**A Sermon for DaySpring**

By Eric Howell

*“Creation, Command, Confession”*

Psalm 19

September 16, 2018

This morning, I invite you to join me in meditation on Psalm 19. There’s something for everyone here in the structure of the psalm: 6 verses about Nature, five about the Law, and four a personal prayer of confession and desire to be pleasing to God.

Here, we discover scripture quotes beloved to many:

“The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims God’s handiwork.”

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.”

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”

If this psalm speaks to you, you’re not alone. C.S. Lewis wrote, “I take this to the greatest poem in the psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.” Like Lewis, I hope to explore it in such a way that our prayer life and love of God is enriched by this beloved psalm after today. So I invite you to discover here how these 14 verses poetically retell of the whole story of the world.

The first six verses are a meditation on the glory of God revealed through creation. From the beginning, the psalmist directs our attention to the expanse of sky at night and in the day, the splendor of the Creator in the pageantry of the drama of morning, noon, and night. The creation awakens every dawn to a new day, the sun delighting in existence fresh, anew each morning. What reader with stoic piety can pass by the mischievous image of the morning sun’s rising compared to a groom emerging from his honeymoon suite. It positively glows. All creation, the sun’s course across the sky, the moon’s luxuriant radiance, the stars twinkle and all that lies below them… their voice of proclamation goes out through all the earth, declaring ‘the hand that made us is divine.”

Finally, the poet thinks on the heat of the sun from which nothing is hidden. C.S. Lewis, writing from temperate, cloudy oxford, England, says to his imagined readers, ‘This is ‘not of course, the mild heats of our climate, but the cloudless, blinding, tyrannous rays hammering the hills, searching every cranny . . .It pierces everywhere with its strong, clean ardor.”(from *Book of Psalms*, p 73-74). This is OUR climate. We Texans know something about that kind of heat Lewis only imagines, but he does a pretty good job of describing it.

The first six verses on the glory of God revealed in creation remind us of the cosmically vast creation account in Genesis 1, in which God brings about all that is by a word, Let there be light, let there be a sun and moon, and trees and grass and fish in the sea, birds in the air and beasts in the field. Let there be a world that witnesses to the greatness and goodness of its creator and reminds its crowning creatures, men and women, of their smallness and preciousness in the womb of that all which is made for them. When they lay on their backs and gaze up to the night sky, when they work in the field and feel the sun on their backs, when they walk in the woods, and sit under a shade tree and watch the clouds laze in the skies, let the heavens tell the glory of God, and the sky above proclaim God’s handiwork. This is my Father’s Word.

The second movement in the psalm, the next 5 verses, shift abruptly to a new theme and no obvious logical connection is supplied between the first and second movements. It pivots so abruptly between verses 6 and 7 that reasonable readers wonder if these were originally two separate poems combined at some later date. Where the first movement is written in wonder of God’s creation, the second is about delight in the Lord’s Law. If this were written by two different people, we might imagine two different kinds of spirituality: a person who finds God in nature and one who finds God in scripture. But if we can hear this as the voice of one poet, we can see how the theme continues one from another. Like a modern poet, the psalmist leaves us to discover the unwritten connection.

For that connection, we turn back again to Genesis, the 2nd chapter. In the second chapter in Genesis, God instructs his human creatures on how they are to live their lives: eat and drink, obey the limits I set for you, multiply, and tend this garden. God gives the human creatures all the guidance they need to lead happy, faithful lives. We might imagine their joyful song, walking hand in hand, barefoot, and barebacked, through the fields of Eden, “The law of the Lord is perfect. It revives the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. They are better than anything, better than gold, sweeter than honey.” Yes, we can imagine this, can’t we, this psalm as humanity’s first duet before Eden’s animal audience. The superscription of the psalm says, “A psalm of David” but it reads as “A psalm of Adam”.

By now, we’ve taken this psalm and heard it in the voices of Adam and Eve, its first two movements mirroring well the movements of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. If we look a little deeper we find further reinforcement to this parallel we’re noticing between Psalm 19 and the creation stories. The names used for God bear a striking resemblance. In the first movement of the psalm the name of God is Elohim. And it is the same in Genesis 1, every time. Elohim. In the beginning, Elohim created the heavens and the earth.

In Genesis’ 2nd creation story establishing life in the garden, the name for God is Yahweh Elohim, every time the Lord’s name is invoked. “Yahweh Elohim formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature.” And in the psalm, guess what, in the second movement about the law, the divine name is Yahweh, every time. Are you with me? Creation story—creation psalm. Elohim. Law—law. Yahweh. Is this an accident? That both the psalm’s structure and the psalm’s language mirror the creation stories? It seems we’re seeing something here. So far, in every way, this psalm looks to be an intentional poetic retelling of the story of the creation and purpose of humanity in creation. The creation wonder and delight in God’s law, then, are part of the same story. First is the creation in God’s glory and then is revelation of how to live as creatures by God’s will. The psalmist is singing Genesis.

The test of our reading will be the third section. Does the pattern hold? If we see parallels between Genesis 1, Elohim, and Psalm 19-.1-6, and Genesis 2, Yahweh, and Psalm 19.7-11, what comes next? In Genesis 1 and 2, the cosmic creation of the world becomes a garden whose story focuses on two human creatures. By Gen 3, the focus sharpens even more to their will, their decisions, finally their sin when they disobey God and disregard the creation that is their home. In chapter 3, they eat the forbidden fruit and experience shame for the first time.

If the story of Genesis is about anything it is that Humans can have the fullness of creation around them and still fall. They can have a carpet of green grass beneath their feet, and the stars of the universe in their eyes; they can have clear instructions in how to live, simple, straightforward instructions. Humans can have all of this before them, in an idyllic situation, and still mess up. It’s the story of humanity. It teaches us, if nothing else, that there is no pure wilderness to which we can escape, no pure knowledge of scripture in which we can hide that will be the milieu in which humans are not prone to fail, and fall, and be unfaithful.

The psalms 3rd movement knows this well. It is humble, introspective. It is personal prayer of one who knows, as surely as the white, hot sun, as sure as the clear law of God, that we need something even more than these. For who knows fully his own errors? Who does not have hidden faults? Who is not tempted to presumptuous sins, who is blameless and innocent?

We see fully now, the psalm really is Adam’s prayer, from the glory of creation, to the delight in God’s law, to the personal prayer of confession of sin, it is Genesis 1-3 in 14 verses of poetry and prayer. This is truly “A psalm of Adam”.

And it is even more. It is our story. It’s yours and mine and all of ours. It’s not just Eden’s duet. It’s Gospel Music. For we too see the glory of God revealed to us by the witness of sun and sea, sky and tree. We too find delight in the word of God, the revelation of God’s will for our lives. And we too, like all those who have come before us, have discovered the futility of our holiness. With an exalted view of creation and a high view of scripture, sanctification is not going to be easy.

Clear me from hidden faults, we pray with the psalmist. Let me be blameless and innocent. We know full well that prayer is not an appeal to our self-made righteousness, but an appeal for divine grace.

Think with me for a moment just how audacious is the prayer, “that the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart would be acceptable in God’s sight.” Yet this is the aim of life, our holiness, our sanctification, our divinization. For those of us living on this side of Eden’s forbidden fruit, in the mix of our own lives we know too well, is this hope even possible? For those of us living in these bodies, we know the common words of our mouths, we know the broken meditations of our hearts. Is it even conceivable that my words and my thoughts could be found acceptable to God?

This is our hope. For this hope, we need more than even the sun’s journey across the sky; we need more than a word of command. We need God to come. We need a savior. We need God’s name to be not just God as Elohim, the creator; not just God as Yahweh, the law-giver. We need Emmanuel—God with us.

And thanks be to God, God is with us by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This psalm, this song of David, song of Adam, song of Eve, song of all who have ever lived, your song and mine. It is the music of the spheres and the language of Zion, This is my Father’s World and O Come, O Come Emmanuel. May we sing the songs of Jesus, who is just who we need in just the way we need him, our Lord and Savior.

In him may we have the confidence to pray that the words of our mouths and meditations of our hearts and the directions of our feet, and the work of our hands, and our desires, our dreams, our relationships, our loves and our fears, our work and our worship would, be acceptable, and by grace, pleasing to you, our Rock and our Redeemer.