

**“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.**

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, 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 nothing is hid from its heat.”

I’m doing some re-reading of the sayings of Desert Fathers, Christian hermits from fourth-and fifth-century Egypt. Here’s an example. A philosopher asked Saint Anthony: Father, how can you be enthusiastic when the comfort of books has been taken away from you? He replied: **My book, O Philosopher, is the nature of created things, and whenever I want to read the word of God, it is usually right in front of me.** In this reply Saint Anthony is echoing a theme found in *Psalm 19*, *Psalm 8*, and *Romans 1:19-21*. The first revelation of God is not the Bible; it’s not the scriptures. Long before there was a Bible, long before God’s Word was written down, there was the nature of created things, there was the sun and moon and stars, and all that God has made that is before our eyes every day. Creation is the first and older revelation of God. For most of Christian history, the nature of created things and God’s Word were seen as complementary—both revealing the truth and reality of God in different ways. *Psalm 19* is an example of that. The first part that we’re focusing on today is about the heavens, the second part is about God’s Word. C.S. Lewis wrote about *Psalm 19*, “I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.”

***Psalm 19* begins by sharing the message from the heavens which is given to all the earth—the heavens declare the glory of God.** David looked to the heavens and saw the glory of God declared. He saw it in the sky, with the glory of the sun and clouds and the beauty of sunrises and sunsets. He could see it in the night sky, with the brightness of the moon and the awe of the starry sky. It’s hard for those of us who have lived most of our lives with electricity and the light pollution that is virtually everywhere to imagine how the night sky looked to people several thousand years ago. The brightness of the moon and stars is much more vivid, and the depth of the heavens is more apparent if you can get yourself somewhere truly dark. The nearest street light is a half mile from our house and on a dark, clear night with no moon, I can go out on our deck and look up and see the Milky Way, the galaxy that contains our solar system. As we heard earlier from *Psalm 8*, it’s very humbling to look at the night sky and to wonder, in the midst of the vastness of the galaxy and the universe, what a humble, small, brief space each human life occupies.

As David looked at the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars, and all with their size, their awe, their grandeur, they shouted without saying a word to David and all who would see, “The God who created all this is glorious, and this is evidence of His glory.” When we look at the sky

whether day or night, we are amazed and we realize that God is vast, having created something so big. God is an incredible engineer, having created something that works together so well. God is an amazing artist, having created something so beautiful. God is generous in goodness and kindness, having created something lovely and constantly changing for all humanity to see.

**“The firmament proclaims his handiwork.”** David repeats the idea in the first line.

“Firmament” is a poetic way of referring to the heavens or the sky that show the handiwork of God. “Day to day **pours forth speech**,” and night unto night reveals knowledge. “Pours forth speech,” is stronger in Hebrew than it appears to be in English; the image is literally of a gushing spring that pours forth sweet, refreshing water.

Most of us don’t think much about the night sky at all. At night, we’re inside, under roofs, with electricity illuminating lights, computers and televisions. Our phones and devices tell us what day, month and season it is with digital accuracy. For most of human history, people had none of these things. The night sky was a primary calendar. The cycle of the moon, 29.5 days from new Moon to new Moon led to our marking months of time. The movement of the stars and constellations rising, appearing and disappearing once again helped humanity mark the passing of the months and seasons, signaling when it was time to migrate with animals on which hunter-gatherers depended, and later when it was time to plant crops. For thousands of years, the stars were indispensable to navigation for anyone traveling by sea. If God had not placed the stars in the night sky, the darkness of night would’ve communicated powerfully to all humanity, ancient and modern, “There is nothing and no-one out there.”

In the aftermath of the fire at Notre Dame Cathedral, many people learned more about the history of the Cathedral and how during the French Revolution many cathedrals and churches in France were vandalized and damaged. During the French revolution, Jean Bon St. Andre, a revolutionist, is reported to have said to a peasant, “I will have all your steeples pulled down, that you may no longer have any object by which you may be reminded of your old superstitions.” The peasant replied, “But you cannot help leaving us the stars.”<sup>1</sup> As a Christian of an earlier century observed, **“Though all preachers on earth should grow silent, and every human mouth cease from publishing the glory of God, the heavens above will never cease to declare and proclaim his majesty and glory. They are forever preaching; for, like an unbroken chain, their message is delivered from day to day and from night to night.”**<sup>2</sup> *Psalms 19* declares, “There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” The glory of God in the visible heavens is for all to see; it’s communicated to all humanity, no matter what their language. It’s a message that has gone out through all the earth for all time.

The Apostle Paul expanded on this idea from *Psalms 19* in ***Romans 1:19-21***, “For what can be known about God is plain to them, **because God has shown it to them. Ever since the**

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<sup>1</sup> John Bates’, *Cyclopedia of Moral and Religious Truths*

<sup>2</sup> Augustus T. Tholuck, cited in C.H. Spurgeon’s *Commentary on the Psalms*, page 86)

**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;** for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened.”

Paul states that God's invisible attributes are seen in the things God has made. As in *Psalms 19*, Paul told us that because this testimony had gone out through all creation, all people are without excuse for rejecting the God who gave us such beautiful evidence of God's power and wisdom. Mick Mooney, author of *An Outsider's Guide to the Gospels*, writes about why, even if one doesn't believe the Bible, it makes sense to believe in a Creator. “The whole cosmos in their perfectly functioning glory. Where did it all come from? From nowhere? Are we to believe it is all the result of one mind-boggling chance? To believe this is to accept the odds given to it. One scientific estimate puts the chance of random creation at one in 10 to the power of 40,000. That's 1 in 10 + 40,000 zeros on the end. Is it realistic to accept these odds as the most rational explanation we have regarding the creation of the universe?”

The observable universe is estimated to be more than 93 billion light years in length (to put this in perspective, the moon is less than two light seconds away from earth). It is perfectly balanced. Everything within it works in perfect union with each other. Within this universe we have our planet, unique in all the universe (so far as we know). On our planet, we have the most fascinating variety of animals, foods, smells, tastes, and visual spectacles, from the tiniest insect to the great whales and every living thing in-between. While I can still stare out at the stars and galaxies all those millions of light years away, whose light is powerful enough to still reach my eyes regardless of the gulf between us, I can do nothing else but believe there is a Creator behind it all.”

In *Psalms 19*, David poetically described the nighttime sky as a dwelling place (a tent, a tabernacle) for the sun. The sun comes out of his "tent" every morning to cross the heavens and returns to its tabernacle at night. Like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber or a strong man prepared to run a race, the sun makes its course through the sky with strength and joy. The sun covers the whole sky, and its power extends everywhere. It's a wonderful example of the glory of God declared in the heavens. The heavens, the vastness of space, has God's mighty works all poised and properly rotating about like the best of displays in the finest museum in the world. What's on display is the 'glory of God.' We use telescopes, satellites and other special equipment to catch special glimpses of this glory. God displayed these things for us to better understand His greatness.

In *Psalms 19*, David answers the question, "Why did God display the heavens?" They're not just existing by accident. God made them to communicate with us. How do you gaze at the heavens? What do you expect to see? How can this help you in your spiritual life? Do you know that we sent a message into space decades ago in the hope of having some alien form of life detect it and respond? The Arecibo message is a 1974 interstellar radio message carrying basic information about humanity and Earth sent to globular star cluster M13 in the

hope that extraterrestrial intelligence might receive and decipher it. What was sent was a message. It wasn't senseless words or a random string of letters. The message has meaning. It reveals knowledge. *Psalms 19* seeks to teach us that God is also sending out an unceasing message 24 hours a day unleashing knowledge about God's glorious self. It's sad that so many people aren't getting the message.

In the 1950s, Cold War paranoia and the fear of imminent destruction gave rise to an unparalleled wave of alien invasion movies and apocalyptic space adventures. One was called *The Thing from Another World* (1951). It ends after a battle with an alien with a reporter warning everyone everywhere, **"Watch the skies!"** David has been telling people to watch the skies for a couple thousand years, not for the threat of an alien invasion, but because they reveal God's glory.

The implications in *Psalms 19* of God speaking to everyone in the world demonstrate that God is concerned for the whole world. This message becomes even more personal in the *New Testament*. At the start of his ministry, Jesus states in the *Sermon on the Mount* (*Matthew 5:44-45*), "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; **for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.**" When Jesus commissions His disciples at the end of his ministry, he tells them to make disciples of all nations. Not only are all people made in God's image, they have heard God's voice ringing through God's glorious creation. What do they hear? God is awesome. God is a glorious Creator.

In college, I was an American Studies major, and I want to close with two quotes by 19<sup>th</sup> century writers from Massachusetts who remind us of the value of connecting with the sun and the night sky as David does in *Psalms 19*. Henry David Thoreau, in his essay "Life Without Principle," declared, "Really to see the sun rise or go down every day, so to relate ourselves to a universal fact, would preserve us sane forever." Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote in *Nature and Selected Essays*, **"If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile."**

Train yourself to appropriately respond to special views of God's creation. When you see some aspect of God's creation that impresses you, say to God something like this, "Lord, you are great. You make wonderful things. You are wonderful. Thank you for allowing me to catch a glimpse of your glory!"

### Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What is the most amazing thing you have ever seen in nature? What did you conclude about God as you gazed at what you were seeing?

2. Have you ever looked at the moon, planets, stars or constellations through a telescope or visited a planetarium? If so, what is that experience like? If not, consider doing so, it can be awe inspiring. Check out the images from the Hubble Telescope here:  
<http://hubblesite.org/images/gallery>.
3. According to Psalm 19:1-2, what do the heavens and the skies do or declare? How do they declare it? What kind of communication does the heavens use? Do you think this type of communication is effective? Why or why not?
4. What do you most appreciate about God's creation? What can we know about God based on what we see in nature around us? Read Romans 1:19-21. What qualities of God does nature reveal to us?
5. How has your understanding of God as Creator of the heavens and the earth helped you to understand and worship the Lord? How has this understanding given you strength and stability as a Christian? How does it help you connect with God when you walk on the beach or in the woods or gaze at the sky?
6. According to Psalm 19:3, who has the opportunity to view God's handiwork? How can you use a passage like Psalm 19:1-6 to share your understanding of God with someone who doesn't believe?