



# **The Heavens Declare the Glory of God**

**A Study of Psalm 19**

**Why Jesus Matters**

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# The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

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## An Introduction

Psalm 19 is perhaps one of those passages within the Bible with which many are familiar. Its opening words resonate deeply within us, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” The second section within the Psalm is equally compelling, “The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.”

Yet, although we are familiar with the Psalm, there is a large chance that the casual reader does not know what the Psalm is actually telling us.

The structure of the Psalm is quite clear.

- The first section emphasizes THE HEAVENS (vv. 1-6). It uses the word ELOHIM for God, His Creator name.
- The second section emphasizes THE LAW (vv. 7-11). It uses the word YHWH for God, His Covenant name.

- The third section emphasizes THE PRAYER (vv. 12-14). It emphasizes our own inability to save ourselves. "I can't, but God can, and Jesus did."

In light of this movement within the Psalm, how are we to understand its message?

Let us begin with the first section dealing with the heavens (vv. 1-6).

## The Heavens Declare the Glory of God (vv. 1-6)

As initially noted, the first section deals with creation (vv. 1-6), what is commonly referred to as General Revelation. All of creation is a compelling, expansive, breathtaking array of visual and verbal experiences. Creation calls to us. It causes us to behold, to see, to inquire, and to explore. Even to the least, it tells us of something or someone. However, creation is limited. It cannot and does not declare the redemptive work of God. Nonetheless, it declares God's glory.

What is this declared glory? "God's *glory* refers here to his royal majesty and power."<sup>1</sup> His glory is His transcendence, His apartness. God's glory is intrinsically attached to His presence. God's work is glorious because it is an expression of who He is. Because He is glorious, the work of

His hands is glorious. Thus, the Psalmist observes how the heavens and the Law are glorious *because* they are works of God.

Our text offers three thoughts concerning the heavens.

**First**, the heavens reveal the *unrelenting* nature of its speech. This is evident from verse 2 with the phrase “day to day.”

- <sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. <sup>2</sup> Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

There is never a time when this voice is silent.

**Second**, the heavens reveal the *all-encompassing* nature of its speech (vv. 3, 4).

- <sup>3</sup> There is no speech, nor are there words; whose voice is not heard. <sup>4</sup> Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

All language barriers are overcome. The confusion from Babel (Gen. 11) is overcome in the clarity of the heavens. Paul will state that because of the all-encompassing nature of this speech, humanity is without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

**Finally**, the heavens reveal the *glorious* nature of its speech (vv. 4b - 6)

- <sup>4b</sup> In them He has set a tent for the sun, <sup>5</sup> which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. <sup>6</sup> Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

“The personified sun emerges from this ‘tent’ in order to make its daytime journey across the sky. So the ‘tent’ must refer metaphorically to the place where the sun goes to rest during the night.”<sup>2</sup>

We see this vision and hear this voice in every sunrise and sunset. It is glorious. God

is glorious. There appears to be a type of parallelism between the heavens and the Law. Just as the heavens are a tent for the sun (v. 4b), so also is the Law a tent for His people (v. 7).

God's witness covers humanity. The vision and voice of God are inescapable. This vision and voice will provide either comfort or condemnation.

From the heavens in the first section, the Psalmist moves to the Law (vv. 7-14).



## The Law Declares the Glory of the Lord (vv. 7-14)

The second section deals with the Law (vv. 7-14), what is commonly referred to as Special Revelation. In addition to the limited work of General Revelation, God spoke to “flesh” out what is necessary in our relationship to Him. The vision provided in the heavens, will yield to the voice provided in the Law. What we might miss in a blurred and limited vision, we will hear in a loud blameless voice.

The Psalmist states two things concerning the Law.

**First**, verses 7-9 describe the Law. There is synonymous parallelism throughout. Each line peels back another layer.

- <sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

- <sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
- <sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

Notice the words used to describe the Word of God: law, testimony, precepts, commandments, and rules. There is a weight to what is stated. “The Lord’s commands accurately reflect God’s moral will for his people and are an expression of his just character.”<sup>3</sup> The Law is glorious, weighty, transcendent, because God is glorious, weighty, and transcendent.

There is this bar, this mark, this measurement, and a standard that we can see and strive after. In the absence of this Law, there would be no way of knowing apart from the immediate and direct voice of God what is expected or demanded of us. Fortunately, the Law spells this out for us.

How might we hit the mark if we do not know the standard? Philip in John 14 asked this same question of Jesus. Knowing, however, does not necessarily answer the question.

- <sup>1</sup>“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to where I am going.’ <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:1-6).

As we will see, Jesus shows us the way to the Father.

**Second**, this section speaks of the Psalmist's love for God as expressed in his love for God's Law (vv. 10, 11).

- <sup>10</sup> More are they to be desired than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. <sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

There is a yearning within our souls that cries out to God. There is a response, an answer, found in God's revelation of Himself in creation and in Scripture. It is the broken Law that brings judgment, and it is the kept Law that brings great reward. The Psalmist looks at the heavens and hears the Law and from what he sees and hears, he offers up the prayer in verses 12-14.

*As powerful as the Law is, it is incapable of declaring us innocent or keeping us from presumptuous sins. The Law exposes us for what we are and who God is. It is the power of this Law that causes us to pray the prayer found in verses 12-14.*

## The Prayer Declares the Glory of God (vv. 12-14)

In revealing the glory of God in creation and in the Law, humanity sees its own inability and brokenness. We cannot make ourselves innocent, nor do we have the power to keep from sinning. BUT GOD. The solution to the dilemma is found only in God, and in answering that prayer, God is glorious.

### Notice the question:

- <sup>12</sup> Who can discern his errors? **Declare me innocent** from hidden faults.
- <sup>13</sup> **Keep back** your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

Somehow seeing the heavens and the Law provokes us to pray verses 12-14. The prayer declares the desire of our hearts. *We want to be acquitted of our hidden sins. We want to be*

*kept from our open rebellion against God, but we cannot do what we desire.* The author of this Psalm cannot do what he asks. Only God can do this.

Notice something in the language. We cannot declare ourselves innocent through our obedience. We cannot keep ourselves from presumptuous sins. The glory of the heavens leaves us without excuse (Rom. 1:21, 22). The glory of the Law shows us our guilt and transgression. To what or to whom can we turn to bring about our justification? To what or to whom can we turn to bring about our sanctification?

**Now notice the answer:**

- <sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, *O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

“My rock” is a metaphor for protection. “The metaphor casts the Lord in the role of a leader who protects members of his

extended family in times of need and crisis.”<sup>4</sup>

When God steps in, then our words and our meditations prove acceptable. Our redemption from sin and death declare the glory of God. The only way for our words and our meditations to prove acceptable (v. 14) is if God declares us innocent (vv. 12, 13).

### **What is the Point?**

In light of God’s glory as revealed through the heavens and the Law, humanity is unable to save itself. God has made a way for humanity to be justified [declared innocent in sin] and sanctified [kept from sinning] and it is only in the person and work of Jesus.

Because the Bible tells a single *Story* and at the center of this *Story* is Jesus, notice the connection when we get to John’s Gospel.

## **John 1:14-18:**

The Apostle John states that the Son declares the Glory of God.

- “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

There is this collision and collusion in all of God’s shadow in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The prayer prayed in Psalm 19:12-14 is answered in JESUS.

The Law is so high, so lofty, so unattainable, and so perfect. How might we measure up to its flawless standard? Let us remember that we do not diminish the Law, we do not negate the Law, and we do not bring the Law down so that we might think we meet its demands (Matt. 5:17-20, 48). We do not bring the Law down; Jesus brings us up. He does for us what we could never do for ourselves. He meets the demands of the Law and imputes His obedience to us (Rom. 8:3,



4). Where once in Adam we were Law-Breakers, now in Christ we are Commandment-Keepers (Rom. 5:12-21).

Friends, the prayer of the Psalmist is answered in JESUS. In Him, we are declared innocent from our hidden sins, and in Him, we are kept from presumptuous sins.

The heavens cannot provide but only point. The Law cannot provide but only point. The Psalmist prayed a prayer of hope of what God can do. He was able to taste and see that God is good, but there is more. The heavens and the Law are only shadows of which Christ is the substance. It is in Jesus that the prayer of the Psalmist finds its ultimate answer. The people of God see the heavens for what they are and hear the Law for what it is. However, neither the heavens nor the Law can save the people of God from sin nor give to them the purity they desire. All such actions and conditions are found only in the person and work of Jesus.

God created a visual and a voice that together point to the one who can answer the deepest longing of the human condition. Only Jesus said and can say, "It is finished."

In Jesus alone and only do we find the answer to the prayer the Psalmist prayed.

## Conclusion

Where does this leave us?

- Blessed is not the man who does not sin, but who sins and sees God as his Rock and Redeemer.
- Friends, let the heavens and the Law declare the glory of God. Let its weight fill you with awe and let both turn you to Jesus in whom you will come to know the glory of God in the saving of sinners.
- Let us stop trying to help God in our justification or in our sanctification. Trust God for both.
- Our responsibility is to believe the record of God's full and final answer to our justification and sanctification.

The heavens and the Law show us the glorious majesty and power of God, but can do nothing to declare us innocent of our present sin or keep us from future sin. The pressing answer to our perplexing condition is JESUS. Only Jesus can declare us innocent in our justification and keep us from future sin in our sanctification.

Perhaps you have overlooked or even rejected God's provision in Christ for your salvation from sin and death. Friend, there is no law you can keep to justify yourself before God or to keep you from your moral, ethical, and ceremonial failure. You will always come up short. You will always run from God, not to God. Your only hope is to see the Lord Jesus as your Rock and your Redeemer. It is only in Him that you can be declared innocent and kept from your presumptuous sins. Will you come to Him today?

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Psalms+19>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Psalms+19:4>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Psalms+19:9>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Psalms+19:9>







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