

Psalms 18-12-13a

This is Thursday, the 13th of December, 2018. We continue our study tonight in the book of Psalms. Tonight we're tackling Psalm 19.

We finished Psalm 18 last time, and I would love to have gone into more depth, but there's an infinitude of depth and we could dive and never come back up. So if we ever cover a Psalm and you have a question about something that I didn't go into detail why contact me, email me, tell me, and I'll be glad to address it. But I'm trying to hit the things that are pertinent and applicable without having the luxury of really going word by word and plumbing the depths as it were.

I've got enough plumbing on my plate this year without plumbing each of the words in the Psalm. So we're going to, as I say, be looking at Psalm 19 this evening. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study and on our fellowship, and then we'll begin.

Father, what a wonderful privilege it is for us to spend this time together and to receive the ministry of your Holy Spirit as we endeavor to improve our understanding of your will and plan and purpose for our lives and the resources that you have placed at our disposal to accomplish that goal. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word tonight, that the meaning will become clear and the pertinence will be evident for each one of us as we endeavor to put these things into practice and redeem the time that remains to us as we anticipate the ever nearer return of the Lord Jesus to take us to himself. And if we are qualified to present us before your throne, we pray that our study this evening and our fellowship will contribute to that end.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Psalm 19 begins as many of these Psalms do with the attribution to David. It is a Psalm of David dedicated to the chief musician.

We've looked in detail at both of these Hebrew terms, who the musician was, the choir director, it says in some cases, and what a mizmor is. So we'll move directly from the heading to the content here. And let's just read this out of our New King James.

I'm going to then read you another version that I think captures a lot of the spirit and the intensity in this Psalm. But we have it here before us. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork.

Day after day, day unto day utters speech, night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out throughout all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

In them, he has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber and rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven and its circuit to the other end. And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them, your servant is warned and in keeping them, there is great reward.

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless and I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight. Oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

You'll recognize many portions of this psalm. Its content is familiar to us. And I ran across a quote from C.S. Lewis of Screwtape Letters fame, who said this about Psalm 19.

I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world. So it is certainly deserving of our attention. And we begin by noting, after giving due attention to the dedication, being entrusted to the choir director, obviously this is another one that David wanted everyone to hear performed by the Levitical singers, to by repetition, learn the words and have them in their hearts the way that we have many hymn lyrics in our hearts and souls.

You hear the tune to the old rugged cross, the words course through your mind. You hear a familiar hymn, even just a portion of it, and the words return to us. And of course, as inspired scripture, those who learned this song were doubly blessed.

But given the dedication and the authorship, it says the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork. We're gonna look at these first four verses as a unit. Day unto day utter speech, night unto night reveals knowledge.

There's no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out throughout all the earth and their words to the end of the world. This has been tied by some back to Psalm 18, certain portions of it that talk about God being above and in heaven.

You remember the part of the last Psalm that said he appeared in the heavens and the cloud and the rolling thunder and the lightning and he drew me out of the waters and set me in a wide place and so on. And so this reference to the heavens is thought by some to be a link between Psalm 18 and 19. I don't see that.

God is in heaven and you could link any two things that mention that God is above us. And I don't really see that. What we have here is a section of the song, the psalm, that many think, in

fact a great many think, functioned independently as a psalm celebrating creation and the God of nature.

And talking about moving on to verse five and six, he has made a tent for the sun like a bridegroom and like a strong man rising from one end of heaven and a circuit to the other end, nothing hidden from his heat. Then you have this clean break beginning at verse seven, talking about the law of the Lord and giving various synonyms and various attributes and qualities and effects that the law of the Lord has. And you say, well, this looks like a whole different subject here because he's talking about the glory of God revealed in nature, revealed in the heavens and in creation and in the sun and so on.

And then he just takes an abrupt right turn and heads off into talking about the law of the Lord and the rest of the psalm, certainly verses seven through 11 celebrate that. Then you can see verses 12 through 14 as the effect of that law and respect for it and the influence of it in the psalmist's life, in David's life. This is what his response is.

And so because of this, the great gray heads of the past have said, well, somebody stuck these two together and didn't bandaid over the joint very well. I have a different view and it's a view that I couldn't find anybody sharing. And so once again, feel free to take this with as much salt as you think it needs.

I'm once again, standing off in the unbroken snow by myself. And many times that's an indication that a guy is off in the weeds. My dad used to say, they're all out of step but me.

Maybe you're not hearing the drummer very well. So I apologize in advance, but at the same time, our assumptions are that the scripture that God has delivered to us is unified. It is inspired.

It has a purpose. It's not the product of human mistakes or a lot of human editing. And to the extent that humans recorded it or edited it or put it together, there's reason and purpose in it.

And rather than saying, well, here's a flaw, this looks like a crack in the teacup here. My view, which I think you all share is that maybe we're not looking hard enough. Maybe we haven't adequately examined the information that God has given us.

And we saw this just this past Sunday, looking at Corinthians, that if you see something that doesn't seem to follow the flow and it kind of sticks out like a sore thumb, well, look harder, look wider, look deeper, spend a little more time because many times these things are an indicator of something that's really important and something that God wants us to trip over a little bit. There can be a lot of toys in the house, but the one you trip over is the one you pick up and look at and say, what's this doing here, right? So when I see this abrupt change of topic and subject and direction, I think this is an attention getter. This makes us want to go back and read the first part again.

And doing that several times over the course of my time preparation, I have a suggestion for

you on what I think is the purpose of it in this song. So let me, as Rod Serling used to say, presented for your observation here, take a look at this. It does seem as though we're back to Psalm 8, when I view the heavens and the stars and the work of your hands, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you visit him? It is clearly a celebration, a theme that Paul picks up in Romans chapter one, that what may be known of God is manifest in creation.

And so when he says that heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork, well, there's nothing controversial here, except perhaps to a godless atheist secular materialist who thinks that the heavens show forth the results of the big bang and the firmament is a happy accident of physics. But for anybody with a lick of sense, the heavens do declare the glory of God. Look at the measure of it, the expanse of it, the vastness, the majesty and the beauty of it.

Anybody that walks outside on a clear night away from town and looks up into the sky and you can actually see the track of the Milky Way. And you think, you know, here we are on this little tiny earth and look what God is capable of. He built the universe and his attention goes from the greatest and the grandest that measured in Google plexus of light years, all the way down to the microscopic that affects my life.

Do I catch a cold or do I not? Am I susceptible to a virus or am I not? God knows all of these things. His wisdom and his knowledge and his plan and purpose are just awe inspiring to say the least. But as we begin looking at this and the Bible begins by talking about the heavens, right? What's Genesis 1.1 say? Barashit bara Elohim, right? Et ha-shemayim, et being the sign of the direct object, in the beginning, God created bara-shemayim, the heavens.

In the beginning, God created the heavens. And so this Psalm begins by looking at the heavens that God created and it says that creation declares the glory of God. And the word here for declare is used of telling a story.

It means to recount, to relate a narrative. And there are a lot of Hebrew verbs for communication, but this particular one is a very important one because it doesn't just point to a thing. It doesn't just act as a demonstrative and say, looky there.

This word, which is sephar, S-A-P-H-A-R, it comes from sephar, S-E-P-H-E-R is the noun form. And we indirectly get the word cipher from this, cipher meaning to do math, to count a thing. They used to talk about ciphering or deciphering, but it had to do with counting.

And so it means to count or to recount. But when it says the heavens, this is such a tongue in cheek verb to use because who can count the stars? But the heavens count the glory of God. So if you can't count the stars, remember God told Abraham, can you count them? That's how many descendants you're going to have.

Well, the heavens count the glory of God, which means it's uncountable. And even with

telescopes and everything, it's just a beautiful, I mean, we're not three words into the body of the Psalm and you have this wonderful poetic word that is used, but it also means when you take count or to recount or to give an account, see how often we use that word, recount, account. It means that there is a story to be told there.

There is a lot of information in the heavens about God's glory. The heavens give an account, give and recount God's glory, the glory of God. And this is the glory of Elohim.

This is the formal magisterial name of God here. And you have the short form here. It's just L, which emphasizes his strength, his power.

So the heavens recount the glory of the powerful God. This is God in his office. This is sort of his title as God.

And his handiwork. And this is the noun that comes from the word asah. You remember the difference between bara and asah? Bara is the create out of nothing idea.

It's not totally accurate, but it's a convenient memory aid. Bara is to create something out of nothing. Asah is to manufacture out of existing materials.

The heavens and the earth were bara. Eve was asah. She was manufactured out of parts, spare parts, evidently that God took out of Adam.

Someday someone's gonna play this tape and I'm gonna get in trouble for being anti-feministic or something. Gloria Steinem will hunt me down and wag her finger at me. But the handiwork, the manufactured handiwork, and the word for God's hand is used here.

The making of his hand shows. And this is to feature, to cry out over a thing. Remember the town crier or the newspaper boys in the 30s, you see the old black and white movies and extra, extra read all about it and the highlights, the headlines.

So you could colloquially translate this that the work of his hands, the manufacture that he has done with his hands gives the headlines and the firmament is what does it. The firmament, and once again, this is a Genesis one word, the expanse, the vastness, gives the headlines of his hand manufactured work. So that's the first idea and it gives two different aspects of God, his glory and his capability.

His glory is who he is, what he's like. He's big, he's powerful, he is organized, he is systematic, he is above and beyond us. All of these are a part of God's glory, right? Aspects of his glory.

And the firmament reveals what he has done with his hands, what he has manufactured. So you have these two parts that we always think of God, who he is and what he does, summed up poetically in this first verse. Now I've not forgotten my introduction.

I'm going to give you an idea here about how this fits in with the rest of the Psalm, but we've got to cover it first. So hang with me. Day unto day utters speech and night unto night reveals

knowledge.

Day unto day, night unto night, there is utterance and revelation of speech and knowledge. So this is yom layom, day to day. And then you have the word translated utters here, which literally means to bubble forth, to come up like a spring.

Have you ever had a break in your water line in your yard and you go out there and look and there's water just like an artesian well coming up out of the ground? This is the idea. I don't like the translation bubble forth because it sounds like there's a bunch of air and soap bubbles. This means to come out like an artesian well, to come out like a water leak where it's just flowing against gravity.

It's bursting upward in solidity and content. It's not bubbly. It's effusing, it's flowing with the force of energy behind it.

So day to day flows speech. Speech. And this is the verb Amar turned into a noun, omer, talking.

Day to day flows with talking. Talking flows day to day would be a backward way. You reverse the Hebrew, read it right to left.

And you've got talking. This is a, you've heard me talk before about the OE pattern when you take a verb Amar and say omer, it's I-N-G. So it's a participial form.

And so it's a continual speaking that flows day to day. Day to day, there's flowing talking. The flow of talking.

And night to night, Leila reveals, and this again is to show, to make known a thing, to uncover it, to tell it, to declare it, knowledge. And this is Da'at. This is a noun form from Yadah, which is to know.

So what do you glean from this? Day to day, night to night. There is the flow of talking day to day. And there is the declaring, the revealing of knowledge, something to be known night to night.

Why not just observation would do this? Why do we have day and night referred to? Think back now, how many elements have we already found coming out of Genesis chapter one? When God said, let there be light, what happened? The light he called day, the darkness he called night, right? So this is a clear referencing back to the great creation story, which David knows by heart out of Genesis chapter one. But what is he doing? He's poetically reworking it as he looks at the result. The creation continues on ever since God worked in the first six days.

And day to day, the glory of God continues to be revealed. Creation itself speaks it. And when you talk about day and night, what does that immediately establish? Regularity, things are on a schedule.

There is a pattern, there is an order. God has disciplined the chaos into order. He took the

chaotic seas and put them in a place and caused the dry land to appear.

He took the formlessness and the void and created a sequence of light and darkness and light and darkness. And David says that pattern, that sequence of light and darkness, that order tells you knowledge and declares something about the glory of God. And of course, this is something science can't explain is where did the order come from after the big start of everything? Why do we have constants? Why do we have unvarying laws of physics throughout the universe? If it was just a big explosion, why aren't there pockets where the speed of light is different or gravity doesn't work or there's no such thing as hydrogen or electrons and protons and all the subatomic particles have different spins and different charges and different properties.

Why is it all utterly consistent all the way through? The most consistent universally observable thing on this earth is night follows day, day follows night. It's regular, it's unvarying, it never changes. You can count on it as surely as darkness follows day, there's gonna be another day afterward.

Well, all of this is leading to a point now. This is great as far as it goes, but it's fairly self-evident. We were not surprised by any of this.

We're about to be surprised. He says in verse three, and notice the italics in your King James. I freely and routinely cross out italics in my King James and New King James Bible.

I find that about two thirds to three quarters of the time, in my opinion, they shouldn't even be there. It works better without them. Sometimes it can be very helpful, but most often not.

Here, I would cross out there is, and most importantly, against the advice of every commentary I read, I would cross out where, and I'll tell you why there's nowhere, but there is nowhere in the text. So what would it read in verse three? Day unto day flows forth speaking, night unto night reveals knowledge, no speech nor language, their voice is not heard. Does that not make perfect sense? There is not skywriting.

The stars don't arrange, you know, Disney movies to the contrary. The stars do not arrange and spell out words. There is no voice that is heard.

There's no, if there's a voice from heaven, that's God speaking on a special occasion, like Jesus' baptism or the transfiguration, something like that. But here, the utterance and the communication and the revelation of knowledge is given wordlessly, soundlessly, without language. There is no speech.

There is no language. The voice is not heard. It's not a voice that is heard, would be a good way to put it, because there is nevertheless sense that is communicated, but it is not in an audible fashion.

Verse four, it says their line, and you've got a note there that says sound, Syriac, Septuagint,

and Vulgate read sound, and that's what it should be. It's the change of one letter in Hebrew. And because he just got through saying there is no voice, then they didn't want it to say there is a voice, so they changed it.

But the Septuagint and many of the other early translations all read this with the very same word, and it's not line, it is sound. And this is a poetic, you know, bear one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ. Each man must shoulder his own load, you know, so bear each other's burdens, but bear your own burden.

And is it a contradiction? Not at all, he just got through saying that he didn't say there's no voice, he said the voice is not heard, right? The voice is not heard, nevertheless, their voice has gone out through all the earth, voice meaning sound. This soundless sound, this unheard communication has gone out through all the earth and the words, meaning the sense, the meaning to the end of the world, to the end of the world. So we're good so far, looking at the sky, talks about who God is, what God has done, and it is a universal communication throughout the world wordlessly.

There are no words. I say again, there are no words. This is key, it's a clue.

If so many times people already get there before I do, that's your clue, if you wanna get there before I say it, that's your clue, no words in the heavens, no words in the heavens, okay? Now, what has been described in the heavens? Any particular objects or just the heavens in general? Didn't talk about the stars, didn't talk about the moon, just said you got the expanse and you got the heavens, right? And there's no words in the expanse or in the heavens. Good so far. Now look at the last part of verse four.

In them, he has set a tabernacle, a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. He rejoices like a strong man, like a champion, like a vigorous youth to run his race. It's rising is from one end of heaven and it's circuit to the other end and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

And that's the last part of this psalm of creative power in the heavens. And then now we're gonna go talk about something totally else, right? The law of the Lord, the precepts of the Lord, the judgments of the Lord, the testimony of the Lord, statutes of the Lord, fear of the Lord and so on. So what do we do with this first part? Well, as soon as you take a look in the heavens and see it declaring the glory of God and the firmament showing forth what he has made with his hands, that communicates wordlessly to the entire world.

In them, he has set a tent for the sun. Now, what's the most famous tent you can think of? It's translated that way in your King James and New King James. It doesn't say tent, what does it say? Tabernacle.

Let's think about the tabernacle. In the heavens, David says, in the firmament, God has set a tent. What's in the tent in the psalm? What comes out of the tent? The sun, right? Haven't talked

about the sun, haven't talked about the light of the sun, haven't talked about why we talked about is the firmament and the heavens, but in them already existing, already doing their thing, God has put a tent.

And out of the tent comes the sun, which is like a bridegroom and like a champion, ready to run a race, right? People say, oh, you know, it's a, I'll tell you where they go at this point with the sun. There is in ancient Sumerian literature, a hymn to the sun, God. And this is in the Sumerian and the Babylon, early Babylonians and so on.

Let me read you a little bit of this hymn to the sun. They got this off of a cuneiform tablet. Now listen and see if it sounds like Psalm 19 to you.

The first 20 lines are missing as with all good cuneiform tablets, it's broken. So there's a bunch of it gone. So lines one through 20 are gone.

Here's line 21 and following. Talking to the sun, talking to Shamash, or Shamash if you're in Oklahoma. Yep, there we go, Shamash.

Well, S-H-A-M-A-S-H, Shamash. You climb to the mountains, surveying the earth. You suspend from the heavens, the circle of the lands.

You care for all the people of the lands and everything that Ea, king of the counselors, had created is entrusted to you. Whatever has breath, you shepherd without exception. You are the keeper in the upper and lower regions.

Regularly and without cease, you traverse the heavens. Every day you pass over the broad earth. Shepherd of that beneath, keeper of that above.

You, Shamash, direct. You are the light of everything. You never fail to cross the wide expanse of the sea, the depth of which the Igigi know not.

I'll tell you who the Igigi are in a minute. Just for now, just say lesser gods. So the depth of the wide expanse of the sea that you cross, the Igigi don't know how deep it is.

They don't know how deep it is. Shamash, your glare reaches down to the abyss so that monsters of the deep behold your light. Among all the Igigi, there is none who toils but you, none who is supreme like you in the whole pantheon of gods.

At your rising, the gods of the land assemble. Your fierce glare covers the land. Of all the lands of varied speech, you know their plans.

You scan their way. The whole of mankind bows to you. Shamash, the universe, longs for your light.

Then there's about 35 missing lines, broken once again. And it picks up, that was line 52. Shamash, the universe, longs for your light.

You pick up in line 88, and this is what Shamash does. Shamash, in the ancient Sumerian culture, was not only the sun god, but he was the god of justice. You get the idea that the light shines and it exposes the deeds done in the darkness.

And so he's the god of justice. He shines down and figures out what's going on. And so a man who covets his neighbor's wife will something before his appointed day, die, be killed, perish, be judged.

That part is in a crack and missing. Something bad's gonna happen to him before his appointed day if he covets his neighbor's wife. A nasty snare is prepared for him.

Your weapon will strike at him and there will be none to save him. His father won't stand at his defense. At the judge's command, his brothers will not plead.

He'll be caught in a copper trap that he did not foresee. You destroy the horns of the scheming villain. A zealous somebody or other's foundations will be undermined.

You give the unscrupulous judge experience of fetters, him who accepts a present and yet lets justice miscarry. You make bare his punishment, et cetera, et cetera. So you get two things about Shamash.

He's the son and he's got the power to adjudicate and to punish those who have done wrong. And he's a pretty big deal compared to the Ijiji who are the Ijiji in Sumerian and Akkadian. Ji, Iji means the eye.

So these are the ones, these are the watchers. These are the ones who watch and they're penetrating gaze. They are the eyes in the sky.

They are the watchers who see what's going on even when others can't. They've got a superior perspective. So interestingly in myth, which I think is half remembered truth in many cases, Akkadian paradise or heaven was a garden.

And in the myth of Atrahasis, these lower ranking deities, the Ijiji, fill in angels, are put to work digging a water course by the more senior deities who are the Anunnaki. So your in-charge angels tell the worker angels to do a job. They don't like it.

And so when the gods, man-like bore the labor, carried the load, the God's load was great. Their toil was grievous. Their trouble was excessive.

The great Anunnaki, the seven, it's Jewish tradition tells us that there are seven cherubim. They named the others besides Michael and Gabriel. You've got Ariel and Muriel and I don't know who all else.

But anyway, the Anunnaki, the seven, were making the Ijiji undertake the toil. So the Ijiji rebel against the dictatorship of Enlil, the God in charge for whom the Anunnaki work. They set fire to their tools.

They surround Enlil's great house by night. On hearing that the toil on the irrigation channel is the reason for the disquiet, the Anunnaki council decided to create man to carry out the labors that these Ijiji refused to do. And so this is why man toils in the dirt because the Ijiji abdicated, rebelled and left.

That's the essence of the myth. And you can hear echoes of what you know of the angelic conflict in this, corrupted and justifying the rebels, of course. But here's the thing.

People recognize that there seem to be strong similarities between David's 19th Psalm and this Babylonian sun God thing. Here's the sun running his course. He's a champion, he's in splendor.

Then you talk about the law of the Lord and that there's justice and there's the illumination of what's right and wrong. And they say, see, this is an echo of Shamash, just reworked, David plagiarized and got this old Shamash hymn from the Sumerians and reworked it for God. And the kinder commentators say, well, what he's really doing is showing the difference because God isn't the sun.

God makes a tent for the sun. The sun is subordinate to him and all these things actually come from God, not Shamash. So it's a finger in the eye of the Shamash myth.

Well, for any of that to really work, you would have to know the Shamash story, which none of us knew till right now, right? You'd have to understand about the Ijiji and all the rest of it. I think that the word of God is complete and stands on its own and does its work without having to fill in. It's always nice to have some background, some isagogics, but it shouldn't be necessary to understand a portion of scripture.

The scripture interprets itself. It is sufficient of itself. And so if you get confused by this, you can't be running off to Sumeria and trying to drag Shamash out of the sky and make him pay for it.

We need to find a better answer. And so we're going to look at that when we come back from the break. But let me say this, notice the perspective that David has here.

We can get so caught up in the affairs of this life and in our daily responsibilities and tasks and in the pressure that requires us to get things done, whether it's self-induced or coming from the outside. And every once in a while, do you ever look out your car window as you're driving to the store to get one more thing done? Or you walk out on the porch and you look at the sky and you think, wow, I'm missing the sunrise. I'm missing the sunset.

I'm missing the night sky. I'm missing the grandeur and the majesty and the beauty that's all around me. There's a bunch of man-made structures in my way.

There's a man-made schedule that's in my way. David had the luxury of living, you know, 3,000 years ago to start, but the principle is the same. Just like Psalm 8, look up and take a moment to

be restored and renewed by the glory of God and the work of God, who God is and what God has done.

If we stop and look at it, we can see a lot of it in the pages of scripture. We can see a lot of it in the world around us, but it is restorative. It is food for the soul.

It gives us objectivity. It gives us perspective. It gives us a renewed appreciation for the one who made us and who has saved us, who sent the Lord Jesus for us.

And it is a tremendous antidote. It's better than Tylenol, Ibuprofen, Aleve, when pressure of life, stress. There's a lot of stress in the holidays for whatever reason.

It's supposed to be celebration and take it easy and get off work. But there's a lot of stress I have noticed and I have felt in the holidays. And better than an NSAID, better than acetaminophen, better than aspirin, better than a hot toddy is to stop and take a look up.

It is where our strength comes from. It reveals wisdom and knowledge to us. It gives us perspective.

It is, we are in some ways, solar charged and it is the glory of God that renews us and gives us fresh energy for the day. And just like these cloudy days we've had, the solar lights don't come on at night because they didn't get enough charge. Our light is not going to shine if we are not restored and renewed by going to God who is light and in him is no darkness at all.

Now we haven't solved the puzzle yet of why the quick left turn in this Psalm, but we're going to when we come back from the break.