

# The Law

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So today we come to the second psalm in our summer series on the psalms. We'll be spending seven weeks there. And the psalms in this series pattern after key themes in the biblical story.

So that's why the series is titled God's Big Story in the Psalms. Last week was Psalm 104 and the theme of creation. This week is Psalm 19 and the theme of the law. Now if you've got a good memory, you'll realize Psalm 19 was preached on just eight weeks ago as part of our Life Explored series.

But that's okay because this is an excellent psalm. C.S. Lewis said it's the best psalm. But it is excellent because it is God's word, worthy of our deepest meditation.

In Psalm 1, we read about the righteous person whose delight is in the law of the Lord who meditates upon it day and night. And that verb, meditate, in Hebrew, suggests the rumination of cows, the growling discontent of lions.

God's law doesn't get into us easily. We need to fret over it, chew on it like cud before swallowing it again so that it gets deep within us. So let's turn and ruminate a little further.

[ 1 : 1 0 ]     Psalm 19, interestingly enough, belongs to one of the smallest genres of psalm. As readers and prayers of the psalms, we're probably familiar with psalms of praise, thanksgiving, lament, prayers for deliverance, songs about Zion, songs about wisdom.

Psalm 19, Psalm 1, and Psalm 119 are usually called Torah psalms because the Torah, the law of God, has central place in the poem. Psalm 19, of course, is that classic example.

Psalm 176 verses, eight verses from each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, all praising God's law. But if Psalm 19 is a law psalm, it opens in a rather striking way.

Verse 1, Now there's a fun little feature of Hebrew poetry called parallelism.

You've probably noticed it yourself, reading the psalms many times. With parallelism, lines are repeated, but there's always a twist. So verse 1, the heavens declare and the sky proclaims.

[ 2 : 3 1 ]     Two lines in parallel. And that invites us to draw a connection between the glory of God and the work of his hands. God's handiwork, says the psalmist, our universe, the world, us, is glorious.

And it speaks to us through the day, through the night, through all the earth, to the end of the world. And we experience and are attracted to the glory of his handiwork in different ways and at different moments.

Some are drawn to flowers, some to the mountains. A friend of mine committed his career to marine biology. Now in my mind, the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins is particularly good at drawing out this dimension of God's good creation.

So if you'll indulge me, I'll read a few lines of his poetry. This is from a short poem on spring. Nothing is so beautiful as spring, when weeds and wheels shoot long and lovely and lush.

Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush through the echoing timber does so rinse and ring the ear. It strikes like lightnings to hear him sing. The glassy pear tree leaves and blooms, they brush the descending blue.

[ 3 : 40 ] That blue is all in a rush with richness. The racing lambs, too, have fair their fling. What is all this juice? All this joy.

A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning in Eden Garden. The poem goes on. I'll stop there. I don't know. Maybe Hopkins doesn't do it for you.

But the point, hopefully, is clear. God's good creation is a reflection of his character. It's meant to be enjoyed. God's creation speaks to us without a word. About what?

About his glory. It follows, then, that cultivating habits, which help us to engage well and thoughtfully as stewards with God's good creation, are important.

And it also means that marring creation, perverting, abusing, destroying, obscures the speech of creation.

[ 4 : 38 ] So, go for walks. Enjoy the seasons. Feel the grass beneath your feet. And most importantly, play your part in mankind's stewardship of this good created order.

But we don't end there, do we? Because creation is not the only or even the primary means by which God reveals himself.

It is, tragically, possible to look at God's green earth and deny the existence of a creator. It's also possible to look at creation and never move beyond philosophical theism, because our minds cannot ascend to God, as we learned in the Tower of Babel.

And that brings us to our first transition in the poem, where we move from general to special revelation. That this is the case is even reflected in Hebrew vocabulary, because the initial reference to God in verse 1 is the generic word for God.

Then, in verses 7 to 9, we get the tetragrammaton, Yahweh. God's personal revealed name, which in the ESV is always Lord, all caps. He who has shown himself to be.

[ 5 : 55 ] An unknown God sets the sun in the heavens. But it is the Lord, Yahweh, who speaks and reveals himself. And in doing so, reveals that he too is the creator.

Now, to contemporary ears, this transition can seem quite abrupt. The sun is a bridegroom, a joyful warrior. Nothing is hidden from his heat. Then, verse 7, the law of the Lord is perfect. But in ancient Palestine, the sun was actually a symbol of law and order.

Some cultures even worshipped the sun as a god, believing that it was responsible for the giving of laws and the enforcement of justice. Now, here the psalmist is quite clear.

The sun is only a created object. God places it in the heavens. And yet, because the heavens declare the glory of God, there is a mysterious affinity. Both the sun and the law reflect the glory of their creator.

Because God's character is consistent. When he acts, when he speaks, we learn about who he has revealed himself to be. And if we compare the sun and the law, there's actually some congruities between them.

[ 7 : 02 ] Both bring life, both bring joy, both bring light, both endure. But for all the blessing which we experience through the sun, the law of the Lord is the superior revelation.

The law of the Lord is perfect. Perfect not in the sense of ultimate, but in the sense of blameless, without blemish. Because it is flawless, it revives the soul.

It does not just bring life, it returns us to life. Not just for our body, but also for our soul. Now the psalm speaks not just about the five books of Moses, but the entirety of God's disclosure of himself to us.

Given for the restoration of all that is dead within us. Much like the sun at the turning of spring. And the opening verse for the second section of Psalm 19, verse 7, it frames or undergirds everything else that the law of the Lord accomplishes in these five verses.

So earlier we saw the parallelism in verse 1. Here we have a six-fold parallel. Expanding both on what it means that the Lord's law is perfect, and what it means to have the soul revived.

[ 8 : 20 ] To say God's law is perfect is to say that it is trustworthy, correct, ethical, uncorrupted, constant, altogether just. Which is to say the same about God himself.

And because God's law is this way, utterly perfect, for the soul revived by the law of the Lord, there is wisdom, joy, enlightenment, endurance.

There's a sermon hidden in each of those statements, I think. It comes as no surprise then that this law is better than gold or honey. For verse 11, in keeping this law there is great reward.

The reward being what has already been described, a revived soul. Living life as it was meant to be. Just as the sun runs its course in the heavens joyfully, submitting to the laws which God ordained for it, so to the person whose life is lived in the light of the law of the Lord.

And then we get our second and our final transition. The first stanza was about creation's speech. And there we learn that creation is an important aspect of the way God relates to us and we to him.

[ 9 : 36 ] The second stanza is characterized by the Lord's speech. And there we learn that God's revelation in Scripture is perfect and brings us into life. In this third stanza, we move into the servant's prayer, who was introduced in verse 11.

And it's the prayer of a realist, whose eyes have already received some enlightenment from the Lord. We've moved from creation to revelation to response. And here in this last stanza, there is a cluster of ideas all related to each other, which reveal to us much about the dynamic of sin in our lives.

We learn that we are blind to sin, powerless before sin, and unable to absolve ourselves of sin. The servant asks, quite rightly, who can discern his errors?

And the answer is that none of us, apart from God, have the ability to do this. It's tremendously humbling to be confronted with a mistake you've made.

But the psalmist intimates, it's not just that we break God's law, but that we sin without even knowing it. That within us, are patterns of dysfunction and selfishness so profound, we're not even always aware of them.

[ 10 : 51 ] And it's only through God's revelation that we become aware of it. And even when we recognize sin, alone we cannot conquer it. Verse 13, keep your servant also from presumptuous sins.

Let them not have dominion over me. If verse 12 is discomfiting, verse 13 is a slap in the face. Not only do we transgress God's goodness unknowingly, we also do it knowingly, presumptuously, like a dog returning to vomit.

It's disgusting. And yet, there is a part of us which delights in it and wills it. A part of us which rejects the honey of God's law and would rather dabble in the putrefaction of sin.

Now that is a bitter and difficult word to hear. We don't like being ignorant. We don't like being powerless. But, praise God, there is a redeemer which the psalmist knew in part who came to us in the person of Jesus Christ sent by the Father so that in the words of John we might have life and have it abundantly.

Because of Jesus, we can in fact be declared blameless and innocent of transgression. This is what we celebrate and remember when we come to the table of our Lord. And because of Christ and his tremendous blameless sacrifice, the Holy Spirit was sent, whom we just celebrated at Pentecost.

[ 12 : 28 ] Sent to convict the world of sin. Sent so that the very power of God would be at work in our lives. Sent so we might discern our errors and be delivered from presumptuous sins.

Sent so that God's good law might be written in our hearts. That our lives might be lived truly and fully as a sacrifice which brings delight to the Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

So as we come to the table, let us approach our bridegroom with great joy, remembering God's great redemptive act which restores us to life and declares us innocent.

And as we go from this place, may we continue to meditate upon the word of God and experience all of its blessing. All praise to him, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen.