

Two Messages from God

Psalm 19

Turn to Psalm 19. What do the heavens and God's instructions have in common? Answer: they are both messages showing the glory of God. That's how Psalm 19 answers. It is a mind-bender to get two such different things, the stars and the commandments, into the same container.

But Psalm 19 is a psalm about two messages that show God at his best, and in Psalm 19 the heavens and the commands belong together because both speak, and both show the perfect God.

The psalm divides fairly naturally into three parts, and we'll read it like that. First there's the glory of the heavens (19:1–6), and then the glory of the law (19:7–10), and last there's a heart-searching response (19:11–14).

1 Voice without Sound, Speech without Words (vv1–4a)

*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.*

We're talking here about the sun and the moon, the stars and the planets. Whatever we see, day or night, when the sky is clear. The ancient world did not have telescopes. Nor did they have street lights or bright lighting at night. At night it was dark. They had eyes and they paid attention, and they knew a lot about stars and planets.

In this psalm, what we see on a clear day, and what we see on a clear night, announces God's glory. What's in the sky urges us to listen. The sun and moon, planets and stars, are telling us something. They are declaring, proclaiming. A message is pouring out from them.

There is no actual sound, no actual words. But still, the heavens urge us to listen. They are talking about God, singing about God, teaching us about God, making announcements about God. This voice pours out continually, to every square foot of this planet.

It never stops, day or night. The heavens want us to listen to what they say about God. The sun and the moon, the stars and the planets: they are never silent.

Remember that this is a prayer to God, a song to God. Psalm 19 is not here simply to teach us about the heavens. By means of Psalm 19, we tell God that we listened to the heavens, we heard them, we learned from them, we got the message. "O God, the heavens show us your glory. The skies proclaim the work of your hands, O God."

This has never been automatic. Without actually knowing God this almost never works. To the ancient people there was obviously deity in the heavens. They all knew that.

But they understood the sun itself to be a god, and the moon was a god, and stars and planets. They worshiped all these. Our world does not see any deity at all in the heavens. It all just happened. The modern world thinks the ancient world was foolish to see gods in the heavens. The ancient world would think the modern world was blind *not* to see gods in the heavens.

And we join the ancient Israelites to worship the invisible God of Abraham, Maker of heaven and earth, who set up the heavens to show us his glory.

2 The Sun: Main Character of the Heavens (vv4b–6)

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.

The sun has the lead role in the heavens. He's like a strong energetic man who can't wait for his race to start. At night, when it is dark, the sun rests in a tent of darkness that God made for it. That's the image here. Then the sun gets up again next morning for its long journey east to west, right across the heavens. Every day the sun rejoices to run his course.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and much flows from the sun itself. The sun shapes life on earth far more than any of the rest. Nothing is deprived of its warmth. That key line tells us about God's glory – nothing is deprived of the warmth of God's glory. Warmth and growth and light, with coolness and darkness at night to rest, and then warmth and light and growth again, day after day after day, for everyone. The sun declares God to us. Are you listening?

3 The Second Message: The Law Declares the Glory of God (vv7–10)

And then, with complete abruptness, the psalm moves from the heavens and the sun to the law of the LORD. "The heavens declare the glory of God." And almost in the same breath: "the law of the LORD is perfect." In a moment we switch from message one to message two.

There is more in common between the heavens and the commandments than that both declare the glory of God. They are also both speech, they both have words, they both teach. The heavens reveal knowledge, it says in v2, and in v7 the statutes of God make wise the simple.

So we don't just have two *objects* that declare God's glory, the heavens and the law, we have two *messages* that declare God's glory, the message of the heavens and the message of the law.

Let's back up. Humans do not know how to live. We never did know how to live. Even in the Garden, God needed to tell Adam and Eve, "you can eat from all these trees, but not that one, that's a bad tree, leave it alone, the rest are all good."

Even in perfect creation, people didn't know how to live, or what to choose. Not knowing is the normal human state. That was God's plan from the start. He would tell us how to live, what was good to do and what was not. Let's read verses 7–10.

*The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.*

If it makes you uneasy to sing the praises of Moses' Law, then think about the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, and other teachings in the Gospels and NT letters about what God's people should do and not do. Jesus said, "teach the nations to obey all that I commanded you." Jesus updated the Moses' law for us, but the basic call is the same.

God has told his people how to live, what is good and what is bad. Most things are not covered of course, most things are normal and good, but there are some clear teachings about what is right and what is wrong.

Remember two things about the commands of God. One, these teachings of God come out of his own character. When God calls us to live one way and not another, he's asking us to imitate him. He made us, in his own image and likeness, and we are his children.

There is no moral standard out there that God obeys perfectly. God himself, God's character, is the standard. God is what he is, and he does what he does, and that is the only moral standard in the universe. His instructions show us how to imitate him.

That's the first. The second thing to remember is what Psalm 19 has in mind: God's commands are good for people. They revive our souls, they make us wise, they give joy to our hearts, they give light to the eyes, they are more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

God's laws and decrees are the gateway into blessing and life. God's great kindness was to show us the right way to live. Psalm 1 already said this. If we live in God's ways, our life will be a healthy tree that always has water and bears fruit when it is time for fruit.

It is a jump for you to see God's decrees and commands like this? Do you find them an unpleasant burden? Why can't we just do what we want? Psalm 19 answers: it is best *for you* to live God's way.

For example, take three commands: the command not to steal, the command not to murder, and the command not to lie. Would you like to live in a town where people regularly stole from each other, killed each other, and lied to each other? Or live in a town where people respected each other's property, did not injure each other, and told the truth. The second town is a kinder place.

But someone will say, "the way I break God's laws does not hurt anyone. What's wrong with that?" Then Scriptures will take us back to the starting point: people do not know how to live, we never have been good at deciding what's best for us.

Verse 7 says, “*The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*” The Scriptures say, “people, you don’t know about right and wrong, so listen to God.” As far as right and wrong goes, we are all are naïve and easily misguided.

The only way to be wise about life is the statutes of the LORD. If you want to be wise about right and wrong, learn the LORD’s ways. “*The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, the LORD’s teachings about right and wrong are trustworthy.*”

The heavens declare the glory of God, and so do his laws and commands.

4 Humble Heart-Searching (vv11-14)

¹¹ *By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

¹² *But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.*

¹³ *Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.*

Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ *May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

This whole psalm echoes the first few chapters of Genesis. Psalm 19:1–6, about the heavens, describe the first days of creation. In Genesis 1 we do not read the name of God, *Yahweh*, just *Elohim*, God. Ps 19:1–6 mentions “God,” but not “Yahweh.”

But in Genesis 2–4 the writer switches to *Yahweh*, God’s name. From verse 7 on, Psalm 19 uses only *Yahweh*. And if this is true, then the law of the LORD replaces the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That was the one tree in the garden of Eden that God said they should avoid.

But the serpent tempted her. Eve looked at the tree and saw that it was good for food, and pleasing to the eye (Gen 3:6). Psalm 19 says the law refreshes our life, it gives joy to the heart, it is sweeter than honey.

The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. Psalm 19 says that God’s teachings make wise the simple.

After Eve and Adam ate, it says that their eyes were opened (Gen 3:7). Psalm 19:8 says the commands of the LORD give light to the eyes.

But there is a contrast between Genesis 3 and Psalm 19. The first people believed a lie, and it brought them death. In Psalm 19 the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever, the decrees of the LORD are firm and righteous.

Do you want to *look* at something beautiful that brings you joy? Do you want to *eat* something delicious? Do you want to *own* something more valuable than gold? That’s how Psalm 19 describes God’s standards about right and wrong. It has the very attractions that make us chase sin instead. Psalm 19 uses the language of temptation – this will bring you joy, it will refresh you, better than gold, sweeter than honey.

Psalm 19 uses the words that take us *away* from God's teaching, except he's using them *of* God's teachings. He's saying, "you leave God's ways because sin is attractive. Open your eyes. God's teachings are genuinely attractive, desirable, and enjoyable.

Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. In Genesis 4, Cain became very angry with his brother Abel. God said to Cain, "*Sin is crouching at your door [like a predator]; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it*" (Gen 4:7). Cain did not listen, he killed his brother.

Here at the end of the psalm, we realize that although God's law is perfect and firm and righteous, we are not any of those, not perfect, not firm, not righteous. Most of this psalm has been about messages from God. Now, at the end, we wonder what kind of message comes from us, our mouth and our heart? We know we don't always keep his commands.

So we ask for forgiveness, and we ask God that sin would not rule over us. "My will is shaky, LORD, keep your servant from willful sins, may they not rule over me." We think when we sin, we're making our own choice, but in this psalm it is sin ruling over us. This is such a powerful prayer: *Keep your servant from willful sins; may they not rule over me.* God wants to hear that.

Let's step back a bit. The scope of this God is staggering. On the one hand, he made the whole universe, what's more he made it to reveal his glory and to give us knowledge.

On the other hand, he is so warmly available to each one of us. He invites each of us to say, "forgive *my* hidden faults, keep *me* from willful sins, don't let them rule over *me*, guide *my* mouth and *my* heart. Maker of heaven and earth, you are *my* Rock and *my* Redeemer." Amen.

PRAYER: Almighty Father, the heavens declare you. The skies show us your perfection, they teach us your power and your wisdom and your majesty. Give us ears to hear this voice without sound and this speech without words. Your guidance about right and wrong is the way to life. It is trustworthy, it brings joy and light and wisdom.

Forgive the sins we don't even know about. Keep your servants from willful sins. May they not rule over us. We need your help with this. We put our trust in you, LORD God, may our words and our hearts be pleasing in your sight. Our Rock and our Redeemer, we put our trust in you. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.