

God's Two Books: The Skies and the Scriptures

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Preacher: Terry McCutcheon

[0 : 00] Our reading today comes from Psalm 19, which you will find in page 456 of the Blue Bible on your seat. Psalm 19, page 456. And we will read the whole psalm together.

Let us hear then the Word of God. To the choir master, a psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.

Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor other words, whose voice is not heard. Their measuring line 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, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving His chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. 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. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

[1 : 14] The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.

The rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, buy them as your servant warned, and keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

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.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my rock, and my redeemer. Let us pray.

[2 : 19] Father, what we have not, give us. What we know not, teach us. And what we are not, make us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. How can I know God? How can I find God?

It's an age-old question, isn't it? Maybe it's a question that you've been asked by someone this week. Maybe it's a question you've asked yourself before in the past. Or maybe it's a question that you're asking presently.

How can I know? How can I find God? I've got many students in Glasgow. And I'm sure that they would all agree that the way to get to know the subject they are studying is by a matter of research.

A matter of research. You read the books. But getting to know God isn't a matter of research. It's a matter of revelation. God must show himself if we are to know him.

[3 : 24] He must reveal himself if we are to know him. And it is to this subject that Psalm 19 brings us. The revelation of God. And just like students at university, Psalm 19 encourages us to read the books.

To read God's two books of revelation. The skies and the scriptures. So let us look firstly to the skies, verses 1 to 6.

God speaks generally in creation. God speaks generally in creation. We can see that the Psalm is written by David who also wrote Psalm 8.

O Lord, O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?

David again here in Psalm 19 points us to the heavens saying, the heavens declare the glory of God. And what David does here in these verses is, in the first four verses, David sets the general principle.

[4 : 39] The general principle that the heavens declare the glory of God. And then he gives us an illustration of this using the sun in verses 4a to 6. Well, firstly, David sets the general principle that the heavens declare the glory of God.

David here points us. He points us to a world far, far bigger than our own planet and to a universe that stretches beyond all that we can see, even with the most powerful of telescopes.

And David says that all these things are there to declare the glory, the power, and the majesty of God. I heard the story of a student who said to his professor, Sir, do you think there is life in other planets?

And the professor replied, No. The student said, Well, sir, why would God go to all that trouble? And the professor replied, What trouble? There's no trouble for our God.

These things are there to display His glory, His power, and His majesty. So the sun, the moon, and the stars act like a sort of a choir that prays God, that shows in their magnificence, their splendor, the kind of God who has made them.

[5 : 51] So what the psalmist is trying to convey to us is that everything that God has created bears His signature. I wonder if you're familiar with the TV show, the Antiques Roadshow.

I used to love watching it with my mum and my dad and my brothers on a Sunday afternoon. And for those that are not familiar with the show, the Antiques Roadshow would descend on a particular town. And everybody from the town would come with their family heirlooms or pieces of jewellery or paintings to bring them to the experts, to see what the experts thought about them.

And mainly to get them valued, really to see how much they were worth. That's really all everybody was interested in. How much is this thing worth? But there would always come a point in the proceedings when the expert would take the piece of furniture or the pottery or jewellery or whatever the thing was and He would point us to the place where the Maker had put His mark, where the Creator had left their signature.

And friends, that's what the psalmist is saying. The psalmist is saying there is nothing that you can see that doesn't bear God's signature. Everywhere you look, everywhere you look has been stamped, has been marked, made by Almighty God.

That's what we sang in our hymn. In reason's ear they all rejoice and utter forth a glorious voice, forever singing as they shine, the hand that made us is divine. And friends, I want you just to note, the psalmist, nor the Bible for that matter, doesn't argue the existence of God.

[7 : 19] He has no need. He has no interest in this. All he does is to instruct every man, woman and child to look up to the glory of creation and to say to everyone, behold the splendor of God.

The psalmist then goes on to tell us that this revelation is a constant revelation. Verse 2, day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge.

This summer, the city of London will welcome the Olympic Games to its city. And one of the events in the Olympic Games is the relay race. And you know how the relay race goes.

Someone starts off, they're holding a baton, they run round, they do a circuit of the lap, they come back round, they hand it to the next guy, he runs round, comes back round, passes it on to someone else and so on and so forth.

But that's what the psalmist is saying we have here in creation. The picture we have here in verse 2, day after day pouring out speech about the glory of God and night to night revealing knowledge.

[8 : 22] It's a constant revelation. There is also an international revelation, verse 3 and 4. This voiceless testimony crossing every border, every culture and every language barrier.

There is no speech, nor other words, whose voice is not heard and their words to the end of the world. Whilst all the stars that round her burn and all the planets in their turn confirm the tidings as they roll and spread the truth from pole to pole.

Well then David illustrates this with the sun using two pictures. The bridegroom and the strong man or the athlete. The sun comes out its tent like a bridegroom leaving its chamber.

I'm not sure if you know but St. George's Throne will have about 10 weddings this year. Unbelievable, an unbelievable amount. 10 weddings. So many weddings this year that one of our congregation said that we should rename the church the Chapel of Love.

I'm not sure what Willie the Minister thinks. But just on a side note, one of the weddings, one of the marriages that's taking place is next Friday and it all began at the lunches downstairs.

[9 : 32] Yeah. Mary and Tom met at lunch downstairs at the lunchtime service sharing a sandwich. They got to know one another and that's all she wrote. Next Friday they're getting married.

So remember if you're single there's a sandwich lunch served downstairs for three quid. I'm only promising lunch now. I'm not promising a partner. But if you've ever witnessed a wedding here at St. George's Throne this is what happens.

The bridegroom starts the proceedings through there in the vestry and then there'll come a point in the service where he'll come out and he'll stand round about here and all the eyes of the congregation are on him until the bride turns up that is.

But it's the same with the sun. The sun comes out and all eyes are on the sun. It's the same with the strong man the athlete when he's won his race at the Olympic Games and he's doing his lap of honour. All eyes are on him.

So there is no place and no time in the world when it's not possible to lift your eyes to the skies and see the wonders that God has made as an expression of his majesty and his glory.

[10 : 39] So as there is nothing hidden from the heat of the sun escaping from the revelation of God's power and majesty and glory and creation is impossible. And that's exactly what the apostle Paul writes in Romans chapter 1 verse 19.

What can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them for his invisible attributes namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made so that they are without excuse.

But folks still try and deny this don't they? And they try to use things that have been made to deny the existence of God. My wife Charlene she loves nature programs she absolutely loves animals and she's got a collection of DVDs at home The Blue Planet The Frozen Planet and it's David Attenborough who narrates these shows he narrates them and David has been up close and personal with more of creation than all of us put together are ever likely to see.

But he's a total atheist he loves to speak about mother nature he appeals to the transcendent while all the while denying what's written in the cosmos but he just like everybody else cannot hide from the wonderful testimony God's world gives to him The wordless message of the heavens concerning the majesty of the creator of the universe has a universal scope no place on earth is untouched by their proclamation God speaks generally in creation but secondly God speaks more clearly in scripture God speaks more clearly in scripture verse 7 to 11 just before we come to these verses I wonder if you would just note the names used for God in each section if you would look to verses 1 to 6 and note the amount of times God's name is mentioned you'll see that God's name is only mentioned once in verse 1 and the word that's used to describe God here in the original in the Hebrew is the word

EL which speaks of God's majesty power and glory but if you would look to verse 7 to 11 you'll see that the word LORD in capital letters is mentioned six times and whenever you see that word LORD in capital letters in your Bible it's referring to the covenant name for God Yahweh Jehovah the covenant making God who binds himself to his people in love he is the promise making promise keeping God he is the God who has promised to save and redeem his people from their sin so you see friends we can learn from studying creation that God is powerful he is a God who loves order and beauty but it is not possible to deduce or to learn anything about his character or what his attitude might be to his creatures and above all what his attitude might be towards sinners I suppose it would be like looking at a watch you could deduce that the maker was a clever man a skilful man he was precise but you could never learn anything of his character whether he was a good man or a bad man so that is why after looking up to the skies we must look down to the scriptures you could look at the skies forever and it won't transform you you could stare at nature endlessly and it will do nothing to you that's why friends coming together as a collective body under

[14 : 20] God's word is so important God's word transforms us and it also informs us about how we should live in God's world in God's way but there are those who say they don't need to come to church or to be under God's word they can do these things don't need to do these things to be perfectly good Christians I was watching Songs of Praise a couple of months ago and they were somewhere down in England just as they usually are and this guy was being interviewed he was a mountain biker in fact he used to take people out in the hills and he was an instructor and he was being interviewed with a hill surrounding him and during the interview he was referring to the beauty of the hills the peace and the tranquility of the hills he then said that his wife had been at church and a lady asked her what church does your husband worship in so it was obvious he'd never been in church with her and his wife responded by saying oh my husband worships on the hills the hills are his cathedral but friends if we are to do that we will be left with an an an an an imbalanced view of

God in fact an impoverished view of God we must look to the scriptures and it is to the scriptures the psalmist turns in verse 7 and following and he lists here for us six different names for the scriptures and their characteristics and the effect that they have and so he begins in verse 7 the law of the lord is perfect reviving the soul when he writes law here it doesn't mean the ten commandments he means the torah the instruction of God the doctrines of God all scripture all scripture is perfect it is complete it needs nothing added to it it is lacking in nothing and look at the effect it revives the soul I think it is very interesting the first effect the psalmist says the scriptures have in us is the thing that is most important to any human being and the thing that the studying of God's first book the skies can't do to us the skies can't restore us or revive us from being dead in sins to being alive in

Christ Mr. James Phillips writes this about the importance of preaching this is why preaching is supremely important for in preaching the word we are giving men God offering Christ to men and in him pardon joy and peace it is in the word that he makes himself known savingly to men as their redeemer that's why preaching is so important and I wonder if you would notice here the progression here in these verses after the law of the Lord reviving my soul the testimony of the Lord making wise the simple God bears testimony against sin it is solid and sure nothing can weaken the testimony what is sin in one generation is sin in another so I don't have to wait for any commission or committee giving their findings on human sexuality or any other issue for that matter I can just turn to the word of God the testament of the Lord makes the simple wise taking the convert and making them a disciple the precepts of the

Lord are right God's precepts and decrees are founded in righteousness they are right for man so as a doctor might give right medicine or a counselor give right advice so does the word of God rejoicing the heart him who has been revived and disciplined by the word of God now has his heart rejoiced by that same word the commandment of the Lord is pure enlightening the eyes there is no defilement in the commands of God if there be any error in this church or whatever church you're party it's not because of this book it's because of us the purity of God's word brings enlightening to the eyes the convert has become a disciple has had his heart rejoiced now has his eyes enlightened becoming a discerned disciple the fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever the rules of the Lord are true and righteous all together and you can see what this is saying that in the scriptures

I have everything I need for life and godliness that when I get all this instruction all this direction and all these principles bang down into my heart then there will be no situation or circumstance that I can face this week this month this year or forever that the sufficiency of God's word can't meet and friends when I receive this when I get this book into my hands and into my heart I will discover that the word of God is more precious than gold to me more sweeter than honey to me I discover that there is great reward in living according to God's word it's an amazing picture but do I believe this do I believe this and the working out of my life and my own experience am I pursuing am I desiring God more than gold is God the priority in my life are the ways of God more sweeter to me than the ways of the world well friends when we move from

[19 : 55] God speaking generally in creation to God speaking more clearly in scripture we discover great blessings but the blessing comes at a cost which is why the psalmist ends as he does in verse 12 to 14 our speaking to God our speaking to God the psalmist begins here to speak about himself he speaks of his errors his hidden faults his presumptuous sins his blamefulness why well you see friends that's the difference between God's two books we look up and we read the book of the skies but when we look down the book of scripture reads us as James says in his letter when we read this book it's like a man looking into a mirror and as we listen to what the scriptures say and submit to it it will bring to the surface our rebellion against God all our errors all our hidden and secret sins it will bring them to the surface again and again and again so what we have here in these verses is the prayer of the man who's studied

God's two books the skies and the scriptures firstly he prays for purification verse 12 who can discern his errors there is a frustration there is a helplessness in the question men think that they know themselves but the heart of man is deceitful above all things sin is so much part of me that I can't discern my errors I don't know I've got no idea which is why the psalmist goes on verse 12 declare me innocent from hidden faults we all have hidden faults don't we faults that we know about that other folks don't know about I often say to myself Terry no one knows just how great a sinner you are but here the psalmist is saying Terry even you don't know how great a sinner you are there is so much you don't know so much you can't discern so much that is hidden from you but friends just as there is nothing that's hidden from the heat of the sun verse 6 there is no sin hidden from the

Lord so the psalmist prays for forgiveness for things he doesn't even know about oh Lord cleanse me from these and after his prayer for purification he prays a prayer of prevention verse 13 keep back your servant from presumptuous sins let them not have dominion over me this real honest earnest and humble prayer teaches us that any of us can so easily fall into the worst of sins unless restrained by grace I'm sure you know the saying there but for the grace of God go I and that's what the psalmist is getting at here he's saying Lord I know that I have it in me to run away from you but keep me back put a bridle in my mouth like you would a horse in verse 12 he referred to hidden sins sins that were not known to him but here in verse 13 he speaks of presumptuous sins willful sins sins that he definitely knows about your friends all sins are great sins but presumptuous sins are particularly dangerous for I willfully know that

I am walking in rebellion to God but I think I'm okay I think I'll just come back and ask for forgiveness I presume upon the grace of God I mean after all I'm a child of God but friends this is an absolutely dangerous road for we begin to set a precedent a trajectory in our lives that will lead to sin having dominion over me that was the warning God gave to Cain do you remember sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for you that's the warning in the poem by John Bunyan the caution to stir up to watch against sin John Bunyan writes sin rather than it will out of action be will pray to stay oh but a while with thee one night one hour one moment will it cry embrace me in thy bosom lest I die time to repent it says I will allow and help if to repent thou knowest not how but if you give it entrance at the door it will come in and may go out no more oh that

I would be kept from presumptuous sin that I may be blameless and innocent of great transgression what is the great transgression walking away from God being cut off from God that's where presumptuous sins can lead friends under Jewish law atonement was provided for every kind of sin but there was one exception presumptuous sins numbers 15 verse 30 to 31 but the soul that sins presumptuously whether he be born in the land or a stranger that soul shall be cut off from among his people because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken his commandment friends that's why David's prayer is so anxious oh Lord keep me from that don't let me be cut off from you friends as as I read this book it will reveal God to I can come to know

[25 : 56] God through this book but I will also come to know myself as this book reads me it will convict me and leave me with a burden a burden of sin but God wants to bless me to bless me with forgiveness but in order to do that he must peel me like an onion layer after layer of sinfulness before the words of this book ever become sweet to you they will first taste bitter but we need to allow God to take off the layers the layers of deceit the layers of pride the layers of guilt the layers of shame the layers of bitterness and he will do this for us as we trust and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ the one whom the skies and the scriptures ultimately bear witness and only when he done this can verse 14 be our prayer for perfection then the speech of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts may be acceptable in his sight oh

Lord our rock and our redeemer let us pray father father we thank you for revealing yourself to us in the skies and the scriptures scriptures and ultimately in your son the Lord Jesus Christ we thank you that as we leave from this place everywhere we look bears testimony to you help us not to ignore this or deny this help us to believe your convincing word in the heavens to trust your converting word in our hands and to submit to the convicting word that has been preached to our hearts we ask this in Jesus name Amen