

The Revelation of God

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Preacher: Mark Chew

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

Now, listen, I experienced this in a spectacular way when we went to Maui for our 20th wedding anniversary. We were on the top of Mount Haleakala for the sunrise.

Anyone been there? On top of that? No, okay. The picture will come in handy then. It's a must-do if you ever go to Maui. 20 years earlier, we had tried to do that for our honeymoon, but that's another story for another day.

You'll have to ask me about it later. Anyway, this time was rather more successful, but there's the sunrise. But there we were, huddled with hundreds of other tourists.

Very romantic, it was. And it was cold too, December, but up in the mountains, always cold. And there we were, huddled, waiting for the sun to rise. And finally, when it did, that's what greeted us.

[1 : 08] It was actually more spectacular than what we have on the slide. Now, I'm pretty sure that there were all sorts of people there that morning. Some would have been atheists, some Christians, some of other faiths.

But at that moment, as the sun rose, everyone became a believer because we gave out a collective gasp. There would have been tingles, run down a few spines, I'm sure, rush of emotions.

And when I say everyone was a believer, I don't mean that in the sense that everyone became a Christian or even that everyone started to believe in a supreme being. But I mean it in the sense that we all recognize that there was something intrinsically beautiful in that scene.

That it wasn't just merely the result of gravitational forces pulling a planet around a dying star.

Because if that was simply the case, then how is that any different to any other moment in history or time?

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

[2 : 25] He has also set eternity in the human heart. Yet no one can fathom what God has done from the beginning to end. Now, if you're an atheist, then once the moment passes, you would have to rationalize your reactions away.

You would have to say that it's simply an evolutionary trick. That we were conditioned to respond as such. That as the first ray of photon hits the eye, this visual stimulus triggers a chemical release of, what is it, dopamine, causing you to give out an involuntary wow.

But for Christians, this spectacular sight, this beauty in creation, we believe, is a witness to the majesty of our creator. We would echo the words of Psalm 19 in verse 1, saying, 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. Writers of theology textbooks refer to this as God's general revelation in creation.

Hence, point one of my outline. But of course, the language is poetic, isn't it? The psalmist knew that the sun, the moon, and all these things, they can't really testify to anything.

[3 : 48] Instead, what he's saying is that by choosing to create and order these celestial bodies, God is using them to announce his presence, to show us that he exists, to give us a hint of his glory and majesty.

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

And so the heavens declare and proclaim the glory of a God who is there. But the interesting thing is, as we read on, no sooner has the psalmist said this, that he immediately almost contradicts

himself in verse 3.

He says they have no speech. They use no words. No sound is heard from them. And yet, their voice goes out to all the earth. Their words to the ends of the world.

And so that's why we call it general revelation. It's because what's communicated is muted. It's not precise. Now, don't get me wrong. Creation is still glorious.

[4 : 55] We still need to steward it. And it still testifies to God. But it's not precise or clear. It's like hearing voices outside your house, you know, with the doors and the windows shut.

But you know someone's there, but you don't know who he is. You know they're saying something, but you can't hear what the words are exactly. And so, similarly, creation declares that God exists, that he's powerful and awesome, maybe even providential and benevolent.

But it doesn't give us much more than that. But eternity has been set in our hearts, as the writer says. And yet, we cannot fathom what God's done from the start.

So it's a revelation that's limited, even though it's universal. The so-called voice of creation goes out to all creation. There are wordless words to the ends of the world.

And yet, what we can know of God from it is limited. The psalmist then, in verse 4, gives us an example, the chief example of it.

[6 : 02] And that's the sun. In the heavens, God has pitched a tent for the sun. It's like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

I wonder whether you married men ever feel like this on your wedding day, coming out of your chamber on your day of glory, glowing with radiance, brimming with pride, straining to get to the finish line, which is the altar.

Maybe that's just the start line. Anyway, to claim your prize, the beautiful bride, in my case, Alyssa. Well, that's what the sun is being described as. It's the most glorious of the heavenly bodies.

He goes on to say, it rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other. Nothing is deprived of its warm. And yet, as we read, the psalmist also makes it clear that glorious as it is, this is merely an object of God's creation.

God still has to pitch the heavens for it to strut its stuff. It is he who sets the sun on its course and provides it the environment within which it can shine.

[7 : 12] And for the psalmist, this is a far cry from all the other sun-worshipping religions that were around him at the time, who many of them would treat the sun as their God.

And now while today, we don't literally have too many sun-worshippers, I don't think, apart from those on the beach perfecting their tents, yet as we look around, we still see a lot of people worshipping nature or specifically science.

They are worshipping creation rather than the creator. And that shouldn't be surprising because once we stop worshipping the creator, that's what we do. We have to worship something.

And so we put our faith now in technology, in medical discoveries to help us save the world. We marvel at the wonders of medical breakthrough and yet fail to acknowledge the God who makes it possible in the first place.

Because think about it, what are scientific breakthroughs except the discovery of laws and properties which God has wired into the fabric of the universe in the first place, hidden, as it were, until humans come along to discover them.

[8 : 28] There is a proverb in chapter 25 and verse 2, which I love, and it says this, it is the glory of God to conceal a matter. To search out a matter is the glory of kings.

All the wonderful research that goes on in the world, in universities, in labs, display the glory not just of the people that discover it, but also of a God who concealed it in the first place and what's more, gave us the ability as humans to be able to find them and discover them.

Two weeks ago on New Year's Day, you might have seen this on the TV, the NASA spacecraft, New Horizons, passed by what they described as a bowling pin shaped planet.

It's called Ultima 2, that little cross there, that small. And guess what? It's 4 billion miles away from Earth.

Can you imagine that? I can't. That's 1 billion miles beyond Pluto, in case that helps. And naturally when people, you know, I think it probably, it was, took the picture and then took probably two weeks to get back to Earth.

[9 : 41] But naturally when the pictures came back, there was great celebration on the next picture, yep. at what occurred. The scientists were overjoyed at this discovery.

Now, think for a moment though, what has actually happened? This scene is only possible because God, in his playfulness, hid this object some millions of years ago, some billions of miles away, just so that one day we might send a probe up there to take a picture of it.

Think about that. That's what's just happened. And that's just one thing in the universe. What about all the billions of other things that we're still to discover and we will discover one day? God's already put them there, waiting for us.

So yes, the sun is the most glorious object in creation and, you know, as I think about it, life wouldn't exist without it. You know, we wouldn't have food.

We wouldn't be able to see anything, much less discover electricity to turn the lights on. No life would probably exist without the sun. And yet, as glorious as the sun is, the one who created the sun is more glorious.

[10:59] And now in verse 7, the psalmist tells us that there is something even more glorious than the sun. That when compared to God's word, the sun is but a pale shadow.

So verse 7, 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.

See that comparison there with the sun? Giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm. All of them are righteous.

Here we see the glory of God's specific revelation in his word. The phrases, law of the Lord, statutes, all these things are just different ways of describing God's word. And for the psalmist, that would have been the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, but that principle now applies equally to the whole Bible.

So if with God's general revelation with creation, we know he exists, then with God's specific revelation, the door of the house of creation is opened.

[12:04] And we are able to hear clearly now the voice outside that house. We're able to know who he is and what he's like. And in particular, we get to know his nature and his moral perfection.

So now we know he's gracious and abounding in love and patience. We know he's full of both truth and grace. We know he loves justice, but that also he shows mercy.

And as we know who he is, we also know what's right from wrong. Because right is defined by who he is and wrong by who he is not. That's why the psalmist describes the law as perfect, trustworthy, right, pure, firm.

These are things, are moral attributes of the law which are there because God is like that. And we have to realize that all these things about God are known to us because God has revealed them to us and not because we've discovered them.

because God's character is unknowable when we, you know, apart from this, if we're only going to study atoms and molecules in this creation, we're not going to know these things about God.

[13:21] And that makes sense, doesn't it? Because how can you look at creation and understand something that's outside it unless God himself first reveals it to us? And just as food is essential for life, so is God's word.

Because we're not merely physical creatures, but moral, relational, and spiritual ones as well. That's why in those verses, the law of the Lord is described then as being of a benefit to us all.

Verse 7, it refreshes the soul. It makes wise the simple. It gives joy to the heart. It gives light to the eyes. Now we know to seek food and water normally when we're hungry, but sometimes we're not too good, are we, to feed our souls when we're spiritually hungry, are we?

And as we look at the society and as individuals out there, we see telltale signs, don't we, of the spiritual deprivation that has come because people no longer hear and read the word of God. Relationship breakdowns, violence, teen suicides, confusion with identity, the pursuit of hedonistic pleasure just to find satisfaction, all these are symptoms of a world lacking the word of God.

[14:46] The sun in its glory may shine on us and give us food to eat. It may even boost our serotonin levels to ward off depression, but it's only God's word that can feed our souls.

I don't know what you like, but I know that nowadays it's often popular, isn't it, for us, some of us to head out to nature, to go to a retreat in order to be closer to God.

Now in one sense, that's probably helpful, getting away from routine is good, slowing down from the hectic city pace of life, that's good, but friends, I do want to encourage you that if ever you do that, please bring your Bible along, because without it, you're only going to hear the muffled sounds of

creation, you're going to go into the woods, and you're not going to hear the clear voice of God. And the danger becomes that when we don't do that, we start to rely on our own feelings from experience, and then we fashion an image and knowledge of God that is invariably flawed and false.

Why? Because the human heart is sinful. That's why in verse 10, the psalmist urges us to come back to God's word. He says that they are more precious than gold, than much pure gold.

[16:10] They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By then your servant is warned, in keeping them there is great reward. Now notice though that the benefit only comes when we heed the warning and keep the commands.

Reading God's word is not a purely intellectual exercise. True reward, the psalmist says, only comes when we take it to heart and we practice what we read.

Now there are some members of my family that love a good dessert. I wouldn't give them away, tell you who they are, but whenever they savor one of these desserts, there's always this sublime reaction on their face.

You know, their eyes would be closed, they'd take that spoon slowly to the mouth, then the look of heavenly ecstasy comes on their face. Yum!

Every spoon is precious, taken and savored slowly. I'm sure that some of you would probably identify closely with it, but that's the way we are to savour God's word as well.

[17:21] You know, when we come to a Bible, it's not a chore or an obligation, it's a delight, it should be, because we're tasting the best thing ever. We're enjoying something that is literally out of this world.

Now, the funny thing is that even as we say that this should be the case, that this is the best treat of all, the function and effect of God's word, actually, as we read on, is often like medicine for a sick soul.

Imagine taking your, you know, I don't know, Panadol and doing that. But that's exactly what God's word does. Verse 12 and 13, the great value of God's word comes as it searches the depths of our hearts, as it shines that powerful torch into the darker reaches, in order to expose our hidden faults and error.

God's love. So who can discern their errors? Nothing except God through his word. Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. And so as we allow God to do its work through his word, humbly submitting to it, then it has the power to reveal not just who God is, but also who we are held up against God's moral perfection.

[18:42] I remember in my early twenties, as I was in one of my moodier periods of my life, devouring large portions of the Bible. And to me, that was actually the best thing ever, one of the best things I've ever done in life.

And I'm still doing it, of course, but not as voraciously, I have to say. As a 20-year-old, there's always spare time. But here I was reading it, thinking, this is all really strange because the words that I'm reading are being written by people 2,000 years ago.

And yet, as I read them, it was as though someone who truly knew me was speaking to me, speaking right into my life. All my hidden faults that I didn't even know was there, my fears, my anxieties, my frustrations, my struggles, it was as if someone knew them all.

But of course, that's the truth, isn't it? Because the person who was speaking to me was God, who has created me and given me his word. And the funny thing though is that even as it was so uncomfortable having all these things revealed of me, there was something strangely comforting as well because God not only reveals my faults, he shows me how he is able to cure and heal them as well.

And so friends, I don't know whether you've had that experience with God's word, but if not, give it a go. And if you have, then let me encourage you to keep coming back to God's word, making time for it, and allowing him to speak to you, even though you've been a Christian forever.

[20:30] Go to engage, because there are no good reasons except lame reasons. Is that right, Candice? Go to engage, perhaps, or one of these, come to some of Bible studies, or whatever you can to get God's word, because it is only through God's word that we get a true picture not only of him, but of us and our world.

Now, you may think that, okay, that's it, this is as good as it gets, nothing more, but actually there's more. Because glorious as it is, God's word ultimately points us to the one that is even more glorious.

And we discovered that in our reading, no surprise from God's word, but in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 1 to 4, and that one is Jesus, God's son. And so in my third point, in Jesus we actually have God's full and final revelation.

Now, I'm just going to read that passage again, but as I do, I want you to notice how there are echoes of Psalm 19 in those verses. Whether it's the sun's radiance or the glory of God's word. So verse 1, 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.

[21 : 51] The sun is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

So, if in creation we've heard the muffled voice of God, and in his word we've heard him as through an open door, then in his son we finally see God walking through the doorway.

In Jesus, God finally enters the house of creation, and he gives us a full and final revelation of himself. In Jesus, we see all of God's perfect character and body, full of grace and truth, justice and mercy.

In Jesus, we see how it's possible for a person to keep the word of God fully, to be completely blameless of all transgression. But most importantly, when Jesus walked through that doorway, he came because he knew that we couldn't live up to the verses of Psalm 19.

We can't, can we? Try as we might, we will continue to commit willful sins without God. We will allow them to rule over us without him. We will not be able to live a blameless life.

[23 : 15] That's why verse 4 also adds that Jesus came to provide purification for our sins before returning to the Father. And so God's word now doesn't just reveal who God is and what we must do to please him.

It also reveals what God has done for us. And so God's word is in this other sense truly life-giving as well because without a knowledge of Jesus we will not be able to be saved from death and judgment.

We will not have life in his kingdom. So friends, if that's you today, then please can I urge you to come to this wonderful life-giving gift of Jesus found through his word.

Vijay and I are planning to run evangelism course soon, early in the year, Christianity Explored. Come along to that, talk to me about it, so that you can really get into the word of God.

God. But for the rest of us, for those of us who know Christ, then what the word of God does now as well, aside from us putting our trust in him, which is very important, is that it also gives us a chance, it shows us how we can be like Jesus, so that in our small little way, we can display and declare the glory of God.

[24 : 36] So, verse 14 ends with a prayer. May these words of my mouth, words which we can speak, which creation cannot, and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Do you notice the contrast there? Our frail and meager lives may not compare to the grandeur of God's creation, or the purity of God's word, or the saving power of God's son, and yet we're still given this opportunity to reflect and declare God's glory, to display the moral perfection of God. Our lives and our words are opportunities to please him. So, friends, will you make that your prayer today? That as we savour God's word and put our trust in him and allow that word to change us, God might use us in the words we say, in the way we conduct ourselves at work, at home, in the community, to be a reflection of his glory.

It's a great privilege, isn't it? Think about it. What God has created the heavens to do, God has also given for us as a noble calling, to do in a small way, what Jesus has done in a grand and universal way.

Let me pray. Father, as we enjoy your creation, help us to give glory to you, the creator. As we search and savour your word, help us to keep your commands and be innocent of great transgression.

[26 : 21] As we witness the radiance of your son, reveal to us in your word, reveal to us in your word, help us to put our trust fully in him for the purification of our sins.

And may we, with our words and meditation and conduct, live to please you and reflect your glory.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.