**Revelation of God in works and words**  19/2/23 dkm

Read: Romans 1:16-32, Hebrews 4

Text: Psalm 19

Psalms: 111, 19, 119:65-72, 134a

It is important for us to understand the two ways in which God had revealed himself to mankind since the Fall. These are often called ‘general revelation’ and ‘special revelation’. These two ways are set before us in Psalm 19, so let us look at this psalm now. Keeping in mind these two methods of revelation, we see a clear division in this psalm. Do you see it at verse 7? The first six verses are about God’s revelation in his creation or his works. In verse 7 David turns to God’s revelation in the law or in words. In the closing verses we find a prayer responding to this divine revelation, urging us to examine our hearts with God’s help, and seek grace and cleansing from the Lord.

**1. Revelation in creation**

This beautiful and majestic psalm begins, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament/skies proclaim the works of his hands’ (19:1). It takes us back to the very first verse of the Bible, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’. From the beginning, through David, through Jesus, and on to the apostles, the truth that God created the heavens and the earth is maintained. It is only in recent times that men like Charles Darwin proposed a God-denying theory of origins. Pagans flocked to this theory like flies to a carcase, and too many Christians got pressured to conform to this new theory. But no words in Darwin’s book compare to the truth and beauty of what we have just read.

The apostle Paul may not be as eloquent as David, but he teaches the same truth, namely, that God’s eternal power and majesty, as well as his divine nature, are clearly seen by everyone in the created world we live in (Rom 1:20). From east to west, from north to south, every human being on this planet gets to see God’s magnificent creation, and his power that continues to be revealed in this creation.

In addition to the heavens above and the earth below, and the mighty ocean waters, we see day and night as created by God in the beginning. God created day and night on day one, and on day four he put the sun and the moon in the heavens, along with the stars. Did you hear of ‘Dark sky’ reserves, places free of light pollution, now being legislated? People want such places where they can stargaze, hopefully not worshipping the stars. It is great to get out of the city and see the stars, although city-wide blackouts will allow us to see the stars from our home!

We do see the moon in the night sky as it waxes and wanes. We see the sun in the day as it moves across the sky day after day, no stopping and no dimming, apart from the occasional eclipse. It gives us light and heat that we depend upon for life. The suns heat drives the water cycle, the other ingredient of life for both plants and animals. David knew all this even if his knowledge of science was not as extensive as ours.

Before waxing lyrical about the sun, David writes of God’s revelation in his creation, referring poetically to day and night speaking to each other, and to us. The constant, unstoppable changing from day to night is seen by everyone on earth, although a friend recently wrote of the amazing experience of being near the North Pole in summer; God’s creation is truly amazing! While day and night continue, they do vary in length, giving us the seasons which govern farming life, and our life also.

Am I now waxing lyrical like David, and maybe missing the point! David’s point is that God’s revelation in his creation is ‘heard’ in every part of the world (19:3). The ‘line’ or ‘voice’ of this revelation ‘has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world’ (19:4, Rom 10:18). This revelation speaks to man in the sense of revealing God’s great power and divine nature, as Paul says, but it does not reveal the name of Jesus, which is essential for salvation (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Only once have I seen the name of Jesus written across the sky, and that was by an aeroplane, and it soon disappeared.

In beautiful imagery, David describes the rising of the sun being like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, presumably to meet his bride (19:5). Sunrises and sunsets must be the most photographed things in the world. David also likens the sun to a strong man or sprinter bursting out of the blocks to run a race- maybe the race is more like a marathon (19:5). We see the sun rising and setting every day, or maybe just the setting, but it is good to stop and reflect on its magnificence and its power, beauty and power given by God who made the sun and set it in the heavens- but do not start worshipping the sun, as millions do. When David describes the sun as being on a circuit from one end of heaven to the other in verse 6, he is not saying that the sun moves around the earth; he is simply describing what he sees, and what we see, even though we know that it is the earth spinning on its own axis. Knowing this scientific fact about our solar system leads us to even greater amazement at the power and majesty of God’s creation- or should do so!

But not everyone hears God’s voice saying, ‘I made the sun and the moon and the stars and everything that you see’. Too many bow down to these created things instead of the creator God. They do so because of sin, which brings darkness to their foolish hearts, and death to their souls (Rom 1:21, 25). And even when they hear God’s word in the Bible, telling us that he made the world in the space of six days and all very good, some still refuse to believe and bow before their creator.

**2. Revelation in words**

While ‘the heavens declare the glory of God’, words are needed for the reviving or converting of the soul. David does not actually use the word, ‘words’; he uses the word, ‘law’: ‘The law of the Lord is perfect’ (19:7). God gave his law to Moses on Mt Sinai, written on tablets of stone. Moses went on to write the books of the law or ‘*Torah*’.

In the beginning, Adam heard God’s voice in the garden, but then he sinned and was thrown out of the garden. Divine communication was cut until God chose to speak to chosen men, and through Moses to his chosen people, and in Jesus Christ to the whole world- ‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14).

It is in God’s word or verbal communication that he reveals much more of himself, and reveals the way of salvation for sinners like us. God told Moses that he was, ‘gracious and merciful, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth …forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’ (Exod 34: 6,7). Such attributes are not seen in the creation, so no man-made religion sees God as merciful and gracious and forgiving sin. God has to tell us that he forgives sin, and this is the revelation we have in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You may have noted the change from ‘God’ in the first verse to ‘Lord’ here in verse 7; in Hebrew from ‘El’ to ‘Yahweh’. The latter is the covenant name of God. God gave his law as part of his covenant with Moses and his people. This covenant is now superseded in the new covenant in Jesus Christ, but it remains as a written revelation of God to us as Gentiles, as well to the Jews.

You will also have noticed the many synonyms for the word ‘law’, six in all, two in each of verses 7-9: law, testimony, statutes, commandment, fear, and judgments (19:7-9). Hebrew poetry is marked by verses of two parallel lines, lines which generally express the same truth in different words. You may recall Psalm 119 which has eight synonyms for the word ‘law’. While calling these words synonyms, they do express different aspects of the law that, ‘together form a multifaceted picture of God’s word’. Each synonym for ‘law’ is followed by an adjective describing this aspect of the law, followed by a comment on the benefit of the law.

‘The law of the Lord is perfect’ (19:7). God is perfect and his creation is perfect, or it was before man sinned. God’s ways are perfect and his will is perfect (Rom 12:2). All that God says is perfect; it is truth and it is clear, no words designed to deceive or confuse. God’s word as we find it in Scripture is ‘useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness’ (2Tim 3:16). David says that God’s law ‘revives the soul’ (19:7 NIV). God’s word is ‘living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit’ (Heb 4:12). The word of God speaks to our hearts, revealing even our thoughts; stand aside worldly counsellors!

‘Testimony’ is the first synonym David uses, and to this attaches the adjective ‘pure’. Testimony carries the sense of witness, or sworn oath. Jesus speaks of his works being a witness and his Father also being a witness through the Scriptures (John 5:37, 39). This testimony is sure, it is signed, sealed and delivered for us and our salvation. It is for making the simple or the childlike wise. Children accept Holy Scripture as true and they become wise, wiser than their unbelieving teachers.

‘The statutes or precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart’ (19:8). We know about statutory declarations in which telling a lie will be judged as perjury. God’s statutes are morally upright in every respect; they are the standard for morality, as well as salvation. The righteous rejoice in right and just statutes. ‘The commandment of the Lord is pure’. We know the commandments, that they are pure and holy, and are not meant to trick or trap us. They actually enlighten us as they reveal what is in our hearts and urge us to confess (19:12). The law is a tutor to bring us to Christ (Gal 3:24), to Christ who is the light of the world.

‘The fear of the Lord’ is an unusual synonym but we could remember the most awesome giving of the law at Sinai. God’s law is to be feared because God is to be feared; and like God, his law endures forever, so do not start hoping that God’s law will change or be revoked. ‘Judgments’ is the last word David uses for the law of the Lord; God’s laws will be used at the throne of judgment because they are ‘true and righteous altogether’ (19:9).

God’s revelation in the creation is complete, and so is his revelation in the Bible. You have no excuse for not listening to God and letting his word change your heart. You love gold but do you love the word of the Lord? David loved God’s word more than gold or silver (19:10, 119:72). You love honey and sweet foods but do you find God’s word sweeter than honey? David did!

God’s word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105). Through God’s word we, as his servants, are warned about hell, and rewarded in heaven, but even today we are rewarded as we do God’s will, and find comfort and assurance in Him.

**3. Responding in prayer**

No one escapes the heat of the sun, and no one escapes the penetrating law of the Lord (19:6, Heb 4:12). God’s word goes forth and it will not return void; it will accomplish what God purposes (Isa 55:11). You are hearing God’s word; what is it accomplishing in your heart and life? May it be a word of salvation and new life in Christ!

David knew he could hide nothing from the penetrating word of the Lord. He was even concerned about sin that he was not aware of, and asks the Lord to cleanse him from hidden faults (19:12). He wanted to be declared righteous by the Lord; he was asking for cleansing or atonement of unintentional sin (Numb 15:27f).

Presumptuous sins are another matter, a serious matter. Wilful disregard for God’s holy law will be punished. And let no one presume upon the grace of God. Paul warns against anyone saying, ‘Let us sin that grace may abound’ (Rom 6:1). This is a danger in the so called, ‘Hyper-grace gospel’. Sin is not to be played with; we must flee every form of evil lest it take control of us (Rom 6:14). David sought God’s help in this matter, and so must we. The word of God must be our guide, and the Spirit of God must be our help in fleeing sin and seeking to live a blameless life before the Lord (19:13).

The closing words of this psalm are well known as a prayer, especially before speaking in the name of the Lord. Sinful thoughts will be revealed by the tongue. So this prayer is not only about words but about thoughts, because thoughts give rise to words. Besides, our thoughts or the meditations of our hearts can, in themselves, be displeasing to the Lord (19:14). David asks that his words, in the first instance the words of this psalm, will be acceptable to the Lord. We are to offer the Lord a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name (Heb 13:15). We need the Lord’s help even as we worship him, and he gives us that help in his word and by his Spirit. The Lord is indeed our strength and redeemer, each and every day forever.