe keeps going whether or not I'm here. Something is missing. I enjoy nature, but it doesn't make me feel complete.

David didn't need to write a psalm in order to make his fellow believers appreciate nature any more than any of us needed to hear these words today of Psalm 19 in order to appreciate mountains, arches, hot springs, green grass, rolling hills, and ocean views. David did need to write this psalm because the wordless sermon of nature that goes out to all people leaves the most important things out. That's why in the middle of the psalm David shifts to preaching a sermon with words, specifically, the Word of the LORD.

What sermon does the Word of the LORD preach that I can't get from nature? "The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul." (verse 7a) I mean, I can be refreshed setting up my RV up at Bear Lake, hiking Delicate Arch in Moab, or sitting on a beach in Corpus Christi. Yet, as refreshing as these places of nature are, they cannot scrub my soul clean and make me complete. I know that there is something wrong with me, that I have done things that I regret and can't undo.

Enjoying nature does not cleanse your conscience. Even while sitting there you have to try to ignore the things that you're not getting done, the things you've done wrong. Even in the beauty of nature, your mind quickly shows you how you're doing other things wrong like neglecting your family and friends who need your care or other responsibilities that you're trying to escape from. You try to pass it off like the rest of the world saying things like, "Nobody's perfect," or "To err is human." "Failure and mistakes are part of the human experience." But that's not even the wordless sermon of nature. The design of this earth, its placement in our solar system, in our galaxy, the distance of the moon from earth – all of this points to a very purposeful design, not a series of trials and errors which eventually resulted in sustainable life.

The refresh for our souls comes only from the written out, spoken message of God. He spells it out that my mistakes, my errors, my wrongs are wrong. He calls them sin. I'm not big enough or good enough or creative enough to actually get rid of them. The best I can do is try to ignore them for a time or do enough things for someone else that they might forget how I have messed up or wronged them or failed them. But God has preached to us Christ crucified, that he himself came and took our place. He was perfect every time that we were not. Being perfect God and Man at the same time, he showed his great care and compassion and wisdom and power by allowing himself to be publicly executed on a cross as if he were a criminal. He did this so that we would be forgiven, that our sins, our wrongs, our failures would be paid for, the debt removed from us never to be repaid. God made us whole, complete, blameless, innocent of great transgression.

This is what refreshes our souls, something that only comes from what God has explicitly told us. This is how the simple are made wise, wise for salvation from God. This is what gives joy to our hearts, and even more as we now have a blameless standing before God and a purpose as to what we should be doing every day in our lives. Being loved by God, having our souls refreshed by the forgiveness of sins, we want to follow God's commands, we want to do his will, which he spells out in his Word. Nature doesn't tell us exactly what God wants us to do. Maybe there is an implicit message there that we should take care of this nature, but God spelled that message out in his Word. He preaches to us to care for the blessings he has given us, to care for each other, to care for this planet, to return thanks to the one who has given us everything.

God also refreshes our souls with his Word as it warns us from our sins, to discern our errors, to ask forgiveness for our hidden faults, for the sins that we ourselves don't even recognize that we're doing or have done, and to keep us from willful sins that would rule over us. All of his revealed Word is trustworthy and true, like a rock that gives me constant, solid assurance that all is right with God and me, that these are truly his instructions for my life. All these things make the spoken and written Word of the LORD "more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb." (verse 10)

With both the wordless sermon of nature and the spoken sermon of the spelled out Word of the LORD, we pray like David to live by both messages: "May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." (verse 14) Lord, allow us to continue to marvel at the wordless sermon of nature, to see your awesomeness, your care, your creativity as you made all of this for me and for my fellow human beings. Help us also to appreciate your revealed Word, the words you explicitly gave us that tell us how you have forgiven all our errors, all our faults, and through Jesus' perfect substitutionary life keeping your Word and his innocent sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection, that we are blameless, innocent of all our wrongs and so our souls are refreshed. May we appreciate your revealed spoken Word as more precious than gold while we also appreciate your power and your care from the wordless sermon of nature. Amen.