

Psalm 19 | September 2, 2018

Introduction

Psalm 19 is one of those prayers that is exciting and inspiring to pray because it takes you somewhere - both outward and inward. And that, I suspect, is part of not only it's genius, but it's purpose. The poem is not only beautiful but sincere, the psalmist longing to please God and by extension fulfill their true vocation as part of the created order. There are three movements.

Reading Psalm 19

Speaking Sky (1-6)

- We open with our eyes drawn upward toward the firmament, described as God's craftsmanship and insomuch speech poured out (though speaking without words) of his glory or reputation.
- Ancient people looked to the sky for signs and for worship. The Israelites didn't worship the luminaries or creation itself but the one Creator God. Everything on and over the earth was ruled and sustained by God, so the lights in the sky aren't worshiped but are themselves worshiping God by proclaiming his glory.
- The image of the sun's searing and searching light will be drawn upon later as the psalmist invites God to search and cleanse him (12-13). We are left thinking of the luminaries not only as projection bulbs but search lights.
- This opening movement will return at the end of the poem when the psalmist prays similarly (as part of the created order himself) that his words and thoughts will be pleasing to God, joining creation in worship, declaring God's glory (reputation) through their life (14-15).
- The psalmist uses *Elohim* as the general name for God as Creator.

Speaking God (7-11)

- In what feels like a strange turn the psalmist progresses with multiple descriptions of God's instructions, decrees, commands and laws. But a clue lies in the name for God now being used, *LORD* or *YHWH*, Israel's particular and personal name for God, the name God uses for himself

when first speaking with Moses (Exodus 3.14) to whom he eventually gives the law.

- In the tradition of his Israelite ancestors the psalmist knows God not only speaks through the sun and stars but through the law, the Hebrew scriptures, God's specific words to them. The law is God's revelation to Israel, and ultimately the world. They don't have to guess at God's nature by merely looking at the sky.
- The psalmist writes glowingly of God's words to Israel, they are better than what creation can offer, they're clear, helpful, "reviving the soul", "bringing joy to the heart" and give "insight for living". If creation's grandeur is a gift, directing people to God's reality and character, how much more so the law?
- The law is a gift, "more desirable than gold", "sweeter than gold", "a great reward" to those who follow it. God has given Israel the law in order they might live as he intended, Israel itself being a light to the world, demonstrating his reputation (Isaiah 49.6).
- Ultimately God comes to Israel in Jesus, "word made flesh" dwelling (tabernacle) amongst them (John 1), arriving to fulfil the law (Matthew 5.17-18). Jesus is the very special revelation of God whose Spirit in us gives life (John 10.10), "reviving the soul", "bringing joy to the heart" giving "insight for living", "more desirable than gold", "sweeter than honey".

Speaking Human (12-14)

- The major shift of the Psalm, the psalmist moves from reflecting to responding. Having looked outward (skyward) at the evidence of God's glory (reputation), and having considered the gift of God's law for right living, then turns inward.
- "In light" of all this the psalmist is aware of how much help they need from their Creator, and they invite God's searching light, like the sun from which "nothing can hide" (v6) to discover anything lurking in the dark corners of their heart.
- "Don't let them control me" are words about error and misalignment. The psalmist wants to be controlled by, directed by his trustworthy and pure God, not his own ways.
- The psalm closes with intention, a hope to live rightly. That the "words of my mouth" and "thoughts of my heart" would be pleasing to God. We

have come full circle, the psalmist hoping what he “proclaims” or pours out demonstrates God’s character like the skies demonstrate his glory.

- The psalmist’s reflection, response and intention reveals a distinctly Israelite understanding of human vocation. Humans are to not only join in with creation in worship but, as the pinnacle of creation, sum it up in offering to God by how they live. As image bearers (like an angled mirror) they thankfully reflect creation’s glory in worship back to God, and reflect God’s glory (reputation, character) into the wider world for its flourishing (Genesis 1, 2).
- In this way the Psalm works out each side of human vocation, with the help of God’s word, the light given, most notably (we understand from a Christian point of view) Jesus.

Questions / Next Steps

What stood out of you about Psalm 19? How did it comfort you or challenge your thinking?

- Are you buried in error, in need of inspiration for life? Do you long for what God offers, “reviving the soul”, “bringing joy to the heart” giving “insight for living”, “more desirable than gold”, “sweeter than honey”? Pray this with me.
- Recommit with this prayer to shine as bright as the heavens, reflecting God to others this fall, becoming more of what you were made to be.