

## SERMON

**CREATION AND THE TORAH**

By Pastor Jerry Truex; May 8, 2011

**Psalm 19:1-14.** To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

19:1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. 19:2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. 19:3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; 19:4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, 19:5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. 19:6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; 19:8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; 19:9 the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. 19:10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. 19:11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. 19:12 But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. 19:13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

**LXX Psalm 18:1-15.** <sup>1</sup> εἰς τὸ τέλος ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ

<sup>2</sup> οἱ οὐρανοὶ διηγούονται δόξαν θεοῦ ποίησιν δὲ χειρῶν αὐτοῦ ἀναγγέλλει τὸ στερέωμα <sup>3</sup> ἡμέρα τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐρεύγεται ῥῆμα καὶ νύξ νυκτὶ ἀναγγέλλει γνώσιν <sup>4</sup> οὐκ εἰσὶν λαλιαὶ οὐδὲ λόγοι ὧν οὐχὶ ἀκούονται αἱ φωναὶ αὐτῶν <sup>5</sup> εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ ῥήματα αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ ἔθετο τὸ σκῆνωμα αὐτοῦ <sup>6</sup> καὶ αὐτὸς ὡς νυμφίος ἐκπορευόμενος ἐκ παστοῦ αὐτοῦ ἀγαλλιάσεται ὡς γίγας δραμεῖν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ <sup>7</sup> ἀπ' ἄκρου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἡ ἔξοδος αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ κατάντημα αὐτοῦ ἕως ἄκρου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὃς ἀποκρυβήσεται τὴν θέρμην αὐτοῦ

<sup>8</sup> ὁ νόμος τοῦ κυρίου ἄμωμος ἐπιστρέφων ψυχὰς ἡ μαρτυρία κυρίου πιστὴ σοφίζουσα νήπια <sup>9</sup> τὰ δικαιώματα κυρίου εὐθεῖα εὐφραίνοντα καρδίαν ἡ ἐντολὴ κυρίου τηλαυγῆς φωτίζουσα ὀφθαλμούς <sup>10</sup> ὁ φόβος κυρίου ἀγνός διαμένων εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος τὰ κρίματα κυρίου ἀληθινὰ δεδικαιωμένα ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ <sup>11</sup> ἐπιθυμητὰ ὑπὲρ χρυσοῦν καὶ λίθων τίμιον πολὺν καὶ γλυκύτερα ὑπὲρ μέλι καὶ κηρίον <sup>12</sup> καὶ γὰρ ὁ δοῦλός σου φυλάσσει αὐτὰ ἐν τῷ φυλάσσειν αὐτὰ ἀνταπόδοσις πολλή <sup>13</sup> παραπτώματα τίς συνήσει ἐκ τῶν κρυφίων μου καθάρισόν με <sup>14</sup> καὶ ἀπὸ ἄλλοτρίων φείσαι τοῦ δούλου σου ἐὰν μὴ μου κατακυριεύσωσιν τότε ἄμωμος ἔσομαι καὶ καθαρισθήσομαι ἀπὸ ἁμαρτίας μεγάλης <sup>15</sup> καὶ ἔσονται εἰς εὐδοκίαν τὰ λόγια τοῦ στόματός μου καὶ ἡ μελέτη τῆς καρδίας μου ἐνώπιόν σου διὰ παντός κύριε βοηθέ μου καὶ λυτρωτά μου

**A. Poetry and Music**

C.S. Lewis wrote: "I take this [Psalm 19] to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflection on the Psalms*, 56.

The poem combines beautiful poetry with some of the most profound theology. The Psalms were not merely read in the Temple. They were also sung. "Though we do not know the forms and sounds of ancient Hebrew music," we can imagine the power that music adds to the words.<sup>2</sup>

## B. Nature and Torah

The Psalm is divided into two parts: The first part praises God (אלהים), who is known through nature (19:1-6). The second part praises the LORD (יהוה), who is known through the Torah (19:7-14).

### 1. Nature (Psa. 19:1-5)

When you look at Psa. 19:1-5, what do you notice? How does God reveal Himself? What is meant by no voice is heard?

When we look at the universe (the solar system, the stars, the galaxies), I think most of us are overwhelmed by the beauty and magnitude of God's creation. We have difficulty comprehending its enormity—

There are about 100 billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy,<sup>3</sup> there are over 3000 visible galaxies, and in 1999 the Hubble Telescope estimated that there were 125 billion galaxies in the universe<sup>4</sup>

—so, we have difficulty comprehending its enormity, let alone comprehending the Creator, the Source and Sustainer of the universe, which we call God.

### 2. Torah (Psa. 19-6-12)

Psalm 19 also tells that the Torah was given by God and reveals that God has a place for us in this universe. We are not a cosmic mistake. Nor are we an unplanned, unanticipated event in the *evolution* of the cosmos. We are here for a purpose.

Notice how verses 6 & 7 link the cosmos and the Torah. What is the Torah? It is often translated “law,” but refers to “instruction.” It can also be used more narrowly to refer to the Ten Commandments, the teaching of Moses as a whole, the first five books of the Bible or the Pentateuch, or even Scripture as a whole—it is the written revelation of God.

<sup>2</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Vol. 19, WBC, 183.

<sup>3</sup> "Ask an Astronomer," Cornell University; <http://curious.astro.cornell.edu/question.php?number=31>.

<sup>4</sup> The Goddard Space Flight Center; [http://imagine.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/ask\\_astro/answers/021127a.html](http://imagine.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/ask_astro/answers/021127a.html).

For Christians, Jesus interprets the Torah for us. In fact, we could say that Jesus is Torah.

When you look at Psa. 19, what are the benefits of the studying the Torah? Look at the last two verses of the Psalm. What does it mean to keep away from the “insolent”? Why is that important? How does that fit in with what we have just read in Psa. 19?

### C. What are the assumptions of Psalm 19?

What are the assumptions of Psalm 19 regarding God?

#### 1. The meaning of the word "god"

The first assumption is that everyone reading the Psalm knows what the word "god" means. The Bible never defines the word "god". Although God's actions and character are depicted throughout the OT and NT, the term, "god," is never defined.

In one sense, God cannot be defined. If defining something means to clarify the boundaries of it so that it can be compared with other things, then God cannot be defined. God is not an object along side other objects. God overreaches our comprehension. As 1 Tim 6:16 says, "God dwells in unapproachable light."

In another sense, it is possible to say *modestly* what Christians mean by the word "god," but even here there are some options.<sup>5</sup>

**a. God as a mental construct.** One option is that "god" refers only to a concept or idea or mental projection. That is God doesn't exist outside of our own minds. The word "god" refers to a socially constructed reality that symbolizes our most important practices and values (Ludwig Feuerbach, Gordon Kaufman).

**b. God as a Being.** The Classic Christian teaching is that "god" refers to an immaterial Being that exists independently of our minds. In this view, God's attributes can be described in two ways:

*Non-moral (incommunicable/not like us) attributes:*

- not part of creation, but the Creator;

<sup>5</sup> The following is from John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001) 41-55.

- not material, but spirit;
- not finite, but infinite;
- not time-bound, but eternal;
- not many things, but One/Unity;
- not dependent on anything, but self-existent;
- not limited in power, but omnipotent;
- not limited in knowledge, but omniscience;
- not limited to a particular location, but omnipresent.

*Moral (communicable/like us) attributes:*

- Just (righteous)
- Good
- Compassionate
- Loving
- Peaceful

God's moral character is revealed in the Torah and Jesus Christ, and also in those who faithfully follow God's precepts.

**c. God as Being-Itself.** Some theologians (Paul Tillich; John Hicks) want to stress that God is not a being. God is not a being alongside other beings (even the highest being in a chain of being). If God were a being, then God would be subject to the categories of finitude, space, and material substance (atomic forces). So Paul Tillich talks about God as "the ground of being" or "Being-itself" or "the power of being." And John Hicks talks about God as "the Real". Both stress the discontinuity between the material world of space and time and God.

## **2. God exists**

The second assumption is that God exists. The Bible never tries to "prove" the existence of God, which is not possible anyway. Nor does the Bible try to argue for the plausibility of God's existence. Again, it is assumed.

### **a. Arguments for the existence of God**

There are many arguments for the existence of God. For example, there is the ontological argument, the teleological argument, the cosmological

argument, the moral argument, and the argument from religious experience.

None of the arguments "prove" the existence of God, but taken together their cumulative effect is persuasive for many people.

One argument I'd like you to consider is called the Anthropic Principle.<sup>6</sup>

### **b. The Anthropic Principle (Argument)**

The Anthropic Principle is this: Our universe is uniquely tuned to give rise to human life.

Recently, Francis Collins has argued that the Anthropic Principle is reason to believe that God exists. Collins is a world-famous, geneticist. He's the director of the National Human Genome Research Institute<sup>7</sup> and, along with his team of about 2,000 scientists, mapped the entire human genome announced in June 2000 (the hereditary information encoded in the DNA of each cell).

"Now that the origin of the universe and our solar system has become increasingly well understood, a number of fascinating apparent coincidences about the natural world have been discovered ..."<sup>8</sup>

Consider the following two observations:

First, in the early moments of the universe, following the Big Bang 15 million years ago, matter and antimatter were created in almost equivalent amounts. At one millisecond of time, the quarks (subatomic particle) encountered antiquarks, which resulted in the complete annihilation of both. But for every billion pair of quarks and antiquarks, there was an extra quark; there was asymmetry between matter and antimatter.

As I understand it, without that very small asymmetry—that extra one quark for every billion pairs of quarks and antiquarks—what makes up the mass of the universe would not exist. If there had been complete symmetry between matter and antimatter, the universe would not have

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<sup>6</sup> Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (New York: Free Press, 2006) 71-78.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.genome.gov>.

<sup>8</sup> The following is from Collins, 71-74

come into existence. Why did this asymmetry exist? Why is there something rather than nothing?

Second, after the Big Bang, the rate of expansion of the universe was precisely right. If the rate of expansion of the universe had been fractionally less, the universe would have collapsed; if the rate of expansion had been fractionally more, it would have expanded too rapidly for stars, planets, and galaxies to form.

Stephen Hawking, the famous physicist, who wrote the book, *A Brief History of Time*, says: "If the rate of expansion [of the universe after the Big Bang] had been smaller by even one part in 100 thousand million million, the universe would have recollapsed before it ever reached its present size."<sup>9</sup>

Hawking goes on to say: "It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us."<sup>10</sup>

Collins agrees with Hawking and writes: Because of the "massive improbabilities"<sup>11</sup> ... "The Big Bang itself seems to point strongly toward a Creator."<sup>12</sup>

Both Hawking and Collins echo Psalm 19:1 "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands." Nature itself bears witness to the existence of a Creator.

### **3. God is relational**

The third assumption is that God is relational; God wants to relate to human beings.

People can know God in at least two ways: Nature and Torah. We have already seen how Psalm 19 assumes that God is known through the nature or the natural world. That is, God can be indirectly and partially known through the study of cosmology, astronomy, physics, biology, mathematics, etc. Psalm 19 also assumes that God is known in a personal and moral way.

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<sup>9</sup> Collins 73-74 quoting Hawking, *Brief History*, 138.

<sup>10</sup> Collins quoting Hawking, *Brief History*, 144.

<sup>11</sup> Collins 200.

<sup>12</sup> Collins 77.

**a. God loves humans, so gives the Torah**

God cares about human beings, so God gives them the Torah and the moral law so they can be fulfilled, happy, and stay out of harms way.

God gives the Torah to humans and, when they keep the Torah, they come to know God in a personal (I-Thou) way.

**b. God is personal and requires an I-Thou relationship**

To talk about God as "personal" or as "a person" is analogical language. That is, God is *like* a person in His ability and willingness to relate to human beings.

Of course, God is not a human being (though we believe God is revealed in a limited way through Jesus Christ). God does not have eyes, ears, or hands even though we may speak of God seeing, hearing, and holding us in his hands. It is analogical and metaphorical language.

The word *persona*, from which we get the word "person," use to refer to "a theatrical mask" and "a role in a play."<sup>13</sup>

So the word "person" has come to mean someone who *speaks* and *acts*, who plays a role in a social drama, who relates to others. Whereas the word, individual, does not imply a social relationships, the word "person" implies a part played by an individual in a web of relationships.

So when we talk about God as personal, we mean that God is a Reality with whom we can relate to in a way analogous to the way we relate to human beings.

But there is one more step. The Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, wrote a book called, *I and Thou* (1927). He argued that there are two types of relationships:

1. There are "I-It" relationships, which are impersonal.

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<sup>13</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 243.

2. There are "I-Thou" relationships, which are personal. [There is no singular "you" in modern English, so "thou" is used.]

I-It relationships are between subjects and objects; e.g., a human and a pen. The human is active, the pen is passive or inactive. In an I-It relationship, we can objectify the object and know about it—its height, weight, color, and so on.

I-Thou relationships are very different. An I-Thou relationship exists between two active subjects; between two persons. It is a relationship of give and take. It is mutual and reciprocal. In Buber's view, God cannot be reduced to an I-It relationship. God is a Being who escapes all attempts at objectification. God is an Absolute-Thou, not an It.

"Knowing God" is not simply the collection facts and concepts related to God; rather, knowing God requires an I-Thou encounter with God. For Psalm 19, that encounter takes place when we keep the Torah, when we live the moral law, we are responding to God as an Absolute-Thou.

#### **D. What are the implications of Psalm 19?**

What are the implications of Psalm 19?

##### **1. God is beyond us**

The first implication is that God is way beyond our ability to comprehend fully or even just a little bit. What kind of power, what kind of mind, would it take to create and sustain the universe as we know it? Our intellects and our imagination fail us here. God is beyond us.

When we speak of God, we are forced to use analogies and metaphors. To use a metaphor is *to speak of one thing in the terms appropriate to another*. Metaphors assume both similarity and dissimilarity.

For example, "to speak of God as father is to say that the role of the father in ancient Israel allows us insights into the nature of God. It is not so say that God is a male human being. Neither male nor female sexuality is attributed to God."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> McGrath 240.

When we speak of God, we should do so with all humility, recognizing our extreme limitations as human beings. Our thoughts about God—that is our theologies—are always partial and broken, and that is why people, even you and I, are often in theological tension with one another. So we need to approach the whole topic with a lot of humility. Whenever we speak of God, we ought to do it provisionally, ready to learn more and change previous conceptions when persuaded.

## **2. God cares for us**

The second implication is that God cares about us. The Source and Sustainer of the universe has given us the Torah. The Torah was given for our benefit. When we live by the Torah guidelines, we can experience something of the Creator's character and power. When we study the Torah, live the Torah, embody the Torah, we can experience the Source and Sustainer of the universe in our own lives.

## **E. What shall we do?**

In light of Psalm 19, what shall we do? How should we live?

### **1. Glorify God by becoming good naturalists**

First, Psalm 19 encourages us to glorify God by become good naturalists or scientists. We are to appreciate nature and to value it.... not to worship nature, not to sacrifice ourselves to it or become slaves of nature .... but to study it, explore it, enjoy it and, in essence, discover something of the mind and power of God.

Isaac Newton, one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, believed that scientific investigation led him to a greater knowledge of God as the Creator of the universe.

Borg talks about "thin places".... they are where God is encountered in the otherwise ordinary experiences and events of life. Thin places are places where the veil momentarily lifts and we behold God. Thin places can be geographic places or wilderness areas; they can be events like taking communion, reading Scripture, or gazing through a telescope ... anywhere where God is encountered.

The study of nature and science can be a "thin place" for us.

## 2. Glory God by become people who keep the Torah

Second, Psalm 19 encourages us to study and keep the Torah. For Jews, Torah study is a *mitzvah*, a commandment. For Jews, the act of Torah study is a sacred task that each child of God is enjoined to do.

### a. Keeping the Torah results in blessing

**Psa 1:2** Blessed are those whose "delight is in the law (Torah) of the LORD, and on his law (Torah) they meditate day and night."

**Psa 119:1** "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law (Torah) of the LORD."

### b. Meditating on the Torah is way to encounter God

**m. Abot 3.2** "If two sit together and words of the Law (Torah) [are spoken] between them, the Divine Presence rests between them." (*Pirkei Abot* means lit. "Chapters of the Fathers")

### c. The Torah is a guide for living

**Prov 3:18** "She [wisdom/Torah] is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy."

**m. Abot 5.22** Turn it [the Torah] over and over again, for it contains everything. Keep your eyes riveted to it because you can have no better guide (Ethics of the Fathers 5:22).

### d. Jesus and his disciples affirm the Torah

**Matt 5:15** "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law [Torah] or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

**Rom 8:4** We fulfill the law [Torah] when we walk according to the Spirit.

**Luke 24:44** The law [Torah] bears witness to the Messiah Jesus (cf. Jn 5:39, 46; Acts 28:23).

## F. Summary

Psalm 19 tells us two things:

1. God is encountered in Nature—nature is not to be worshiped—nature reveals the power, glory, and mystery of God.
2. God is encountered in Torah—when we study the Torah, live the Torah—we experience God in an I-Thou relationship.