

The Good God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, hello, everyone. I don't know if you know me. My name is Ben Roberts, so I have the same last name as that guy. We're not related. We're not. You can remember me. I'm the less ginger, less foreign-sounding Roberts at St. John's. And I work with the Artizo apprenticeship program, so I help training people for ministry. And I'm like talking into this. Nope. Look at that. Well, we're starting a new sermon series this week, which is very exciting. And so, as you may have noticed in your bulletin there, we're tracking along with the weekly themes of Life Explored, which is a course that all the small groups are going through together at St. John's. And each week of that course invites us to know God through a different piece of his character. And so, this week, the theme is looking at the goodness of God. And actually, we're going to be hearing about the goodness of God from

Psalm 19. I don't know if you noticed this, but this psalm is all about words and speech. And it's kind of like a play. There's three characters. They speak their parts in turn. Each testifies to God's goodness in its own way. And the first person that speaks is creation.

Second, the Word speaks. And third, we speak. So, let's start off. Let's look at how creation speaks. It's very Christian-y to talk about creation. And what we mean by that is what was talked about in our first reading, that the earth and the sky and the trees and us and everything around us is here because God created it. God made it. It's creation because it was created.

And because God created, everything in creation, in some sense, speaks of him or reminds us of him. And so, this is what verse 1 is talking about. The heavens declare the glory of God. The sky above proclaims his handiwork.

So, this first voice, creation, itself, the world, it's speaking about the creator. And if you go look at that passage there and you go down those verses, you'll see all of these words that are speaking words. The heavens declare. The sky proclaims.

[2 : 1 1] Day pours out speech and talks about voice and word. And so, this kind of wonderful personification where all of the material things have been made are this kind of course of creation. And they're speaking about the goodness of God who made them.

The image here is that God spoke creation into being. He spoke. There were seven days. And he would say, let this happen. Let this happen. Let this happen. Let there be light, right?

God spoke all of it into being. And it still resonates with his voice. And so, when God called all of these things into being, he said, oh, this is good. This is very good. And ever since then, day and night, without ceasing, all of creation has buzzed and hummed with God. Our creator is powerful and amazing and good.

It's whispering behind the scenes. Verse 4, it says, their voice goes out through all the earth, their words to the end of the world. And so, the praise of creation is heard everywhere. It's up and down the canyons and in the atmosphere.

And there's no place where this voice doesn't reach because all of creation is singing. The sun is the example that Psalm 19 gives us here in verse 5.

[3 : 2 1] It says, it hangs in the sky like a lantern in God's tent. Then it says that the sun rises, happy as a groom. And what it means is happy as a groom after his first night with his bride, which is quite an image.

You've got to watch out in the Bible. Sometimes you'll get stuff like that. And there goes the sun, day after day, joyfully rising, triumphantly coming out, giving life to plants and plankton and people and all the things underneath it.

And you have to remember, when this is written, that most of the experts of the day agreed that the sun was definitely a god. Like, for sure, it was a god. And this psalm will have none of that.

And so instead, the sun, which would have been the most potent and powerful god of all the other religions, the sun god, it's shown here to be a servant of the creator god.

And it's serving his purpose and what his plans for it. And it's providing heat and light for all the things in creation. And in doing so, it's joyfully blazing forth this message, God made me.

[4 : 24] God is glorious. God is good. But there's a catch, right? There's a catch. He thought this was sounding a little bit too good. The heavens declare God's praise, but there's also a sense in which we're completely deaf to that.

Now, don't get me wrong. Vancouverites are more grateful for the sun than anyone else on earth. But even so, we don't always hear the sun echoing the creator's goodness, do we?

I mean, you could think about what most people do on Sundays. They're taking selfies at brunch. They're not in church, right? They're not singing praise. They're not seeing this in creation, obviously.

And so, creation is singing of this great and good and glorious God, and yet we're not hearing it. Transmission is broadcasting, but we don't have our radio on. And Paul talks about this in Romans. He says, God's, this is a little dense, so stick with me. God's invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

[5 : 35] So, it's saying, God has showed exactly who he is and what he made in creation. But then Paul goes on and he says, but they, humans, were without excuse.

Because even though all of this is out here, even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but became futile in their thinking. Their foolish hearts were darkened.

So, what this is saying is that this marvelous song is happening all around us.

The creation is singing of God's goodness, but humans, in our sin, we either miss it or we misinterpret it or we just completely ignore it. And in this, our hearts are darkened. We've turned away from the truth about God.

Okay, so this is the point in the sermon where it's going to take a turn to get really, really nerdy. Is that okay? Aaron said it's okay, so I'm going with it. So, Tolkien.

You know this guy. Lord of the Rings. So, he also wrote this thing called the Cimmerillion. Is anyone? Yes, raise your hand. Oh, that's pretty good.

[6 : 36] Okay. So, he writes the Cimmerillion. It's like a prequel for Lord of the Rings, kind of. And he begins with the creation of Middle Earth in this book. And what's so wonderful about it is it all happens by singing.

And so, the kind of creator God in Tolkien's world, he just starts this song, and he just starts singing. And the music, like the people that are envisioned as angels in this, they start singing along with him.

And it's this choir that's just kind of building this glorious harmony. And then all of a sudden, it says there's this void, and there's nothing. And all of a sudden, it was not a void anymore. It was just filled with creation. And it's really great, and it's just really compelling.

And then all of a sudden, there's the bad dude, like the Satan character, and this counter melody starts. He's like, I'm pretty good at music. I'm going to sing my own melody.

And he introduces a dissonance into this great song of creation. And there's this slight cacophony that's happening. And it's like chaos and evil start to enter the song, and they begin to kind of mess with the song, and everyone's worried that it's not going to come out.

[7 : 39] And then more and more voices are hearing the wrong song, and they're picking it up, and everything's looking really bad, but then God saves it. So it's, anyway, I'm not doing it justice. You should go read it.

Here's the point. We picked, as humans, we've picked up that wrong tune. We've picked up that destructive counter melody that's not God's melody.

And the only one that can restore that song, creation, our own hearts, put everything back into harmony, is God. We need his help to be able to perceive his goodness and to be able to live into it. And the way that we receive his help, first of all, is through revelation. And so it's actually through his, not just what's happening in creation, but his direct speech to us.

And this is where the second voice comes in. And that's God's speech to us by his word, the Bible. So we shift from words about God to words from God.

[8 : 36] And the words from God, specifically here in this passage, are all about God's law. I don't know if you noticed that. The first five books of the Bible, the Torah. And this shift might seem a little bit abrupt. We're going from the sun.

And all of a sudden, we're talking about the book, God's book. But the psalmist wants us to see that this book, in particular, is luminous. That God's speech in the Bible is brighter, it's more blinding, it's more powerful than the sun.

And it's amazing, if you stop to think about it, that this creator that we've been talking about would take the time to speak directly to us. not only that, but use other humans, that he would use people to pen his words on scrolls of paper, that his Holy Spirit would be there working through that over the course of thousands of years, preserve these things and help them to take life in our hearts.

It's amazing. But God is more than simply a creator that's just out there creating stuff and not involved. This is the God that reveals himself. And so God actually wants, he wants us to know him. He's going to help us to know him, by revealing himself. And so in his kindness, he writes a score which is going to bring the rhythm and the tone and the harmony all the way back into the song.

[9 : 48] And so it's all spelled out here in verse 7. It says, the law of the Lord is perfect. The testimony of the Lord is sure. The precepts of the Lord are right. The commandment of the Lord is pure.

It goes on, there's six statements there in all and they're all about God, the Lord's speech. And this is talking about Yahweh, Israel's God, the God who writes plainly to people. Now as I was reading that, I know some people have kind of like an allergic reaction.

They get like hives with the words like law and commandment. They're like, ah. And what you need to see here about this is that these words, they're not like a straitjacket.

They're not supposed to stifle you. Psalm 19 is saying, look at this, this is a really good gift. This is a good gift from a good God. And the best example I could think of this is as a parent of small children.

And we have rules in our house and I guess they're kind of like laws. I don't know, sometimes. And so, when we, you know, come to a busy intersection, I don't say just like, you know, you do you, whatever, just cross whenever your little heart tells you, like it's all going to be fine, right?

[11 : 00] No, I've got a rule about that. I'm like, wait for the light, wait for the light. And laws are not always good. They're not always good. But God's law, it is good.

It's like the rules that I'm talking about there, the rules that I make for my kids that protect life and instruct. Rules that have our best in mind. And God's law is all about teaching us who God is and teaching us the best way to live.

And it speaks joy and hope into our hearts. Psalm 19 is trying to use all the imagery it can to tell us what a good gift this is. The law revives the soul.

It's like food for a hungry person. It makes wise the simple. It makes ignorant people to be knowledgeable. It rejoices the heart. The law is about liberating constraints.

It's a good gift to the human soul, which is lost without God's voice. I like verse 10. Do you like that? More to be desired than gold. Even much fine gold, sweeter also than the honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

[12 : 04] Have you had any honeycomb lately? Have you ever had honeycomb? It was really good. God's word is beyond valuable. That's what this is saying. It's beyond sweet.

It's a thing to crave. It's a thing to read and mark and learn and inwardly digest. And yet, there's also a condition here, isn't there?

So, God's law, it's this really good thing. It's really helpful. It teaches us how to live. It also has expectations on us. And so, it's something that we have to observe and obey as well.

And this is what verse 11 is starting to hint at. By them is your servant warned. There's warning in God's speech. Because if God is good, then he must work to establish good.

He can't just sit by and let bad things happen. He has to do something to fix it. Meaning that he's ultimately going to end evil. Ultimately, he's going to abolish sin. Ultimately, that means that he must judge.

[13 : 05] And what that means for us is if we're not made, if we're not healed, if we're not made or declared good by God, that we can't be with him. We can't participate in this song.

But perhaps we're feeling like we can't hear creation's song of praise and we can't or we won't keep God's law. And then, what are we to do then?

And this is the part of the psalm which actually, we're the third speaker. It's our turn to speak. So creation speaks, God speaks, and then now we speak. And the great thing about the psalm is that they give us this part.

So a lot of times in scripture, we're reading, and we read it and we're like, okay, what do I do now? The psalm actually, it actually tells us what we're going to do.

And what we're going to do is respond to God's speech with a cry for help and a cry for forgiveness. And so, verse 12 asks this question, who can discern his errors?

[14:08] And if you translate this more literally, it's something like, who can understand sin? Or like, why are human hearts so bad? Like, why do we sin? And, what it's trying to say is essentially that we're just these tone-deaf fools.

That we're completely missing the concert of all the things that are happening around us, of God's marvelous creation, of who he is. And we're just caught up in speaking these words and living lives of dissonance and we're causing pain.

And that we need forgiveness. And not just that, we need forgiveness and then we need rehabilitation and we need transformation. And that starts with God's word.

But even more, it's actually God's work in our lives which will begin to accomplish that. So, if you look at your Bible there, you see how the psalm all of a sudden moves into the first person. declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless. Innocent of great transgression.

[15:16] Declare me innocent. Keep back your servant from sin. In other words, we can't do this ourselves. We need God's help. And this speaks of God's goodness more than anything else.

God will forgive and God does transform. We know as Christians that the full promise of this is given to us in Jesus. We're going to celebrate communion today and that's a very tangible reminder of the fact that God has forgiven and he's wanting to work in our lives.

Jesus pays the price of our sin. He offers us forgiveness which is what we need more than anything. And if you look in your bulletin there, there's a question that we're supposed to ask every week with these sermons.

The question for this week is what is the best gift that God could give give you? What is the best gift that God could give you? Surely we're beginning to see what that might be as we've looked at this, right?

Surely it has something to do with recognizing the goodness of God and coming to know him and have relationship with him. And in the process of that being forgiven and being healed and brought back into this mighty chorus, this song that is transformed and healed.

[16:29] the psalm closes with these words, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

And that's a prayer, isn't it, for us? O Lord, that our feelings and our thoughts and our sounds would resonate with the beauty and goodness of God as we come to resemble his son Jesus.

Lord, tune our hearts to sing your praise. Amen. Amen.