

The Revelation of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 January 2019

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, I'm sure you've all experienced this before in one shape or form. There you are, standing on the beach maybe or on the top of a cliff, and it's just before dawn and you're waiting for that first ray of sunlight.

Alyssa and I experienced this in a spectacular way when we went to Maui for our 20th anniversary. We're on the top of Mount Haleakala for the sunrise.

Anyone been on top of Mount Haleakala? Guy has been, yeah, a few people, yeah. It's a must-do, isn't it, if you're there? 20 years earlier, we tried to do the same thing at our honeymoon, but that's another story for another day.

They can ask me about that later. So there we were, huddled with hundreds of other tourists, the most romantic setting, of course. We were waiting patiently in the cold.

It was December for the sunrise. And finally, as it did, this is the picture that greeted us. It's actually more spectacular when you're there than the picture suggests.

[1 : 07] Now, I'm pretty sure that on that day, there were all sorts of people there. There would have been atheists, maybe Christians, and maybe people of other faiths. But at that moment, as the sun rose, everyone became a believer as we gave out a collective gasp.

There would have been tingles go down a few spines, I'm sure, and a rush of emotion for others. And so I say everyone was a believer in the sense, not in the sense that they all became Christians, or they started to believe in a supreme being that day, but in the sense that we recognized something beautiful, intrinsically beautiful in that scene.

That, you know, what was happening wasn't just the result of gravitational forces pulling one planet around the orbit of a dying star. Because if that was simply the case, then how's that any different from every other moment in time?

No, instead we were responding to what the writer of Ecclesiastes calls eternity in our hearts. I've got the verse up on the slide. God has made everything beautiful in its time.

He has also set eternity in the human heart. Yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. Now, if you're an atheist, then, you know, as soon as the moment passes, you would probably rationalize your reactions away.

[2 : 34] You would say simply that it was an evolutionary trick, that we've been conditioned to respond as such. You know, as the first ray of photon hits the eye, it triggers, the visual stimulus triggers a chemical release of, what is it, dopamine?

Yep. Causing you to give out an involuntary, wow. But for Christians, this sight, this beauty in creation, we believe, is a witness to the majesty of our Creator.

And so we would echo what the psalmist says in chapter 19, in verse 1. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day, they pour forth speech. Night after night, they reveal knowledge. The writers of theology textbooks would call this God's general revelation in creation.

Hence, point one of my outline. But of course, the language is poetic, right? The psalmist knew that the sun, the sky, the moon, all these things were inanimate. They couldn't really testify to God.

[3 : 44] What it's saying, though, is that God has chosen to create and order these celestial beings or bodies to announce His presence, to use them to show that He exists and to give us a hint of His glory and majesty.

They are telltale signs of His existence as we look up into the heavens. And every human being is able to know something about Him, about His grandeur, about His power.

And so the heavens declare and proclaim the glory of God who is there. But interestingly, no sooner has the psalmist said that, then he almost contradicts himself in verse 3.

Can you see that? Because he goes on to say that they have no speech. They use no words. No sound is heard from them. And yet their voice goes out into all the earth.

Their words to the ends of the world. And that's why we call it general revelation, because what's communicated is muted and imprecise.

[4 : 55] Now don't get me wrong, it's still glorious. When we look out today, for example, it is still glorious. But it is muted and it's imprecise. It's like hearing voices outside your house with the door and windows closed.

You know someone's out there. You know they're saying something, but you don't know who they are or what they're saying. Similarly, creation declares the glory of God, that He exists, He's powerful, He's awesome.

Perhaps He's even benevolent and providential. But it doesn't give us much more than that. Not just by looking at creation. Eternity has been set in our hearts, but as the writer says, we cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning.

It's a revelation that's limited, even though it's universal. The voice of creation goes out to all the earth, the wordless words to the ends of the world. And yet what we know of God from creation is limited.

The psalmist then gives us the chief example of this, which is the sun. Verse 4, I've often wondered whether that was how I looked on my wedding day.

[6 : 15] Bursting out of my bedroom, glowing with radiance, brimming with pride, straining to get to that finish line, which is the altar, to claim my beautiful wife. But while the sun is glorious, and most glorious of the heavenly bodies, it goes on to say, the psalmist, it rises at one hand of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other.

Nothing is deprived of its warmth. And yet, glorious as it is, the psalmist also makes it clear that what we're looking at is a mere creation of God, a mere object of God's creation.

For it is still God who pitches the heavens, isn't it? For it to strut its stuff, God sets it on its course. It provides the environment within which it can shine.

And for the psalmist, this was a stark contrast to all the other sun-worshipping religions of his day, who treated the sun, many of whom, as their God.

Now, today, we don't have too many literal sun-worshippers, I don't think, apart from those tanning themselves on the beach. And yet, as we look around the world, we still see many people worshipping nature, or more specifically, science, don't we?

[7 : 36] They still worship creation rather than the Creator. And that's not surprising, because once you stop worshipping the Creator, that's what happens. We start to put our faith in technology, in medical discoveries, to rescue the world, to save our lives.

And so we marvel at the wonders of medical breakthroughs. And yet, at the same time, we fail to acknowledge the God who makes it possible in the first place. After all, if you think about it, what are scientific breakthroughs, except the discovery of laws and properties, which God has wired into the fabric of universe, in the first place.

Hidden, as it were, until humans came along to discover them. There's a proverb in the Bible, which I really love, Proverbs 25, verse 2, and it says this, it's on the slide, it is the glory of God to conceal a matter.

To search out a matter is the glory of kings. All that wonderful research that's being done around the world and universities and the like, display the glory, not just of people who discover them, but actually of a God who concealed them in the first place.

And what's more, gave us humans the ability to find them, to understand what's going on. Two weeks ago, if you're watching the news, on New Year's Day, the NASA spacecraft, New Horizons, passed what they thought was a bowling pin shaped planet.

[9 : 07] It's called Ultima 2, I think that's how you pronounce it. And guess what? It's 4 billion miles away from Earth. Can you imagine that?

That's 1 billion more than Pluto. You can't imagine that either, can you? No. And so naturally, the next slide shows people celebrating when they discovered it.

And rightly so. But just think for a moment, what's just happened? Rightly, they are overjoyed at their discovery, but all this is only possible because God, in His playfulness, hid this object just so that one day we might send a probe up there to take a picture of it.

and He did it millions of years ago and billions of miles away just so that one day we'd find it. And what about all the other billions of other things up there that we still haven't discovered?

It's amazing, it's amazing, isn't it? Yes, creation is glorious, the sun is glorious, and I, you know, if you think about it, life wouldn't exist without the sun, would it?

[10:22] We wouldn't be able to grow food, we wouldn't be able to see, we wouldn't even be able to discover electricity to turn the lights on. No life would exist, would it, without the sun.

And yet, it's only there because of God. And yet, the psalmist now contrasts it with something even more glorious. Verse 7, the sun is a pale shadow when compared to God's word.

For he says, the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the law are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. And here, can you see the comparison with the sun? Radiance, light. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

Here, we see the glory of God's specific revelation in his word. Point 2. Phrases like law of the Lord, statutes, precepts, they're all just different ways of talking about God's word.

[11:28] In the psalmist time, that would be the Torah, the first five books, but now it applies equally to the entire Bible. So, if with God's general revelation with creation, we know God exists, then with God's specific revelation, the door of the house of creation is opened, as it were, and we're now able to hear the voice outside the house.

We're able to know who God is, what he's like. We know what his nature is, and in particular, his moral character, his moral perfection. So, we now know that he's gracious and abounding in love and patience.

We know that he's full of both grace and truth, that he loves justice, but he also shows mercy. And as we know who he is, we also know right from wrong, because right is defined by who he is and wrong by what he's not.

And so, the psalmist describes the law as perfect, trustworthy, right, pure, firm. But all these things are only known because God has revealed them to us.

It cannot be discovered. God's character is unknowable by us just studying creation.

[12:52] We cannot know anything about God by studying atoms and molecules in creation. Yes, we know generally that God exists, but we don't know who he is. And that makes sense, doesn't it?

Because God is not part of creation. So, how can you understand God by looking at creation? which is why the focus of God's word is never about, you know, science or explaining the physical world.

And if you look at the Bible that way, you're not going to get any answers. No, God has left that for us humans to search it out. That's our glory. Rather, God's word is focused on revealing his nature, who he is, which then informs who we are.

And so, without God's revelation in his word, we're actually lost and unable to know him. And so, just as food is essential to life, so is God's word because we're not just physical creatures, but relational, spiritual, and moral ones as well.

That's why when the psalmist says it's perfect and pure, he also says that God's law is written for our benefit. Verse 7, it refreshes the soul.

[14:04] It makes wise the simple. It gives joy to the heart and light to the eyes. Most of us are pretty good to seek food and water when we're hungry, but we're not often good at feeding our souls when we're spiritually hungry, are we?

And you look out at our society and at individuals and we see all the signs of that deprivation, don't we? Relationship breakdown, violence, teen suicides, confusion over identity, people pursuing pleasure just for satisfaction.

All these are symptoms of a world lacking in the knowledge of God found in His Word. The sun in its glory may shine on us and fuel the food we eat.

It may even boost our serotonin levels, which ward off depression. But it's only God's Word that can feed our souls and give us true satisfaction in life.

I don't know whether you practice this or you like to do this, but nowadays it's quite popular for Christians to head out to nature, to retreat, to be closer to God. And, you know, I think that's sort of, yeah, that makes sense.

[15 : 21] Getting away from routine helps. You know, slowing down from the hectic pace of life in the city helps. life. But I want to encourage you, if that's what you need to do, or you find helpful, that you bring your Bible with you as well.

Because without it, as you head out into the woods, you're only going to hear the muffled sounds of creation. You won't hear the clear voice of God. And the danger is, if we rely then, we go out without our Bibles, then what we rely on is, we start relying on our what?

Feelings, or experiences, or what other people say. And we begin to fashion an image and knowledge of God, which is invariably flawed and false.

Why? Because we and others were all tainted by human sin. Now, the psalmist urges us in verse 10 to seek and to savor God's word above all things.

He says that they are more precious than gold, than much pure gold. They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned, in keeping them there is great reward.

[16 : 34] But notice what he says there. You only get a benefit when you heed the warning and keep the commands. Reading God's word is not an intellectual exercise only.

True reward comes when we take it to heart and put it into practice. There are some members of my family that love a good dessert. I wouldn't give them away.

But whenever they savor it, there's this look that they have, this reaction that they have on their face. Eyes closed. Then that look of ecstasy as it touches the lips.

Yum! Every spoon is taken deliberately. that's what it is for us to savor God's word as well, isn't it? It's not supposed to be a chore or obligation that we feel like we need to do to get it out of the way for the day. No, it should be a delight because we're tasting the best thing ever.

[17 : 36] We're enjoying something that is literally out of this world. Now the funny thing though is that even though God's word is meant to be the best treat of all, as we read on, it often functions more like medicine to a sick soul, doesn't it?

Can you see what verses 12 and 13 say? The great value of God's word comes as it searches the depths of our hearts like a powerful torch shining into the darkest reaches.

It exposes our hidden faults and error. Who can discern their own faults? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins.

May they not rule over us. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. You see, we need to submit to God's word, don't we?

And allow it to do its work for that power to reveal not just who God is, but who we're really like when we're held up to God's moral perfection. As I was in my early twenties, during one of the moodier periods of my life, I found myself devouring large portions of the Bible.

[18 : 53] That was one of the best things ever, I think, for me. But here I was, thinking, you know, this is really strange. I'm reading words that were written by someone more than thousands of years ago, and yet as I read it, it's almost as if someone who truly knows me is talking to me.

Now, of course, that's absolutely true, isn't it? Because God, who created me, was speaking to me. He knew me through and through, even the hidden faults which escaped me.

And he had a way of showing, revealing my fears and anxieties, my frustrations and struggles, not only just to say that he knew how I felt or what I was going through, but also to point out that sometimes, often, the symptoms of all these things was actually my own fault and my own error, my own pride, my jealousy, my failure to trust him.

And so, brothers and sisters, that's why it's important to keep reading God's word, isn't it? To make time for it. Even though we've been Christians for a while, God still desires to speak to us so that we can come to a truer picture of him, a truer picture of us and of the world.

Now, last week, if you were here, Vijay already gave you some ideas as to how you can continue to do that this year, so I don't want to go over that again. What I wanted to just do this morning is to arouse in us the desire for it, because God's word is more precious than gold and sweeter than honeycomb.

[20 : 35] Now, if you think that it can't get better than this, but wait, there's more. Because if we read the rest of the Bible, God's word actually ultimately points to the one that's even more glorious than that, isn't it?

And that one is Jesus, God's son. Maybe more glorious is not the way to put it, but in our reading in Hebrews today, we learn that the Bible points to Jesus who becomes God's full and final revelation

to us.

And now, as I read that passage again, which will be on the screen, I want you to notice how there are echoes to Psalm 19, whether it's a reference to the sun's radiance or to the glory of God's word. So, listen up as I do that. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom also he made the universe.

The son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. And so, if creation is us hearing the muffled voice of God and the word is us hearing him through an open door, then in his son, we finally see God walking through the doorway.

[22 : 05] In Jesus, God enters the house of creation and gives us a full and final revelation of him. In Jesus, we see all of God's perfect character embodied in the one man, full of grace and truth, justice and mercy.

In Jesus, we see how it's possible to keep God's word fully and be blameless of all transgression. But most importantly, when Jesus walked through the doorway, he came to give us purification for our sins.

Because, try as we might, we're not going to live up to Psalm 19, are we? We will keep committing willful sin. We will keep allowing them to rule over us without him, to stop us living a blameless life. And so, God's word now doesn't simply reveal who God is or what he wants us to do. No, God's word also reveals what God has done for us in Jesus.

And so, God's word is truly life-giving because the knowledge of that and our trust in Jesus is then what saves us from death and judgment and gives us life, true life, in his kingdom.

[23 : 28] And so, if there's anyone here today who has not put your faith in Jesus, then come and read about this life-giving gift in God's word. Read about this treasure that is better than gold that's revealed to us in his word.

But those of us who have already put our faith in Christ and trusted in him, then what the word of God helps us to do now as well is to be like Jesus.

as we trust in him and keep his commands. We too, in a small way, have a chance to display and declare the glory of God.

And that's how the psalmist ends in verse 14 with a prayer. He says, may these words of my mouth, as opposed to the creation which has no words, and this meditation of my heart, be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Do you see the contrast? Our frail and meager lives, may not compare to the grandeur of God's creation, nor the purity of God's word, nor the saving power of God's son, and yet we can still reflect and declare God's glory with the words of our mouth and the meditation of our hearts.

[24 : 50] Our lives and our words are opportunities for us to please him. As we display his character, as we allow God's word to change us, we will display the glory of him and his son.

So will you make verse 14 your prayer as well? That as we savour God's word and put our trust in his son, God will use us with the words we say in how we conduct ourselves to be a reflection of his glory.

It's a great privilege, isn't it, to think that God might display his glory through us, to do in a small way what Jesus has done on a grand and universal scale.