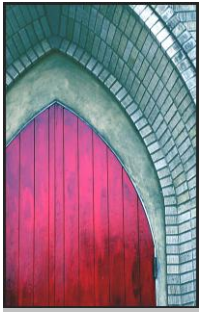


God Speaks

TEXT: PSALM 19 (ESV)



Rev. Jon Dunning
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Oak Hills
Presbyterian Church,
Overland Park,
Kansas

FUNCTIONAL?

How does the Bible function for you? What place does God's word have in your life? Do you want it to play a different role in your life than it currently does? What might that look like? The start of the New Year often gets me asking such questions of myself. As we evaluate our habits, set-up resolutions, and justify our procrastination, I want to add to your thoughts the question of expectation. Do you ever consider what it is that you want to see happen through God's word? Where do you want God's word to take

you? And what do you suppose that path might entail for you? These are the questions of Psalm 19.

PSALM 19

TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID

- ¹The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
²Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
³There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.
⁴Their 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,
⁵which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.
⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.
⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
⁸the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.
¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
¹¹Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
¹²Who can discern his errors?
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.
¹³Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.
¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

"EVERYBODY LIES"

There is a popular TV medical show, in which the main character (a doctor) has a basic principle by which he lives and works: "everybody lies." He approaches all of his patients with the same basic assumption—they are lying to him. They do it out of shame, out of a sense of self-preservation, or out of fear of getting 'caught'. More basically, they lie as a means of maintaining some sense of control of their situation, even while their presence in the hospital puts on display a fundamental lack of control over anything. But is this cynicism warranted?

Stepping aside from the imaginary world of television, it's difficult for us not to be cynical. We watch presidential debates, knowing that we won't know what we think until the next day when we have the chance to use the internet to filter out truth from error. Closer to home, we ask ourselves who in our lives can we really trust. Much of our world is based on the fact that we can't trust one another. We are worried (or should be) about identity theft. As one writer has described it, our world is full of "compromise, insincerity, and half-truths." Do we really have any other choice except to believe that "everybody lies"?

The more difficult question for us is do we project this mentality to God? Can we trust Him to speak truthfully to us? Can we make decisions about our lives based on His word in the face of inconvenience, discomfort, or even sacrifice? Will He be true to His word? These are some of the basic question addressed in Psalm 19. But even more fundamentally the question is: Is God saying anything at all? And if he is, we then need to ask the follow-up question: what is He saying? Ultimately the question for us is, are we listening?

ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE

Psalm 19 begins by laying a foundation for these questions in the first 6 verses. David, the author, answers the primary question (is God speaking) with a resounding "yes" by telling us that God is always speaking everywhere. Notice how David leads us through these questions.

He begins by attributing the speech of God to that which He has made. God has given words to the distant heavens; He has given a proclamation for the sky above us to herald.^{19.1} In the second verse David points out that the words of the heavens continue day and night. The poetry here is rich—the day is bubbling over with so much to say about God's beauty and perfection, and even the darkest, most mysterious part of night is making something known. The very ordering of how we spend our time is speaking to us. God is always speaking.

The other side of the speech of the heavens and the sky is that this movement of God's speech through Creation knows no boundaries. Depending on your translation, the double-negatives of verse 3 can be difficult, but the thought is that the voice of the heavens is heard in every language, in every tongue. These words don't need to be translated. There is no place outside of the measuring-line of the sky where these words do not extend or where they are not heard.

God is always speaking, everywhere. But what is He saying? Verse 1 is the right starting-point: the heavens and the sky are directing our attention to God Himself by bringing to our attention everything that He has crafted with his hands. David exemplifies what this means in his poetic description of the sun. He compares the sun to a groom, appearing out of his canopy to begin his life with his new bride, and to a champion who competes with vigor out of joy. The sun greets the morning and governs the day, and nothing escapes its heat. This is but one example Creation pointing to its Creator.

What this means is that the world in which we live itself is yelling to us that it has a Creator. Paul writes to the Romans, “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, in the things that have been made.”^{Rom 1.19-20} We can’t escape the existence of God. Another implication of this is that the very ordering of day and night speaks of God’s power and beauty—His glory. Whether or not you can perceive specific words, God is still speaking. The rising and setting of the sun—the way that our days are put together in the heavens—they speak of God’s glory. There may be times in our lives when we feel like we have little other than night and day to remind us that God exists and that our lives are not random collections of events. Can you hear him?

ENOUGH

So, if Creation points us to God in a non-stop way, is there anything else that God has said, in which we can respond with confidence? Again, David says “yes.” Beyond Creation, God has spoken to His people directly by calling them to live in such a way that they would reflect His glory, even as Creation does.

“The law . . . is perfect, reviving the soul”^{19.7}: God’s words to His people include His instruction in a way of life that far exceeds a list of do’s and don’ts. It is complete and flawless. It calls the hopeless to hope and breathes life into the weary.

“the testimony . . . is sure, making wise the simple”^{19.7}: God Himself bears witness that we can have the assurance that His words are true. The inherent confidence they contain gives those who are easily led astray a sure foundation.

“the precepts . . . are right, rejoicing the heart”^{19.8}: God’s charge His people is upright and unwavering. At the same time it promises to us joy at the core of our being.

“the commandment . . . is pure, enlightening the eyes”^{19.8}: There is nothing confused about what God sets forth, and by His word He brings understanding to life.

“the fear . . . is clean, enduring forever”^{19.9}: The ‘fear’ here is the proper response of true faith before a Holy and Merciful God. This response will last because its Author will last.

“the rules . . . are true, and righteous altogether”^{19.9}: The judgments of the Lord are truth. None can decry His wisdom and His justice. He acts with faithfulness.

David’s final appeal at the end of this section^{19.10} speaks of these words as valuable and pleasurable in the truest sense. In simple terms, pursuing God’s words is ‘worth it.’ In verse 11 he makes his final appeal—following God’s words has consequences that will mean everything (“great reward”). This is not earning God’s favor; it is the way in which we will know the blessing about which these words speak.

What do these descriptions do in the realm of expectation as you approach God’s word? These words are God’s instruction to His people, the way of life that He has set out for us. They speak of both his specific commands to us, but also of God’s instruction to us about how to live—what to love, and what we most need. His words cannot be confined by lists on the one hand, and philosophies on the other. God’s word strengthens the weak and brings back those going astray. It shapes the simple—those led astray easily. It brings joy and it gives understanding where we need it. What David is saying is that God’s word is enough for us—it strikes at the core of our deepest needs. It assumes we need life and correction and instruction and hope and God extends all of that to us. God’s words as described here are words for sinners, for people who know their intellect, personality, wealth, and connections can only get them so far, and nowhere with God. And yet, they assume that God speaks directly through His word.

LIVING IN BETWEEN

So far, I wonder if this Psalm doesn’t remind us of the Beatles’ “A Day in the Life” in which the first two verses were written by two different people, independently of one another, and then put together as a song. It might sound good, but do these two parts belong together? I also wonder if we aren’t distracted by a mis-reading of these words—one that gets us to believe that they somehow are putting you on the fast track to a happy and successful life. If God is always speaking everywhere, and if His word is enough, how can we not simply get on board and live the successful life?

The answer is that we find ourselves between God speaking always and everywhere as He governs our circumstances, and living out the beauty of His law in our lives with all its benefits. And that’s where Psalm 19 ends. After reflecting on the wonder of God’s words in Creation and in His Law, David leads us deeply into our own hearts. David knows that there are “hidden faults” in his life.^{19.12} His problems have problems, and there is sin in his life that he can’t see, let alone understand how to face. But he also knows about “presumptuous sins” in his life—willful, deliberate stances taken against God—and their great ability to rule over him.^{19.13} And so David cries out that the Lord would “declare him innocent” and that God would “keep back your servant” from this sin. And even as David prays, he reminds us that when God does this work, then he will be “blameless, and innocent.”

These words are for sinners; the reason we live in a world in which “everybody lies” makes sense isn’t an ‘out there’ issue. It’s about each of us. I want us to approach God’s word individually and corporately. I want us to know God’s word. But I’m not concerned about statistics. What I pray is that we might know God through His word and that we would see Him move among us as He describes here.

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