

## Lent 3: Psalm 19

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### Introduction

This psalm is a beautiful song. A combination of reflection and responsive worship and action. The poetry and rhythm is beautiful, and the theology rich.

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### Stanza 1 - v1-6 - The Skies

*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.*

*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.*

In ancient and modern times humanity has been fascinated by the wonder of creation. The earthly sphere around us captivates us, we delight to explore and understand it. Turning heavenward, transcending our mortal realm, our vista expands in all directions. Marvelling at that which is above and beyond us, we perceive creativity, eternity, immortality. It is natural for us to attribute divinity to the cosmos, hence we have astrology and various forms of celestial worship across the ages. It's just so big and amazing, and it hasn't got less interesting to us, less complex or smaller with the development of astrophysics, space travel and Hubble. We've got some answers, but we have way more questions and awe.

Sometimes we so become absorbed in the wonder of creation and forget to look behind it, we attribute it with divinity or we credit it's beauty to someone else. While Egyptian gods, for example, were held responsible for works of light and darkness; day, month and year; summer and winter; constellations; the birth process; sleep; and the succession of generations. Psalm 19 reminds us the universe is a spokesman for the Creator - Yahweh, an example of his handiwork and it proclaims creation in all it's splendour.

On the canvas of the sky the most glorious character is the sun. At the time the psalm was composed, the moon and sun were often considered deities, or representatives of such. In Egypt - Ra was his name and he was portrayed riding a chariot across the horizon in the course of the sun. Here this theology is corrected, the sun is not a god, not an independent being but a servant of the Almighty: a guest in God's tent; it is like a

bridegroom coming out of his chamber full of life and vigour but as glorious as he is, giving warmth to the whole creation, he is the subject of someone higher. He is God's champion running for delight in the stadium of his Master's sky.

This song lays underneath what Paul says in Romans: creation bears animated witness to the Lord Almighty (Romans 11:18ff). With rhythmic consistency the testimony of the heavens pours forth like water bubbling up from a fresh spring, and its instruction is presented for consideration of the Creator just like pages from a book turn over and over instructing us with knowledge. Paradoxically without a voice, its speech is heard daily across the world, by every people of every tongue.

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## Stanza 2 & 3 - v7-13 - The Scriptures

In the ancient world the sun god was often the god of justice and the imagery is similar to that used to describe the Law, so it's natural to turn to the Law as another witness of the glory of the Creator. But unlike the gods of the ancient near east, or the gods of our world for that matter, who manipulate and trick one another and humanity, and who were often immoral...

*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.*

With repetitive phrasing, layers of truth, wholesomeness and life are put before us. In the first section of the song the general name for God is used, but here the covenant name, the sacred name of God appears. In reflecting on the word of God, we come closer to his heart, we see his goodness on more personally than we can in observing the skies.

The declarations of God are described by various nouns, to tease out the breadth and depth of his instructive word: it is Law, statutes, precepts, commands, decrees.

The writer pairs these with a range of adjectives to further enhance the picture. The instruction of God is perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure and firm. The Law of the Lord is whole, it can be relied upon to guide a person into right paths. Following the way of God brings radiant enlightenment enabling the believer to see in new ways and live faithfully.

The guidance of God benefits the one who spends time in his word. His decrees refresh the soul bringing it life. They give protection and benefit to the simple, making them wise, not misleading them but directing them in safe paths. His commands are not restrictive they give joy to the heart of those who will be instructed.

God's self-revelation, his instruction, the words he gives his people to live by and the accounts of his plans and purposes for creation are enduring and righteous. Therefore the fear of Yahweh is pure, without corruption. To revere him is to assume an appropriate attitude of humility, loyalty, and absolute dependence on him. This posture enables the faithful person to approach God, to follow him and please him.

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### Stanza 3 - v10-13 - The Response

Next we hear the psalmist's personal response, he declares his understanding of the value of God's decrees.

*They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;*

*they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.*

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

The Torah of Yahweh is intended to guide (19:7–10), warn (19:11a), and reward (19:11b). It is precious and sweet, the instruction of God enriches and nourishes his creatures who live in a difficult world.

The blessings of Scripture are rich, but the weight of them is also heavy. They cause a person to take account of themselves what their light reveals...

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

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

*Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.*

The psalmist is now aware of his own imperfections in comparison to the all-encompassing goodness of the divine. It is not possible to lift oneself out of guilt, or strive for a higher way, a person must seek forgiveness from God himself to be reconciled.

He seeks cleansing from both wilful and unintentional sin, so that he might not offend the one he stands in awe of. He is looking for unbroken, undamaged relationship with his Maker.

Having taken the reflective journey of the Psalm, the writer comes to worship the one whose glory he has seen, who has cleansed him from sin, and who calls him into relationship. The last lines are a commitment to walk into life in harmony with God, living a life that is pleasing to him.

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### In Conclusion

The heavens testify readily to God's consistently good intention for his creation in general and in his word we can discern his love and redeeming plan for humanity, he has not left us in the dark.

This Psalm helps us to worship God both for what we can see around us and for what we have come to understand. We might think of God's Law as a bunch of rules, but its really more directive counsel, meant to drive us to right relationship with God. Keeping it is a delight because through it we discover who God is and how to fit well within his creation.

In light of this Psalm 19 begins with praise and ends with a prayer for alignment with God's will and pleasure. It's an offering of self, the concrete verbalisations of the mouth and the still forming ruminations of the heart, offering both the outer being and the inner core as an acceptable gift, a living sacrifice to the One who is glorious above all else.

God is not a judge or accuser in this psalm, he is a Creator and Teacher, a Provider and Father. The grateful servant acknowledges the Master, as a foundation of rock on which a life can be built and a saviour who will bring restoration when it is needed. Opening his hands and his life, the psalmist steps forward willingly and joyfully to live a life and walk a path brings joy to his own heart and pleasure to the Lord as well as he observes his beloved child.

I encourage you to use Psalm 19 this week as you walk the days of Lent, use them as a meditation, as a prayer to commune with God. Take the journey of the psalm in reflection and worship, consider his blessings to you in creation and revelation, and then as you come to the final verses, take action. Step out into your week committing all you say and think to be in harmony with his ways, offering your life back to God as a fitting response to his glory and provision.

Let's start that journey now. Turn to the psalm and we'll say the final lines together.

*May these words of our mouth*

*and these meditations of our hearts*

*be pleasing in your sight,*

*O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.*

Amen.

*Tyndale Psalms D Kidner; Feasting on the Word Year B; IVP Bible Background Commentary OT*