

Psalm 19

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 August 2007

Preacher: Fergus MacDonald

[0 : 00] I would like us now to turn to the words of that psalm which we find on page 552 of the Bible.

That's in the Old Testament version of the Psalms. And I would like to focus especially on verse 14, although we'll look at the psalm as a whole.

And in verse 14 we have these words, May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord my rock and my redeemer.

Some years ago on a visit to New York I attended a Lutheran church. And I remember the preacher on that occasion quoting a poll that had been taken in the east coast of the United States, which discovered that people who attend church live on average seven years longer than those who do not.

And after having announced the result of this poll, the preacher said, That means that you're not wasting your time sitting here listening to me. Well, I wonder, do we waste our time when we come to church?

[1 : 28] What do we do during a worship service? How do we spend our time? It is not the case that for us sometimes our bodies may be here, but our minds may be far away.

We tend to switch off, especially when the preacher begins the sermon. We tend to convert worship into a spectator activity.

But as we discover in the Old Testament and in the New Testament church, that worship was very much a participant endeavor. And we need to remind ourselves of that constantly, that we are here not in a passive sense, but we are to be actively involved in the worship of the house of God.

And the Psalms remind us of that frequently, remind us that worship is a physical, verbal and mental activity. In the Old Covenant, worship involved going to the temple, just as it involves coming to church for us.

Psalms were sung. They were often shouted out, sung loudly. Not only were the worshippers involved with their voices, they were also involved with their minds.

[2 : 56] The psalmist here prays that the meditation of his heart, as well as the words of his mouth, might be acceptable to God. And we discover in the Psalms lots of metaphors, lots of figures of speech.

They are there in the poetic language of the Psalms to excite our imagination, to stimulate us to think, not to switch off and to think of something else.

And so, Psalm 19, this psalm, at all psalms, but this psalm particularly perhaps, helps us to understand what we are to do in church, what we are to do in worship.

It suggests to us that there are three things that we do when we come to church, at least three things that we are, we ought to do. The first is that we are to listen to nature.

We see that in the first part of the psalm, where the psalm is concerned with the glory of creation. When we come to church, we come to worship our Creator.

[4 : 09] And this psalm reminds us of that fact, that we need to listen to what He is saying to us in creation. This psalm opens with some very powerful poetry, in which the psalmist personifies the heavens, the skies, day and night, and the sun.

He tells us that the whole universe is speaking to us. These created elements declare, they proclaim, they pour forth speech. It is almost as if they are singing rather than speaking in a great and ending concert sung to the glory of God.

Their voice, He says, goes out into the whole world. There is not a single language in which the creation does not speak. And so when we come to church, we need to ask ourselves the question, do we listen to what nature is saying?

Do we hear the music of nature? Do we hear it? What the psalmist is in fact saying here, that in a sense, seeing is hearing.

Seeing the beauty and the order, the grandeur, the awesomeness of creation is a means through which God speaks to us and enables us to hear His voice.

[5 : 40] Do we listen to it? Sometimes creation sings a hymn of praise as it does here. At other times, it sings a psalm of lament as it does in Romans 8, in the verses which we read where Paul speaks of the whole creation groaning as in the pains of childbirth, as it longs for the day when it will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

This psalm focuses upon the sun. In the ancient world, there were many songs or hymns written to the sun.

The sun was regarded as a god. This was true not only of the ancient Near East, it was true of the Incas in Peru, of the Aztecs in Mexico. But here, the sun is not deified, it is personified.

The sun is seen not as a god, but as a creation of God. A creation of God for which we are to give thanks. And we see this wonderful metaphor that the psalmist uses here.

And he speaks of the night sky as a great tent, the sun's tent. And when the dawn breaks, the sun comes out of the tent as a man going to his wedding or as a runner, an athlete, running in a race for all he is worth.

[7 : 13] And as the sun moves across the sky from the east to the west, it looks as if it is a runner running its race. And so we have this metaphorical language which is designed to capture our imagination, which is designed to stimulate our thinking and to enable us to rejoice in the creation that God has given to us.

What we have here is not a scientific analysis. What we have here is a poetic description just meant to stimulate our imagination, to encourage us to think of the glory, of the wonder, of the creation which God has given to us.

And so when we come to church, especially on a beautiful day like this, ought we not to listen to the creation? Ought we not to listen to the world of nature?

Ought we not to be aware of what Derek Kidner calls the eloquence of nature or what Harold Fish calls a verbalized cosmos? God is addressing us through the world.

God is addressing us through the sun, through the moon, through the stars, through the earth, through the trees, through the fields, through the animals. God is speaking to us. Are we listening?

[8 : 31] God is listening. But the psalmist also tells us that when we come to church, we are to submit to scripture because he goes on at verse 7 to speak of the law of the Lord.

Now the law of the Lord there is not simply the Ten Commandments, it's the word Torah which means instruction and the word is used there as the equivalent of scripture.

scripture. And in fact, there are other words that are used here along with it such as statutes, precepts, commands, ordinances. The word Torah or Torah simply means instruction.

And God has given us his word when we come to church. We not only come as creatures glorying in the creation that God has made and sympathizing with the creation as it groans as it often does. We are to come to gather around his word and to hear what he is to say to us. It's interesting that the image of the sun is carried over from the early verses.

[9 : 40] We see this particularly in verse 8 where we read that the commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes. And just as the sun gives light to the earth so God's word gives light to our souls.

God has spoken to the human race not only indirectly through creation but directly through people like Moses, David, the Old Testament prophets and supremely through Jesus and his apostles.

As the sun fills our galaxy with light so the scriptures enlighten our moral universe. And when we come to church we come to be enlightened.

We come to know the light of God's word being shed upon our lives. So God has given us his word as signposts, instructions, directions, life maps if you like.

Hear the words of God's covenant. They are the Ten Commandments plus if you like. They are all that God wants us to know of himself.

[10 : 59] But the description that the psalmist gives us here of God's word is a very dynamic one. He speaks about God's word doing things. It revives the soul, it makes wise the simple, it gives joy to the heart, it gives light to the eyes.

God's word is not simply an abstract concept, it is a dynamic force. God's word is a doing word. God's word does things.

And so when we gather around God's word we need to ask God to help us to sense its power. Not only to hear what it says but to experience its power.

For God's word is not only a word of instruction, it's a word of power. It's a word which not only tells us what to do but gives us the energy with which to do it.

And so God's word is an enabling word as well as an enlightening word. God's word revives the soul as psalmist says, it gives new life, it affects the spiritual renaissance.

[12:08] It's more than a makeover. God's word can bring new life, new birth, change, radically change our spiritual destiny.

God's word makes wise the simple, it gives wisdom to ordinary people. We live in an information society which is strong on data but weak on wisdom.

And how important it is that we have the wisdom of God's word to enable us to make decisions which are wise and just and honourable. God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. God has given us his word to enable us not simply to understand theology but to know how to live. God's word is God's handbook if you like for life.

You know when you buy a car or buy a washing machine you get a handbook that tells you how it works. you get the handbook from the manufacturer and that's what the Bible is. The Bible is the handbook from our creator to help us to live.

[13:17] It's a handbook for living about everything else. The handbook of salvation. The handbook of God's grace. God's word gives joy to the heart. We live in a society which is bent on entertainment.

The pleasure industry has never been larger than it is today. And yet how many empty broken lives there are. God's word can give joy to the heart.

The entertainment industry cannot do that. It can give a thrill for a moment. But it cannot give joy to the heart. God's word brings joy to the heart.

And it gives light to the eyes. We live in an age in which many people are looking to various forms of spirituality for what they call spiritual enlightenment. God's word is the source of true enlightenment.

God's word, it is God's word that gives light to the eyes. God's word is radiant. The commands of the Lord are radiant.

[14:29] So God's word does things. God's word is active. linguists and philosophers speak of what they call speech acts, in which they tell us that certain forms of speech not only communicate information but do things.

They perform actions. We see this in normal life. For example, in a wedding, when the minister in the wedding says to the bride and to the groom, I hereby pronounce you man and wife.

That's more than a statement. That is an action. That is changing the status of the couple before him. And God's word is like that.

God's word is not simply words. God's word is a speech act. God's word changes things. God's word changes us.

God's word changes the world. God's word is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword.

[15:42] And so when we come to church, we come to hear God's word, and not only to hear God's word, but to feel God's word, to have that sense of being impacted by its power, not simply being fascinated by the concepts that it may present to us, but being impacted by its power, because God's word is powerful.

God's word, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit, is animated today by that self-same spirit who brings his word off the page, brings it into our lives, and we owe the impact of God's word in our lives.

And so when we come to church, we are to listen to nature, but also when we come to church, to submit to scripture.

But finally, I think this psalm also tells us that when we come to God's word, we are to respond to the Savior. up until verse 10, the psalmist is speaking in generalities, but from verse 10 onwards, he becomes personal, and he speaks about himself as God's servant.

He speaks about his hidden faults. He speaks about the words of his mouth and the meditation of his heart. Here we see the psalmist moving into a personal, an awareness of a personal relationship between him and God.

[17 : 33] And so when we come to church, we come not simply to listen to the creation, not simply to hear what God's word is saying to us, but we're called upon to make a response.

Just as the psalmist makes a response at the end of the psalm, from verse 11 onwards, so also we are challenged to make a response. And this is where we are not spectators.

This is where we are active, we are participants, and we respond one way or another. We either go with the word of God or we go against it, or we refuse to budge.

We are called upon to make a response. Let's look at the response that the psalmist made here. He speaks here, as I said, not in first-person terms.

He speaks of I, he speaks of my. And this opens the psalm to us for use in our personal prayer. He speaks in terms of a personal relationship with God.

[18 : 37] He submits himself to God, he describes himself as God's servant, as one who is submitted. The idea, the idea at the background here is of a covenant relationship which was borrowed by the Samus and by other writers of the Old Testament from the culture of the time where a great king or an emperor would make a covenant with a vassal nation which he had conquered.

And he would make a treaty or a covenant with that nation. And a lot of the literary form of these covenants is reproduced in the Old Testament in a religious dimension.

And here we see that just as the king of a vassal nation becomes the subject of a great king or an emperor and he says he is his servant.

So the Samus says that he is God's servant. God is his great king. He's made a submission he submitted his life is all to the great king.

And so he accepts the authority of God's word as absolute authority. His commitment is a total commitment. His surrender is unconditional.

[20 : 03] And so we see the Samus here speaking of his own personal response. God's love. It's interesting that the metaphor of the son continues even in this part of the psalm.

Where he says in verse 11, by then is your servant warned. And the verb translated warned can equally well be translated enlightened. And so God's word has enlightened him, he is saying.

Into God's word has brought this light into his own life. Now what does he discover when he makes this personal response? He discovers two things.

First of all he discovers that God's word convicts him of sin. We see this in verses 11 and 12. Particularly verse 12. Who can discern his errors?

Forgive my hidden faults. When we come around God's word we discover that it's a searchlight. Just as the sun leaves nothing hidden as it moves across the earth.

[21 : 11] So also God's word pierces the deepest recesses of our hearts and of our personalities. There's nothing that we can hide. We may think there is, but there's absolutely nothing.

God's word is like the sun. God's word shines into the deepest recesses of our hearts and of our personalities.

And so the sun discovers that there are errors and hidden faults lurking in his life. And he prays for forgiveness from them and from all his willful sins.

When we come to church sometimes it can be disconcerting because we discover that in our lives there are errors and hidden faults we become convicted of things to which we were blind before.

But it's much better that we know the reality. It's much better that someone who's got cancer may know that they've got cancer than be totally ignorant of it. And God's word gives us this diagnosis of our human condition.

[22 : 22] And it tells us that there are errors, that are faults, hidden faults, there are willful sins. It tells us that these things have gone wrong in our lives.

And the root of that wrongness is that we live in a wrong relationship with God. And that we need to put that relationship right. We need to come and trust in a Saviour.

And so although God's word is worth more than 24 carat gold and better than our favourite food, it can also make us feel very uncomfortable and this may be the reason why many people leave it on the shelf.

But we are invited to respond. This psalm gives us a vehicle with which to respond to God. It's important for us to recognise that the psalms have been given to us to be tools.

They've been given to us not simply as interesting pieces of God's revelation. They've been given to us as instruments to use in our worship.

[23 : 34] And this psalm gives us an opportunity, gives us a means of bringing ourselves to God, of coming to the Saviour. That's what the psalm does.

That's what the psalmist does. He says, May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Now he wrote these words for himself, first of all, but why have they been preserved in scripture?

They've been preserved so that you and I can use them also. They've been given to us to become an instrument to help us to have the experience that he had when he drew near to God on that original occasion.

It's interesting that the word pleasing or acceptable is a word which is borrowed from the sacrificial ritual of the temple in which a sacrifice which is offered by a worshipper is accepted by the priest, by God through the priest.

And what the psalmist is in fact saying here is that this psalm is like an offering that you take with you when you come to God. Just as in the Old Testament, people took an offering and they made that offering to God.

[25 : 05] And what the psalmist says here is that this psalm is in fact an offering. And in virtue of the sacrifice of Jesus, this psalm can bring us to God.

These words are a form of words which can bring us to God. That it's a means of grace which God has given to us.

Paul tells us that it is if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God has raised him from the dead, we will be saved. For it is with our heart that we believe and are justified and it's with our mouth that we confess and are saved.

And so if there is the meditation of our heart and the words of our lips come together, then God is giving us here a form of words which will enable us to come to God.

Just as David did, just as countless numbers of the people of God have done through the centuries, come to God and discover him to be their rock and their redeemer.

[26 : 11] God has given us this psalm to be a means of grace. Remember what the writer to the Hebrews said near the close of his letter?

Through Jesus, he said. Jesus is the way to God, there's no doubt about that. Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name. A sacrifice of praise. the fruit of lips that confess his name. God has given us here in these words at the close of the psalm, a sacrifice of praise.

And he invites us to use, to offer that sacrifice now with lips that will praise his name. God has to love.

And if the meditation of your heart and the words of your lips resonate with what the psalmist is saying here, then by the grace of God, you can use these words to come to God and discover him to be your Lord, your rock, and your redeemer.

[27 : 27] God has to And so we have here this means of grace that is being offered to us this morning. And I would urge you, I would plead with you, to use it for the purpose for which it has been given, that you may indeed make these words your words, that you may make this meditation your meditation, and that you may bring these to God and have the assurance that through Jesus it will be acceptable, it will be pleasing, that you will be accepted, and that you will discover God as your rock and as your redeemer.