

Psalm 19 - “God Speaks!”

What do you like best about living in our region? (feedback) For me there are two things - one is the weather. I love that it is so temperate - we have far fewer days of extreme weather than other parts of Australia.

The other thing I love about our area is the sheer beauty that surrounds us - the crystal clear waters of the Wagonga Inlet, the rolling green hills of Bodalla, the beautiful beaches, the abundant bird and marine life, the lushness of the vegetation (Though I think that might be in overdrive at our place...); the incredibly clear skies at night, the gorgeous sunsets. I find it all quite breathtaking.

I constantly give thanks to God for this beautiful area, and pray I never take his handiwork for granted.

Psalm 19 which we read this morning, is without equal amongst the psalms. It is not only full of poetic beauty, it is a psalm of great theological depth. C.S. Lewis wrote, ‘I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.’

I hope that the Psalm might speak to us all this morning.

The Christian faith is unique amongst world religions, because it centres on a relationship of love between God and his people. The key mark of that relationship is intimacy, and one of the the deepest expressions of intimacy is communication. If there is no communication, there is no intimacy.

I remember a conversation I had some years ago with a young muslim man. We chatted for some time, covering a number of topics, including our respective backgrounds. When he found out I was a Christian minister, he was quite curious. He asked me why I’d left my business and gone into the ministry. I said that God had told me to. That simple statement left him stunned. “God *told* you?” he asked. He then shared that in his religion, God - Allah - was distant. He didn’t speak to his followers. There was no intimacy. Muslims just obeyed Allah’s laws.

The God we serve is not only the creator of the universe, he is our heavenly Father, and as such, longs for an intimate relationship with us.

The truth that God speaks to us is the key theme of our psalm this morning.

Echoing the word of Genesis chapter 1, David begins by declaring that God speaks through the glory of his creation: **'The heavens are telling the glory of God; the firmament proclaims his handiwork.'**

He doesn't speak in words, says David, yet **'their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.'**

God proclaims loudly through the beauty, majesty and glory of his creation, that he is there! God's intention is to reach us - to connect with the people he created. So he speaks, or "shouts," at us, with all the stops pulled out, so that we might hear and respond to him.

Not even the hardest of hearts can see a blazing sunset over the Wagonga Inlet without some sense of awe. Did anyone see the sunset the night before last? It was spectacular. Someone local took a short video, and posted it on Facebook. **CLIP**

As people stand in awe before this breathtaking scene, they are witnessing the heavens declare *"the glory of God."*

Of course they are not listening to spoken words, but God is communicating clearly. Paul sees all of us accountable to God because of creation. We read in Romans 1:20 **"Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse."**

A Missionary called Don Richardson in his book *Eternity in Their Hearts* speaks about tribal groups who had been waiting for someone to come and tell them about a Saviour. Through what they had learned of God from creation, and through their knowledge of their own human nature, they already had a strong sense of the Creator and of their sin and imperfections. God had prepared the way for the message of the Gospel through His continual speech in creation.

So the opening of Psalm 19 reveals a God who communicates His glory to us through His creation.

There is a problem though. Because of our sinful nature, we don't always get the message. Sometimes we are deaf to the continual communication of God through creation. Sometimes we are even blind to its beauty.

We need the Word of God so that we can understand the works of God. God's revelation through creation holds us accountable, but it also condemns us because so often sin causes humanity to deny the Creator.

But even in the darkness, God speaks. The psalm now speaks of the specific revelation God gives us through his Word. David calls it 'the Law'.

'The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.'

The word '*law*' or Torah meant revelation, not just legislation. The law was a means of God showing his people who he was. He wasn't just giving them laws to live by.

Then there's that word 'perfect'. The law of the Lord is *perfect*, reviving the soul. We use the word perfect to mean flawless. In the Hebrew, however, the meaning of *perfect* is broader. It means "complete, sound, whole." So you can see how it would *revive the soul*.

How many of us have turned to the Bible in times of trouble, and found that God has led us to a passage which has brought us direction and comfort?

When I was in a previous parish, I got to know a young woman with four young children under four, whose husband was sent to gaol. In practical terms, she found herself a single mother, without direction or security. The future looked bleak, and she didn't know what to do. I'd had the opportunity to get to know her a bit by then, and was able to share Jeremiah 29:11 with her. Anyone know the verse?

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

As we explored what that verse might mean in her situation, she found it made a great difference to her state of mind.

The Law of the Lord is '*perfect*'. It is complete, sound and whole, and it has the power to speak to any and every situation.

Through the following verses, David also describes the Word of as "*testimony*," "*statutes*," "*commandment*," "*the fear of the LORD*," and "*judgments*." These are areas in which God communicates with us or speaks to us.

And just in case we find that those words sound a little ominous, we need to also bear in mind the great value in God's word. David says it is not only "*perfect*", but "*sure*," "*right*," "*pure*," "*clean*," "*true*," and "*righteous*." As God communicates with us in the many different areas of our lives, we know that he is completely trustworthy.

If you're wondering what practical use there is in all this, then David assures us of the purpose of God's law. It's purpose is "*converting the soul*,"

"making wise the simple," "rejoicing the heart," "enlightening the eyes," and "enduring for ever," and "righteous altogether."

At all times, God wants the very best for us. As he communicates with us through his Word, or his Law, he invites us to respond and to reciprocate his love. As we do so, we experience innumerable blessings.

So...experiencing any trouble, or tension, or lack of direction in life at the moment? Or perhaps we need guidance in giving thanks and praise? David points us to the Word of God - God's law. God's revelation to us.

Having enthused about the way God speaks to us through his creation, and guides us through his law, David becomes even more passionate. He says this about God's words:

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

When we listen to the words God speaks to us, they reveal to us how wonderful he is. They also show us how much he loves us. When we listen and respond to his words, we are touched by the Almighty himself, and we are transformed. Encounters with the living God are precious - so precious, that we will find we want them more than anything else in the world. God himself will become our treasure.

More than that, there is great *pleasure* in hearing from God and interacting with him. David used a metaphor that for him described the sweetest, most desirable experience - that sweet taste of honey from the honeycomb.

As we become increasingly intimate with God through hearing from him and responding to him - we are blessed beyond measure by simply *knowing* him, and having him look directly at us and *speak to us* - whatever our need may be.

The psalm closes with David's heartfelt prayer to God. This is the Contemporary English Version:

None of us know our faults. Forgive me when I sin without knowing it. Don't let me do wrong on purpose, Lord, or let sin have control over my life. Then I will be innocent, and not guilty of some terrible fault. Let my words and my thoughts be pleasing to you, LORD, because you are my mighty rock and my protector.

David confesses to God his inadequacy, and his fear of offending God. He longs to please God in all he does.

What shines out of this prayer, is David's love for God. He loves God so deeply, that his deepest desire is to please him. There is real intimacy here. David isn't afraid to show God his weaknesses. He knows God loves him warts and all.

This beautiful psalm shows us that God speaks to us at every turn; that God invites us into an intimate friendship with him as we listen to and respond to him; and that as we respond to him, our love for God, and our intimacy with him will grow, drawing us into the friendship with God for which we were created.

Let me close with David's prayer:

Lord, none of us know our faults. Forgive us when we sin without knowing it. Don't let us do wrong on purpose, Lord, or let sin have control over our lives. Then we will be innocent, and not guilty of some terrible fault. Let our words and our thoughts be pleasing to you, Lord, because you are our mighty rock and our protector.