

TWO BOOKS

Text: Psalm 19:1-9

Belgic Confession Art. 2

Readings: Romans 1:16-25, 8:18-25.

Theme: God reveals himself to us through creation and his word.

Purpose: To encourage you to see God's revelation in His creation and His word to praise him.

Over the centuries the way people have gained information has kept changing. At first it was through conversations with others and pictures. As time went on more and more information was written down and people could either read that themselves or listen to someone else read it aloud. After the invention of the printing press and the increase in literacy more people could read books for themselves. And in more recent times the internet and the world of websites and blogs have opened up many more ways of gathering information.

Psalm 19 informs us that God has told us about himself through two means, through creation and through the Bible.

Article 2 of the Belgic Confession follows this psalm very closely and explains what we know of God from both the creation and his word. It describes these two sources of information as two books.

In theology we call these God's general and his special revelation; his revelation in creation is general and his revelation in the Scriptures is special. Today we are going to consider both of these.

1. GOD'S REVELATION IN CREATION

a. The opening verses of Psalm 19 describe some **characteristics** of this general revelation: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands." (vs 1)

i. From this we can see that *everything* declares God's glory - the heavens by night and the sky during the day. The entire world reveals God's majesty and glory.

ii. This revelation goes on *all the time*, it is constant: "Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge." (v 2) The word used for "pour" is used of a spring bubbling up a constant supply of water. At the top of the South Island of New Zealand by Takaka you can visit the Pupu springs. There is a constant and vast outpouring of water welling up out of the ground. This is what God's revelation is like - it pours out, night and day, in a never-ceasing flow of information.

iii. This revelation of God is seen *everywhere* (v 3-4): "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their words go out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the earth." (v 3f) This is poetic language; you can't hear any speech or language from creation, yet God is revealing himself throughout the world; wherever you look you can see some evidence of him.

Different aspects of God's creation speak to different people.

Gardeners notice the vibrant colours of the flowers, the huge variety of shrubs and bushes, the wonder of seeds germinating in their vegetable garden and the amazing growth of the plants.

Trampers notice the beauty of the native bush, the strange twisting of the tree roots, the different coloured moss on the ground, the chirping of native birds, the streams and rivers running down the valleys, the breath-taking beauty of the snow-covered mountains.

Sailors notice the sun glinting on the water, the beauty of the bays and beaches, dolphins swimming and diving at the bow of the boat, the swell of the sea and the power of the waves.

Everything around us reveals something of God, all the time, everywhere. But what exactly does it tell us about him?

b. The opening verse also describes the **content** of this revelation: "The heavens declare the *glory of God* and the skies proclaim the *work of his hands*."

The created world tells us about God's glory and his works. The apostle Paul explained this in more detail in Romans 1:20; "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."

i. When you look around in the world you ought to see that *God exists*; that there is a divine being who made all of these things; that the world has a design, an order, a system, a plan.

More and more scientists are coming to the conclusion that the theory of evolution is fundamentally flawed and that the world and universe has all the marks of intelligent design. Our human bodies are so complex and so finely tuned that it is impossible to believe that we just happened by chance; all the evidence points to a great designer. As Christians we know that the creation shows that God exists.

ii. The creation also shows that God is *powerful and glorious*. The word glory in Psalm 19 means weight. People ought to see that this supreme being has weight, that he is powerful, that he is almighty.

The writer of this psalm gives us the example of the sun (vs 4b-6). He describes it in poetic language from the point of view of someone who watches the sun rise in the morning, crossing the sky and set in the evening. He thinks of two comparisons.

The sun is like "a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion", all dressed up in his wedding finery and on his way to the ceremony and the reception!

The sun is like a champion runner rejoicing to run his course through the sky! (v 5)

Today we know much more about the sun than David did. We think of the earth as a big place, but compared to the sun it is tiny - it would take one million earths to fit into the sun! The sun is a very large star compared to the others in our galaxy and is in the top ten per cent in size, but there are other stars that are much larger still. It is 150 million kms away from us. Even with light travelling at 300,000 kms per second it still takes eight minutes for the light from the sun to reach us on earth. The sun is a spectacular example of the glorious work of God in creation!

c. God has revealed himself in this way to **communicate** to us. He has shown us something of who he is so we can get to know him.

We can compare this to getting to know other people. You can learn something about another person by just looking at him, but to really get to know him he has to be willing to tell you about himself. Sometimes we say about someone, "He's a closed book"; we mean that he doesn't share much, he doesn't give much away and so you can't get to know him. If you want to know him he has to reveal himself to you; he has to open himself up.

The same is true of God. If we are to get to know God He must reveal himself, he must make himself known; he must show us his power and his works. Thankfully, he has done that through his creation which the Belgic Confession describes as "a most elegant book."

We sing of this in one of our hymns:

O wide-embracing, wondrous love!

We read thee in the sky above;

We read thee in the earth below,

In seas that swell and streams that flow"

(Psalter Hymnal 329 stanza 3 "O love of God...)

Yet not everyone believes that God exists or that he is powerful. Not everyone sees his glory and his works. Why is that?

d. This is because of the **complications of sin.**

i. The perfection of the original *creation* has been tarnished. The world isn't the perfect place it was at creation. Through Adam and Eve sin has entered the world and that has affected all of creation.

The apostle Paul explains this in Romans 8; "The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." (v 22) "For the creation was subjected to frustration...." (v 20). This is the present situation, and we see evidence of that in floods and droughts, in large fires that burn down forests and houses, in earthquakes that demolish cities to heaps of rubble, and mudslides that take out whole villages, and volcanic eruptions that bury an entire town.

God is revealed in creation but that revelation is not as clear as it once was.

It's like seeing a movie without the sound; you can get a general idea of what is going on but unless you can hear the words it is hard to follow the story.

ii. Not only is creation affected by sin but so are *our minds*. Sin has blinded our eyes, obscured our vision and darkened our understanding so that we cannot make sense of this revelation of God in creation.

Yet the Apostle Paul points out that despite the effects of sin there is enough evidence of God in creation for people to see him. There is enough revelation there so as to leave people without excuse (Romans 1:21).

2. Because sin came into the world God has also made himself known through **HIS WORD.**

The Bible is the written record of what God wants us to know about himself. Here God has revealed himself "more clearly and fully" (BC Art 2).

Psalm 19 describes God's word as his law, his statutes, his precepts, and his commands. This refers to the five books of Moses, what the Jews called the Torah, what we call the Pentateuch. But these words take in *all* God's written revelation of himself. For us living in this New Covenant it includes the whole Bible, the Old and New Testaments.

a. Psalm 19 describes the **characteristics** of this book and what it can do.

i. Verse 7: it is perfect and can revive our soul or our spirit, that part of us that is able to relate to God.

Verse 7b: it is trustworthy, a sure foundation, dependable and reliable, and so makes wise the simple. It is truth that speaks to our mind and helps us to understand this world and our place in it.

Verse 8: it is right and correct in all it says and so gives joy to the heart. It will give you joy in the centre of your being, a deep-seated happiness in God, the gladness that comes from knowing Him.

Verse 8b: it is radiant giving light to the eyes. In Psalm 36:9 we read, "In your light we see light." Reading the Bible enlightens our minds; things that were obscure become plain, what was dark becomes light, what was unclear becomes clear.

b. The word of God has these characteristics because of its **content.**

It tells us about *the LORD*. It is the "law of the LORD."

Notice that the beginning of the Psalm talks about God (v 1). The word "God" translates the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which describes God as the Creator, the God who is almighty and all powerful, God revealing himself to us in the world.

But in verse 7 the name of God changes to LORD, which translates the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. This is God's covenant name, God in relationship to us his people, God revealing himself to us in his word. It tells us about his love and compassion, his holiness and majesty, his righteousness and justice.

The Bible is the revelation of how this LORD God has rescued his people from sin through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. The content of this book focuses on **Jesus**.

The law and the prophets and the psalms all speak of him, all point forward to him. Jesus told the Jews; "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39).

The gospels tell us about his life and teaching; the letters of the NT explain the significance of all he said and did; and the last book of the Bible gives us a perspective on how he is directing all history, a history that will climax in his coming again.

The Bible is the written word that tells us about Jesus, the Living Word. Again this is well expressed in a hymn:

*We read thee best in him who came
To bear for us the cross of shame;
Sent by the Father from on high,
Our life to live our death to die. (PH 329:4)*

c. God has written this book to **communicate** with us, so we must read it and hear it.

In the Middle Ages the Bible was written in Latin, a translation called the *Vulgate*, which most of the common people could not read. The Roman Catholic Church did not want people to have a copy of their own or to read it for themselves.

The Reformers, however, wanted to give everyone a copy of the Bible in their own language. Men like Wycliff, Tyndale and Luther risked their lives to translate the Bible into English and German.

They did this so tradesmen and merchants and mothers and children could read it for themselves.

Having your own copy of the Bible is a great privilege. Don't take that for granted. Be sure you make use of the opportunity of reading it.

d. We saw earlier that the general revelation of God in creation was complicated and confused by sin. By contrast the Bible is **clear**.

The Belgic Confession expresses this well when it says; "He makes himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation."

Notice that the Bible does not tell us everything. It is not exhaustive. It does not give us the entire history of the nations, or all the details of geography, or a complete biology, or a comprehensive psychology.

The Bible is focused on what we need to know in order to be saved and to glorify God. That message is clear.

Yes, some things are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16) but the overall message is plain; that "God so loved the world that he gave his One and Only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

God has given us two books: one is creation, the other is the Bible. Be sure you read both of them! Read them so you come to know the Lord God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen