

Evergreen Presbyterian Church
Church Campout, August 11th, 2024
Pastor Adam Parker

Sermon Title: The Preaching Heavens

Sermon Text: Psalm 19:1-14

Psa. 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Psa. 19:2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.

Psa. 19:3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.

Psa. 19:4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In them he has set a tent for the sun,

Psa. 19:5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

Psa. 19:6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

Psa. 19:7 ¶ The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;

Psa. 19:8 the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;

Psa. 19:9 the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.

Psa. 19:10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Psa. 19:11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Psa. 19:12 ¶ Who can discern his errors?
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

Psa. 19:13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

Psa. 19:14 ¶ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Main Point: The heavens are God's creation and are a part of His revelation of himself to all humanity, so that we all stand without excuse before him.

Outline:

1. The Sermon of God's World (19:1-6)
2. The Sermon of God's Word (19:7-14)

Introduction

I have learned with time that sermons here at the campout need to be simple. I don't know if the mind is dulled by trying to sleep with a tree root in your back, or if it's just something about waking up outdoors, or if there's something about me preaching without amplification, but often by the time Sunday morning rolls around during this camping trip, we need the word of God, but we can't handle it being too long or fancy.

And so I wanted to pick one of my favorite Psalms for us to meditate upon and hear from God's word today. And we will keep it simple and short today.

This Psalm has two parts to it, and that's the outline we're going to follow today. Very briefly, I want us to appreciate the two sermons God preaches to us: First, the sermon of God's world in the first six verses. Then second, we'll look at the sermon of God's law from verses 7-14.

What is God telling us and all of creation about himself, and what are the limits of that message? Let's look and respond to what he says.

1. The Sermon of God's World (19:1-6)

The first part of this text, in verses 1-6 we find the sermon of God's world. Look at the verbs in this text. These are preaching words:

“the heavens DECLARE the glory of God.”

“the sky PROCLAIMS his handiwork.”

These are preaching verbs. In the New Testament, these are the words that are used for preaching.

In part I picked this text because here we are, outside, looking at the sky, looking at God's world. And for the past few days it has been preaching a sermon to us – sometimes without us realizing it. We have been surrounded by, and pummeled by a message from God through the creation. I think sometimes we feel that sermon, but we often have trouble articulating what that sermon is. We know we benefit from being in nature of course; there is a great book – I don't think written by a Christian – called *The Nature Fix* that highlights the benefits of being out in

nature. We do know that there are incredible benefits to us as human beings just being out in the world that God made.

We know that it *feels good* to be outdoors; we know that the outdoors can stave off depression; we know that it feels good to breathe the fresh air and the sea breeze (and certainly to escape the heat back in Portland right now), but we are often unaware of the message that it proclaims to us.

In fact, we don't normally think of the world as preaching *anything*, really. We just think of it as a place that we live in, and a place that God perhaps uses to provide, but we don't think it as much of a preacher, do we?

But it *does* preach. Just a couple of examples from these first six verses. Verse 1 tells us, first, that "the heavens declare the glory of God." It's telling us that the first thing that nature preaches is that God IS. There *is* a God. There *is* a creator. There *is* someone who is behind and underneath and above all of this. He is as real as the sea. He is as real as the sand. He is as real as this sky, and this breeze on our skin. He is as real as this bench you're sitting on [and the weird shells that are underneath of them for some reason].

But there's more. It also tell us that this world preaches that *God is glorious*. Whomever it is who could speak and make such a sky, such a world, such a creation must be glorious; he must be great! He must be creative, and love beautiful things. This world shows us glimpses of what the maker is like, and he is glorious, and we can *see* his glory.

The Psalmist also says that the creation preaches a sermon that isn't limited by human language or geography. He's saying that everyone hears this message. Everyone understands it. Everyone gets it. There is no place on planet earth where people do not know from the sermon of the world around them that there is a glorious and creative God. R.C. Sproul used to say there is no such thing as atheists. What he meant was that even those who don't believe in God actually know he is there, but according to Paul, they push that knowledge down and suppress it. That is what this Psalm is also saying. There are no true atheists when you live in God's world. Only those in various stages of denial.

The sermon that the world preaches is universal to all mankind, in all times, in all places, in all languages.

But there are also limits to the sermon that nature preaches to us.

2. The Sermon of God's Word (19:7-14)

That takes us to the second part of this Psalm today, which is the Sermon of God's word.

Starting in verse 7 you maybe notice a change, and it's pretty quick, right?

One minute the Psalmist is talking about nature and the sun and the skies, and then immediately he goes, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul."

And if you're like me you might think, "Well that's true. And I love it. And I'm glad... but how did we jump from the sun to the law of the Lord? I thought this was a nature Psalm."

I get it. This seems like a quick turn.

But consider this: in the mind of the Psalmist, all of this forms a complete message.

If the sun in the first six verses is the most glorious gift of God to our physical lives, then his word is the most glorious gift for our spiritual lives. In other words, when you get to the end of this Psalm you're meant to be blown away by the exhaustive kindness of God, because his gift is full and complete: if you have the revelation of God in nature, and the special revelation of God in his word, you have everything you need.

Why do we need the law of God anyway? Why are we incomplete without God giving us his word?

Well, it's because of the limits of the sermon that nature preaches. If you only hear the sermon of nature, you haven't heard enough to bring you peace with God, only condemnation.

Remember: nature is like a guitar with one string, or a steering wheel that can only turn one direction. It does one thing, and it does that one thing well: it tells us *that* the Lord is, and it tells us that things aren't right between us and him. Nature is at

war. Suffering is real. Sin and misery are a part of this world. And we can see that. Anyone can see that. Everyone knows that (as beautiful as it is) this place is not as it should be.

But if God never speaks, we will only *ever* know his existence and our guilt, but never any message of hope or cleansing from sin. There's no hope of forgiveness for sinners if God doesn't speak.

This is where verse 7 comes in. Notice that in the first six verses here, the creator is only ever called "God." That name "God" is "el" in the Hebrew. It is the generic name for the creator. A name that other nations would use, as well. An impersonal title, but not really his name. Never is he called by any other name in the first half when the Psalmist talks about nature.

But then look at what happens in verse 7. Suddenly almost every verse for the rest of the Psalm, he is called by his proper covenantal name, "Yahweh." Every time it calls him "LORD" in all caps, it's the name Yahweh. No other nations knew this name: only God's people. This section in the second half on God's Law calls him by his personal covenantal name Yahweh 7 times, and in the first six verses, he never does! Why? Because God exists, but he remains merely a distant creator if he doesn't also stoop down to us and reveal himself, and name himself for us.

Ours is a day where everyone wants to figure out their *own* approach to God, their own type of spirituality. They like the idea of God, but they want *their* idea of God. And it has to come from them and their own mind or somehow they think that this God most not be truly authentic.

And yet this Psalm is telling us, if you will not listen to God's word, the *only* thing you will have is a knowledge that God is, and that he is glorious. But beyond that you will have guesswork, and you won't know the true God, or his true name.

That's the first very important thing the sermon of God's law preaches to us.

But secondly, the law of God gives us a message of hope that nature won't preach to us. According to verse 7 it also "revives the soul" and "makes wise the simple." According to verse 8 it "rejoices the heart" and "enlightens the eyes." These are things that the sermon of nature can't do. But it also shows that God's law is good for the soul, not bad. Some people have a wrong view of God's law. They think

that it's only a message of misery and condemnation. They think that God's law tears us down. And it does do that, of course if we break God's law (which we all have).

But that same law contains promises, and predictions that a Savior will come to rescue us. That same law tells us that a day is coming where the Lord will, to quote verse 12, "declare us innocent from hidden faults." The hidden faults are real, but so is the innocence that God will declare because of his promises.

Nature can't do that. And nature won't tell you that God can do that. Only God's word, spoken specially to us in the sermon of God's law can do that. Nature doesn't preach the gospel to us. It only preaches God's greatness and our guilt.

When God's law speaks and does what it's supposed to, look what verse 13 says will happen: our inner life will be transformed so that we hate sin and turn from it in our lives. But it also says that this same message makes us "blameless and innocent." Well that's pretty amazing. Because we are sinners, and so is the psalmist, and he knows it as he's writing. That's why he has to be "declared innocent" of those hidden faults that he knows are there.

So the sermon that the law of God preaches is actually a message of guilt because we are sinners, but it's also a message of the way of having our guilt addressed. And how is that guilt addressed? Well God's law says that we find peace through sacrifice. By having blood spilled. And that blood will either be ours, or that of a substitute. And the law of God for centuries preached to God's people that God will accept a substitute for us.

And this is the gospel message, and the most important thing to know – it's a message that you won't find in nature. God sent his Son as the full and complete and perfect substitute to bear our sins, to be our substitute. Will you rest in and trust in that Son?

Conclusion

If you are already a Christian today, then this Psalm tells you that you are doubly blessed. Not only have you been hearing the sermon of nature your whole life and certainly this week, but you also have heard the sermon of God's word and heard

his promise that in Christ there is a redeemer... someone to forgive you... someone to lift your sins and burdens... someone to bring you peace with God the sort of peace that even a weekend in nature can never give on its own.

Instead of a message of the bare existence of God, you have heard that you may call him Father, and that you can come to him through Jesus Christ his son. This is a message that isn't preached by nature, but that was given to us by the Law, the prophets, and the gospels.

If you are a Christian, then you are *doubly* blessed. And if you are not yet a Christian, then take this as God's invitation to you, through his son Jesus Christ, to come to him and to know innocence and blamelessness from your sin.

Let's pray.