

God's Sweet Speech

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. If you're new, my name's Jono Smith. I'm one of the pastors here at the church. And if you're new, you're coming in the second week of a five-week series we're doing on the Psalms called the Songs of Life.

Last week I spoke to you from Psalm 4, titled the sermon, Christian Confidence in Troubling Times. And I talked about how we should respond to suffering and particularly to persecution as Christians.

And this week I get to preach, as you know, from Psalm 19. And I'm really very glad that I get to preach from Psalm 19 because it's one of my favourite Psalms. And it's one of my favourite Psalms because I love nature.

I love nature. I love God's creation. I always have. I grew up in what was then semi-rural Diamond Creek on a big acreage with, you know, kangaroos in the backyard and foxes and fish in the creek and eagles in the sky.

And I just loved living out there and enjoying God's creation. I always wanted to be a zoologist or a field naturalist, as my granddad used to prophesy over me, if you will.

[1 : 20] And I never became one because I was hopeless at science. Just woeful at any kind of scientific study at all.

But I don't think I wanted to be a zoologist for the science. I really just wanted to have a job where I could be in nature and observe nature and enjoy God's creation.

So that's what this Psalm is about this morning, at least the first half. You can remember Psalm 19 easily because the first half, verse 1 to 6, is about God speaking through nature.

And the second half is about God speaking through his word. And so I've titled the Psalm, God's Ministry Through Sky and Scripture. God's Ministry Through Sky and Scripture.

Well, why don't I pray for us and we'll dive into this Psalm and see what God has for us. Heavenly Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, my Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

[2 : 28] Amen. Well, my goal this morning is to connect you with the ministry of God through the sky and the ministry of God through the scriptures.

Of course, it's not just the sky that God ministers to us through. It's God's creation as a whole. But this Psalm is particularly speaking to us about God's ministry to us through the heavens, the skies, the firmament, as the old-fashioned word says.

So why don't we dive in? And the first point I want to share with you is that God speaks to us through nature. Verse 1, follow it with me. The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

The first thing we need to notice straight away is that this Psalm is about God mainly. It's not mainly about God's creation. It's mainly about God.

The heavens, the creation, are telling us something about God. It's really popular and cool right now to be into environmentalism, to go green, to reduce your carbon footprint.

[3 : 43] But the big problem with a lot of that environmentalism, I think, is that it neglects the creator of the creation. Have you noticed this?

A lot of the popular environmentalism is very secular, very humanist, and it deliberately sidelines the creator who is creator over his creation.

This Psalm tells us that the main point or one of the main reasons that God created the universe is to show us his glory, to teach us about who he is.

See, God existed in eternity past. He didn't need a creation. He existed with himself in perfect Trinitarian unity and relationship and love.

He didn't need a creation. He didn't need humanity. He didn't need any universes or anything else. But he decided to create something, as Genesis 1 says, with a word for his own pleasure and to display his glory.

[4 : 50] God's creation tells us something about him. The heavens are declaring the glory of God and the firmament or the dome or the sky proclaims his handiwork.

That is, God is displaying something to us. He's teaching something. He's preaching a sermon to us through his creation. He's teaching us that he's glorious.

That he's magnificent. That he's worthy of worship. That he's above all. Listen to Romans chapter 1, 19 to 20.

This is Paul condemning people for not believing in God. One of the reasons he condemns them is this. That they should know about God just by looking up.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, plain to everyone. Because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through what?

[6 : 10] Through the things he has made. Through his creation. He's speaking to us through his creation. Let's move on to verse 2.

Day to day pours forth speech. And night to night declares knowledge. I looked up that verb, pours forth, in the Hebrew. And it's a great word.

It means literally gushes forth. Like a big dam when they open the wall. It just gushes forth.

Night to night, day to day, gushes forth. Speech from God. Knowledge about God. Every time you see a sunrise. I haven't seen one in a long time, but apparently it happens.

Every time you see a sunrise. Every time you see a sunset. Every time you see a night sky. Every time you see anything magnificent in creation. God is gushing forth speech and knowledge to you about himself.

[7 : 12] About his glory. We need to hear it. God never speaks in vain. He never wastes a word. And he's gushing forth speech to us as we observe his creation.

Make sure that you hear what he's saying. I think today we are so busy in the hustle and bustle of modern life.

We're so busy that we neglect the ministry of God to us through his creation. You can go whole days and weeks without ever observing a night sky.

Without ever taking the time to appreciate a delicate flower or one of God's incredible creatures that make up his kingdom. We are so busy that we fail to hear and perceive the voice of God in creation.

I think at the moment, as you know, there is an epidemic of depression. Mental illness. Depression today.

[8 : 19] I've got some stats here that should alarm us, I think. And Australia is, you know, has the highest incidence of depression in the world, I think.

At least the Western countries do. These are some stats about Australia. One in four women and one in six men will suffer depression at some stage in their life.

Each year, almost 800,000 Australian adults will experience a depressive illness. Depression is the third most common cause of illness among women and the tenth most among men.

In 2001, a few years ago, it would be worse now. Australian GPs reported depression as the fourth most common illness that they dealt with in their practices. Depression is the leading cause of disability in Australia.

And the World Health Organization predicts that by 2020, depression will be the second most common disease in the world after heart disease.

[9 : 27] Depression is the third most common cause of illness. I know that this is a complex, complex issue. Believe me, I know. Many of you suffer from depression and I know how complex it is. But I wonder, I just wonder if one of the contributors to our depression, this epidemic, is our failure to enjoy God's ministry to us, the ministry of hope and wholeness, his ministry to us in creation.

I wonder if it's our withdrawal from creation that has been one of the contributing factors in this depression epidemic.

Charles Spurgeon was a great preacher. He had the biggest church in the world. His sermons were circulated around the globe by the millions. And yet he suffered from acute depression, almost crippling depression throughout his life.

I've got a quote from him about this ministry of God to us in nature as a possible cure or relief for melancholy, as they used to call it, or depression.

He says, speaking of his experience of depression, a day's breathing of fresh air upon the hills or a few hours' ramble in the beechwood's umbracious calm would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive.

[11 : 01] A mouthful of sea air or a stiff walk in the wind's face would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is the next best.

He knew what it was to be ministered to by God in creation. Let's go on to page, sorry, verse 3 to 4a.

We've seen that God speaks to us through his creation, that he's preaching to us, that he's encouraging us through the observation of his creation. Verse 3 to 4, So we see that God is speaking to us, and yet there are no words.

He's speaking to us in silence. And this is hard for us to grapple with because we are so word dependent, aren't we, in receiving communication.

We've either been taught through words being spoken to us or by reading words on a page, and yet this word from God is telling us that he is speaking to us without words when he ministers to us through his creation.

[12 : 26] This is really difficult for us to grapple with, or at least it is for me, to think that God's words are coming to us silently, as it were.

And I think what the Bible is saying here is that God's words speak to us when we observe colour, contrast, magnitude, magnificence.

When we experience what God has created, what he has designed, that is when we hear the words of God, though they're silent.

When you go to the Grand Canyon or the Victoria Falls, there are no words that you are hearing in your ears or reading on a page, but God is speaking to you and ministering to you through that experience.

And yet, verse 4, yet, though there are no words, their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the earth.

[13:37] There are no words, but God uses his creation to minister to us hope, healing, wholeness. We need the eyes of faith to see it.

I want everyone to go out of here today and to drink in God's creation around us. We live in a beautiful country and in a beautiful part of a beautiful country. Don't take it for granted, but drink it in and be ministered to as God gushes forth speech and knowledge.

Renee and I, the other night, we're down at Ruffy Lake Park and we take our dog down there quite a bit and it was wonderful. We were walking down by the river, looking up over those rolling hills and it was sunset so the sky was violet and red and orange and it was incredible.

And we just stood there and worshipped and were ministered to by God and we had a sermon preached to us in that moment as we observed God's creation.

Don't neglect the ministry of God through his creation. Now, having said all of that, trumpeting to you the necessity of us hearing God's words to us through his creation.

[15:01] Having said all of that, the truth of the Bible is that though people can be ministered to, though Christians can be helped and healed by spending time in God's creation, no one will ever, ever, ever come to faith in Jesus Christ by observing a sunset or a sunrise or the Grand Canyon.

No one has ever been regenerated by looking at a beautiful sunset. And so we need something in addition to God's creation to awaken us from spiritual death, to regenerate us, to bring us into a loving relationship with Jesus.

We need something else. Calvin talks, John Calvin talks about the Bible being our spectacles of faith. I wonder if you've ever looked at a painting.

I was at the Impotter Museum yesterday and looking at these works of art and you can look at a painting and be completely taken in by it and taken over by it and enraptured by it.

And, you know, a human being just like you can come up and look at the painting and get nothing from it. That's how it is with the creation, God's creation.

[16:33] A Christian who has been awakened, who has read God's word and knows who Jesus is, who's been regenerated by faith in Christ, looks at the creation and sees God, looks at the creation and loves and worships God as its creator, whereas someone who hasn't been regenerated, who is spiritually dead, who hasn't, through the Bible, been given the spectacles of faith, cannot see what we see, cannot praise Jesus as the creator of this beautiful creation.

Romans 1, 21 to 22 says this, following on from that earlier word from Paul about people being condemned for not worshipping God.

He says, For though they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Here's what's happened.

Because everyone is sinful to the core before they're saved by grace, no one who has not been saved by grace appreciates creation for what it is.

People are senseless and their minds have been darkened and they've become numb to God's creation and His ministry through it. That's why Calvin talks about us needing the Word of God.

[17:59] That's what the second part of the psalm is about. Listen to his words. About God's use of His scriptures in awakening us to the glories of His creation.

He says, For as the aged or those whose sight is defective, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written, are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words, but when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so scripture gathering together the impressions of deity, creation, and nature, which till then lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness and shows us and shows us the true God clearly.

Friends, if we're going to praise God for His creation, if we're going to have unsaved friends and relatives come to the knowledge and love of Jesus, we need them to read the revealed will of God and the revealed word of God in the scriptures.

Let's see what this psalm says about the scriptures. Verse 7 to 8, The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes. And we could go on, couldn't we, in that brilliant part of the psalm.

[19 : 38] It talks about the word of God being precious, about it being powerful to awaken us to spiritual life and light. The word of God gives light and life to the soul.

There are so many stories of this, aren't there? Of people being awakened through reading the word of God. If you grew up in the church and you can't pinpoint a moment when you were converted, regenerated, saved, it's probably because over the years you heard the word of God preached and read and that's the way that God awakened you to his mercy and love in Jesus.

But there are so many stories in church history of men who are awakened dramatically simply by reading the word of God. There's Augustine. He picked up Romans 13, 13 to 14 which says, let us live honorably as in the day, not reveling in drunkenness nor in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.

Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. He read that and he was saved. Awakened to the mercy of God in Jesus.

What about Martin Luther? He picked up Romans 1, 16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[21 : 04] He picked that up. Regeneration occurred. Salvation came. The word of God was powerful to save.

The word of God gave light and life to the soul. What about Jonathan Edwards? Great American theologian and pastor. 1 Timothy 1, 16 did it for him.

But for that reason I received mercy so that in me the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who had come to believe in him for eternal life.

He read that and he was saved. The word of God awakened his heart. The word of God raised him from spiritual death and gave him eternal life.

I wonder if you've heard the story of Tachichi Ichi. He was, 1918, he was a Chinese murderer, convicted of murder, going to the gallows and a Christian woman risked her life to get into the prison and share the gospel with him and he read the simple words of Jesus in Matthew where it says, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

[22 : 15] He read that and he was saved. He gave his life to Jesus. He died a few days later. He said he was offering himself as a sacrifice to the Lord, regenerated by the word of God and a very own Matt Sheffer who's working here this year as an MTS student and an evangelist.

He grew up Roman Catholic, didn't have a saving faith in Jesus. His RE teacher told him to read the Bible. He sat down by himself in the library during RE class because he was getting nothing out of it.

Read the Bible in the library and became a Christian. The spectacles of faith, the word of God awakens our soul, enlightens our eyes and gives us life.

Friends, our spiritual life begins with the word of God. It's the word of God that awakens us and it's the word of God not only that awakens us but that perseveres us in our spiritual life because it's the word of God that keeps us alive.

If we don't read the word, we'll shrivel up, we'll die spiritually, we'll fade away from faith. That's the way that God set it up.

[23 : 46] That's why he gave us his word. It's a life giving word. So many of us see God's word as a chore. It's a chore to read God's word. It's a duty. I guess we better do it.

It's the Christian thing to do. What does the psalmist say about the word of God? Later, verse 10 I think. He says, the word of God is sweeter than honey. Honey in those days.

It's the sweetest thing that you could get. It was the best dessert you could ever find. You can imagine the psalmist walking through the woods and seeing a massive beehive and getting a stick and shoving it in there, bringing it down and tasting the honey and saying, that's like the word of God.

That's delicious. Just insert your favorite dessert there. That's what the word of God should be to us. The most delicious, sweet treat that we can have each day.

It's not only a treat for us, but it's the way that God keeps us alive and it's the means he uses to awaken us, to hear his word to us in his creation.

[24 : 53] So I want to encourage us today in closing, I want to challenge you today, go outside, take the word of God and step into the creation of God and hear that double revelation that he gives us in his word, and in his creation.

Listen to close to the words of John Stott. He's a great preacher but also a great naturalist. He says this, we seem to have a good doctrine of redemption.

We know about the cross, got good doctrine there, but a bad doctrine of creation. Yet God has given us in nature and in scripture a double self-revelation.

So nature study and Bible study go hand in hand. Both are explorations into the revelation of God. I challenge you today to go outside to look up and appreciate God's revelation to you in nature and in word.

Let me pray for us to finish. Father, we thank you for your word and we also thank you for your creation. We thank you that you speak clearly to Christians through both and I pray that we wouldn't neglect either the peril of us shriveling up and losing spiritual life.

[26 : 19] Lord, encourage us today to hear you as you reveal yourself in creation and in scripture.

Pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to take just a short minute now to reflect on the words that we've heard this morning. There'll be a few images on the screen of God.