

THE REAL WORLD AND THE REAL WORD

A Sermon on Psalm 19

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Throughout history, both believing and unbelieving philosophers have pondered such questions as these: "How can we know anything for sure?" "How can we know and understand this world and ourselves?" "Is there any real knowledge to be obtained about God in this world?" "Where do we start in our knowledge of God—his creation? Ourselves? Or His Word?"

Psalm 19 answers these questions as it reveals God's instruction and revelation to his creatures in both the real world and in his real Word. Psalm 19 teaches us that there is a constant revelation of God going on around us in the real world and a final revelation of God that is found in the real Word. Both are sources for understanding and knowing the Living God who made heaven and the earth, as well as the key to understanding our purpose, mission, existence and being as his created beings. As you read Psalm 19 notice how God "preaches" or "proclaims" his revelation continually through His World and in His Word.

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

David the Psalmist praises the glory of God revealed in God's world and in God's Word. In verses 1-6, the Psalm focuses on God's real world that he created for his glory, and verses 7-14 show God's revelation in His real Word. The first part of the Psalm points our attention to God's general revelation in nature and in creation, while the second part points our attention to God's special revelation in Scripture.

God's creation was created for his glory and man's good. The creation all around us is the theater of God's glory revealed. Just as when we visit an auditorium and are surrounded by the music of an orchestra, or as we go to an art museum and are surrounded by great works of art, so every day of our lives we are surrounded by the majestic handiwork of God our Creator. The heavens declare and the sky proclaims God's revelation to all people in this world! As the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans 1, even the power and attributes of the Living God are seen in what he has made so that all people are without excuse who do anything other than praise him in adoration and wonder.

Notice that the creation and the Word of God, the Real world and the Real Word are speaking, proclaiming and literally preaching the truth concerning God. Both reveal God in all his majesty. The creation is the context in which God savingly reveals himself through his word. No one can know Christ died for their sins by looking merely at trees, lakes, the sky and the heavens, but the Word of God teaches us this saving revelation and confirms clearly what we have glimpses of all around us. The real world reveals God sufficiently and clearly, and shows forth his existence and the real word teaches Christ and Him crucified for sinners. As one theologian in the past put it, the world shows how the heavens go, while the Word shows how to go to heaven!

Because the real world that God has created reveals him in his glory, then we as modern Christians should be concerned, at least cautious about how little time we spend looking at, meditating upon, and looking at God's revealed glory in creation. What I mean is that in any given day, we are often more attentive to the inorganic and mechanical, over the organic and the living creation of God. On any given day, we most of the time spend more time in *virtual reality* than we do in *real reality*, that is reflecting upon and living in God's world, his creation. Because of our being spellbound by the newest gadgets and electronic devices, we often forget about seeing and reflecting upon God and His attributes in his creation.

I'm not being too extreme in saying that we as humans usually spend more time on an average day surrounded by the creations of our own hands, rather than surrounded by the handiwork of God Almighty. Think about the fact that electronic alarm clocks wake us up each morning, rather than the sunlight or the birds these days. We then listen to music from our electronic stereos, while eating our microwaved, easy-to-prepare breakfast, while watching the clock tick on the wall telling us when we must leave. We can turn on our headphones to play our favorite CDs or tapes while we ride our bikes in nature or take a walk in the world. We spend much time in our cars, listening to stereos and CDs, living in traffic, and traveling on cemented roads and

expressways, rather than a nice ride through the woods. Of course, most of us cannot get to work that way!

Then when we go to our jobs, we look at our PC screens while doing our work. Glancing momentarily out the window of God's world and creation, only to return back to our lit up PC screens in order to do our job. We surf the net in cyberspace rather than taking up space out in the woods, or in God's creation most of the time. When we are not doing this, many of us are looking at a TV screen, experiencing the surround sound ambience of feeling like we are somewhere other than where we truly are in God's world. With surround sounds of birds, streams, and reality in Dolby Digital 6.1 EX, who needs to experience the actual world?!

As modern people, we simply spend a lot of our time in a virtual reality of our own making, rather than the real reality of God's making. If the creation, if the Real World proclaims God's goodness and reveals him to all men, then something has to be changing within us as we withdraw more and more from the environment in which he created for man to live! Think about it.

As the people of God, we should be aware of this tendency to spend more time in virtual reality than real reality! It will have an impact on how much we depend upon the toys of our own making to help us to survive and rather than being reminded of the power and majesty of God revealed in his sustaining of creation.

As we spend time in God's real world, we should also seek after the knowledge that God's real world can teach us. Education and study should be important for us in an age of anti-intellectualism and cyber-selfishness, where the only person who truly matters is the person who can fix my electronics, program my computer, write code, hook me up to the network, and provide me a DSL and ISDN so that I might download, upload, and unload faster than a bullet from a gun in a virtual reality of my own making. In a culture where Microsoft Certification is more important than knowing Homer (not the guy on the Simpson's), Plato, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Van Til, we as Christians should exert a special effort to study God's creation and to learn more about God and ourselves, *just for the sake of learning!*

Because God has created all things in the real world for our good and his glory, this is an encouragement to all people to study and be educated simply for the sake of education. That means that when we think about study or learning, we should remember that we are plumbing the depths of God's creation in his real world in order to find out information concerning ourselves, but also to see God and to know him better as well! God has placed great potentials and possibilities in his real world, so that through study and understanding we might come to know more about God and His world.

Yet many times Christians look at study and education as functionally and pragmatically as the unbeliever who is trying to suppress the revelation of God found in his study and pursuit of knowledge. Oftentimes, Christians get caught up in asking the

question "What college or program of study will bring me the most reward, get me the best job, help me to make the most money?" Rather than asking these functional and pragmatic questions, we should ask "What education or program of study has God given me an interest in to pursue so that I might glorify Him and serve my neighbor.

The fact that the real world reveals the real and Living God is reason enough to study for the sake of study and to be educated for the sake of education itself in a particular field of interest. God has made us all different and given to us differing interests and so we study and pursue education to know God better in his world, yet we also want to serve our neighbors and our community and in doing this we will glorify God. *Why do you study? Do you study? Why do we want to learn more things? Why should we be interested in the different fields of knowledge?* Because all that we study, all that is revealed in creation that gives to us our different fields of study, is given to us so that we might know God better as well as to know ourselves as humans created in His image.

Let us look at a few ways that study and education can help us to glorify God and to know him better. Are you interested in the way God has providentially ordered, arranged, and watched over this world? Perhaps history would be something interesting for you. Do you find yourself wondering how different parts of God's creation or matter can be broken down into microscopic elements? Perhaps chemistry would be fascinating as a pursuit of study. Do you find yourself interested in how man has written stories about his existence, his different problems, and wanted to vicariously visit different times and places around the world to walk in other's shoes? Then perhaps literature would be interesting for you to pursue. Do you find yourself pondering questions about beauty, goodness, truth, existence, and being? Maybe you would enjoy philosophy.

Historically, Christians have had a rich education in the liberal arts or humanities because they knew that God had created all things well and they were interested in knowing foundationally a little bit about a great variety of subjects in God's real world. *Why? Because God's glory was revealed in these areas and after God created all things, he looked upon what his hands had made and he said that it all was very good! This is still the reason why we should pursue learning and education today, just for the sake of learning and education.* Learning and education was not a result of man's pursuit for more money before the fall (or merely learning how to do one thing like produce a nice PowerPoint presentation and write HTML code). Learning and education was the result of pursuing a great knowledge of God and man, and then passing this knowledge on to the next generation of people in order that God might be glorified. Learning and education was to be fully human and real as image-bearers in God's world.

But all of the facts that we learn in creation need to be rightly interpreted. If you have not thought about it yet, you must be aware that all facts are *interpreted facts*. This means that we should study and know God's world, but we must seek to rightly interpret his real word and for this task we need God's real Word.

Now that we have looked at the importance as Christians of living among God's real world and fully learning in God's real world, it is important to stress how we are to fully understand the world in which we live since the fall. The fall of man brought sin and blindness in man's heart. The creation was cursed and man was no longer able fully to acknowledge God's glory in creation. Rather, as Romans 1 teaches, man began to suppress this reality so that he might live in God's creation as he pleases without restraint and according to his own law. Man became a law unto himself. Therefore, when considering God's real world, we must also remember the interpretive key to understanding this world through God's real Word.

God's real Word teaches man of his sinful condition and of his need of a Savior. This real world clearly reveals that God is indeed powerful and is the Great Judge of sinful man. Although the creation shows God's attributes and power, the real Word specifically and clearly spells this out. Although the Law of God is written on our hearts so that we know how we are to live in the real world, the real Word of God spells this out for us so that what we knew within ourselves subjectively might be confirmed for us objectively by the Living God.

As human beings made in God's image yet fallen, we have a tendency to pervert and skew the data of God's existence we find in our understanding of the real world. We not only make up our own rules for living contrary to God's Word, we also make up alternate "real worlds" through our skepticism, unbelief, doubt, as well as substances of our own making such as the abuse of drugs and alcohol. We use God's world functionally and pragmatically so that we can prosper and so that we can rule in our tiny kingdoms with the great end goal of taking over the world (if we were all honest enough to admit it).

Fallen man wants to conquer certain intellectual domains, now genetic engineering in these recent days, so that we as men can fully rule and be in control our own worlds and destinies. The Tower of Babel incident is not merely something that happened back in Old Testament days—the same intent that caused man to make a name for himself at Babel, and the ongoing desire and attempt to dethrone God (Psa. 2), is the same intent and purpose for which many live pursuing today!

Fallen man wants to deny the real Word that is pure, enlightening, bringing true wisdom and understand to us (Psa. 19:7-9):

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

Man seeks to deny God while living in his real world. It is so sad that fallen man is so blind without the real Word that they cannot see their useless and weak plight

against the Living God. Some men actually use their great learning and education as tools to deny the existence of God. Why? Because they know that if they affirm his existence, they must also humbly submit to him as LORD and judge and they must live according to his real revelation in his Word. So, they use God's intellectual gifts and abilities given to them; they use the energy and the breath; they use the tools that God has provided for them to continue a great war against the Almighty. They use all of the gifts that God has given to them in the real world and in their humanity made in God's image in order to deny him. All the while fallen man does not realize that he must rely upon the Living God in order to deny him. In other words, all men need God in order to try and act as if they do not need him.

Yet it was in this real world that God so loved that he became a human being, the Real Word in order to redeem fallen man, to glorify him, and to bring about the restoration of all creation. God's real world was the place, the context in which God humbled himself to come and reveal truly and finally the Real Word. The Apostle John says in chapter 1 of his gospel:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men.... ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is a powerful statement of God's love and concern for those whom he loved in His real world. Because of our inability and blindness to see fully the saving hand of God and cry out to him in belief through merely his creation, God came into his creation, the real world as a man so as to truly reveal the Living God through His real Word. The very Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. In Jesus Christ we find true life in God's real world as well as truth. The Word has revealed God's glory and he is full of grace and truth. The grace he extends to us as we look to him by faith as the Son of God who died for sinners. The truth of God is manifested and revealed clearly in who he was and what he taught to us concerning God and who we are! Those who receive his grace begin to understand his truth.

Many in Jesus' time and our time today allow their minds, their intellects, their stubbornness, to get in the way of believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many say that if God will just prove his existence to them, then they will believe. But that is wrong. In fact, the creation constantly and clearly speaks and proclaims God's existence, yet many deny it. The Word of God became flesh and revealed clearly God's truth, yet many denied it. What more can God do? He has revealed himself in the real world and in the real Word, yet men deny his existence and trample upon his grace and goodness.

As Aurelius Augustine prayed many years ago, we must believe in order to fully understand. We should look to Jesus Christ by faith, knowing that in our seeking God in

Jesus Christ, we will come to a better understanding and knowledge of God as well as of ourselves. Let not your pride hold you back from believing. Do not wait for so-called "proof" before you believe. Remember, as Jesus taught in the story of Lazarus and the rich man that even if someone rises from the dead men will not believe:

²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house- ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'

Jesus tells them a powerful statement that we must all keep in mind when witnessing the gospel to fallen men and sinners: "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." That means that if they do not believe and heed the real Word of God (Moses and the Prophets), then they will not believe anything else. God has given his final and Real Word for us to know and interpret all things rightly, including the revelation of Jesus Christ raised from the dead. The Word of God is sufficient for our life and salvation. Because God has clearly revealed himself in the real world as well as the real Word, all men are without excuse if they do not believe!

Repent, and believe the good news that Jesus has come into this world to save sinners! Christians be careful that you live in God's real world, while being obedient by his grace to his real Word. As we seek better knowledge and education, by his grace may we be able to say with the Psalmist *in Christ*:

May the words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart be pleasing in your sight, our LORD, our ROCK and REDEEMER.

Soli Deo Gloria!