

01/05/14

Psalm 19 - Lessons from God's Creative Hand

(special message because of snow storm)

- well, this is the first Sunday of the New Year, and what that often means around here is that we dedicate our time to focusing on the questions why are we here, and where are we going, and how do you fit in?...
- in other words, we try to lay out the plan for the coming months together--in fact that's the message I prepared last Monday for our time this morning...
- however, the Lord had different plans...and with the weather that is predicted for today and the next several days...we had to make a strategic decision about what to do..
- I hope you pray for your pastors and staff for all sorts of reasons, but one prayer request is that we have wisdom in making the myriad of decisions that have to be faced on a regular basis...
- and what we had to decide this morning was -- should we just cancel everything for today...or should we hold everything as planned...or try to strike some sort of happy medium...
- and as you know, we decided to go ahead and hold our 9:30 services at FE and FW but also be sure we made this available for those who would prefer to join us on the internet...
 - so whatever way you are participating today -- we're glad that you are with us and I'm also thankful for all the people who work week in and week out to be sure that these presentations are available in a variety of ministry venues...
- we also knew that our group would be smaller today regardless of what we did so we didn't want to move forward with our "Why are we here, where are we going discussion" because we want to be sure everyone hears that...so Lord willing, we will talk about that 2 weeks from now...
- plus, it's pretty obvious that everyone who's here at least has the weather in the back of their minds...so I thought that might be a great opportunity to bring it to the front of our minds...
 - so this morning we'd like to talk about Lessons from God's Spectacular Creative Hand...
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to Psalm 19...page ____ of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- I also want to especially thank Scott Flora, Dave Arthur, and our maintenance team for doing what was necessary to have our parking lots and sidewalks ready for ministry this morning along with Heather Smith who had to get our power-point together on very short notice along with the many of other folks working behind the scenes...sometimes the Lord gives you special opportunities to serve Him and I appreciate people who do whatever is necessary to make that happen...
- perhaps it would be best for us to start with a quote from one of Job's counselors which can always be an interesting proposition...but in this case it seems unusually appropriate...
 - (from Elihu) God thunders with His voice wondrously, doing great things which we cannot comprehend. For to the snow He says, "Fall on the earth," And to the downpour and the rain, "Be strong." He seals the hand of every man, that all men may know His work.. (Job 37:5-7).
- that pretty much sums up this day, huh?...God thundering His voice wondrously...doing great things we can't comprehend...for to the snow He says -- fall on the earth...
- this morning I'd like us to think about that through the lens of Psalm 19 -- looking for Three lessons from a really cold weekend.
- read Psalm 19:1-14
- so, what lessons can we learn from this unusual weather we're enjoying together?....

I. This Weather Reminds Us of God's Creative Glory.

- theologians refer to Creation as part of God's General revelation of Himself...
- it's general for 2 reasons...because it gives us some information about God but not everything there is to know and also because it is given to everyone...
- and what these verses are telling us is that...

A. General revelation is intended to help us understand the presence and power of God.

- verse 1 tells us...
- v. 1- the heavens declare the glory of God...
- v. 1 - the sky above proclaims His handiwork...
 - please note carefully the emphasis of those two verbs (declare, and proclaims)
 - who among us has not gone out on a starry night, gazed up in the sky and been amazed at the beauty and wonder of God's creation?...
 - there are times when the sun is setting or the leaves are dazzling that it just takes your breath away...
 - you have a private moment of worship wherever you happen to be at the time...
 - God's glory is marvelously on display...
- assuming you want it to be...seeing God in His created glory is a choice you make in your heart and a response to His grace working in your life...

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote -- "Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."
- Elizabeth Barrett Browning
- so if we'll allow our hearts to be open...we can be reminded especially in the next few days of the power and presence of our God...
 - now we can choose instead to sit around and complain about something we don't like...
 - or fret because our plans may be changed...
 - or focus on how all of this may be impacting us...
 - in other words, we can sit around and pluck blackberries...
 - or we can use these special circumstances to see how earth is crammed with heaven...and how every common snowstorm, and even uncommon one -- is afire with God...
 - Psalm 19:1 - The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

- then David explains...

B. God in His grace makes this revelation available to everyone.

- Psalm 19:2-3 - Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.
- there's some question about exactly what David is saying here -- but I think the English Standard Version probably is correct here when it says -- ESV - There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.
- that's the point that David is making...and it certainly fits the argument that is developed in verse 4...
- Psalm 19:4 - Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun.
- God in His grace makes this general revelation available to everyone...

- I was reading an article yesterday that claimed that nearly half of our country's population will experience temperatures below zero in the next few days...
- that's an incredible statistic when you think about it...
- and it has a way of putting mankind in our place...if we'll let it...
- perhaps you've been following this incredible story about the ice breaking ships in Antarctica...if you think you have cold weather problems, just think about these guys...
- it started with a group of Russian scientists, journalists, tourists, and crew members studying global warming on the Akadmik Shkalskiy...
- [pic of the Akadmik Shkalshiy]
 - they got stuck in the ice...which I would think is a bit embarrassing or at least somewhat ironic when you're on an ice-breaking ship studying the effects of global warming...but that's what happened...
 - so then the Chinese government got involved by sending the Xu Long to rescue the people stranded on the Russian vessel...so they sent a helicopter and safely transported everyone who wanted to get off to the Xu Long...
 - [pic of the Xu Long]
 - then the Xu Long got stuck...
 - imagine if you're one of those scientists or tourists...on what is now your second ice-breaker stuck in the ice...like, really?...
 - so the Australian Maritime Safety Authority got involved and have now asked the United States Coast Guard to send one of our ice breakers, the Polar Star to help the other two vessels...
 - [pic of the Polar Star]
 - you'll be happy to know that the Polar Star just underwent a 90 million dollar overhaul...I didn't say that's what the ship cost -- I said that's what the overhaul cost...
 - although I'm thinking there's going to be at least 2 ice-breakers on e-Bay any day now -- with an ad that reads something like, ice-breakers available really cheap, but you have to transport them, from Antarctica...bring an ice pick...
 - but the point is -- the heavens declare the glory of God...and if we will allow it to, we can be reminded the next few days of the incredible power of our God and the world he created...
- by the way...if you get snowed in in the next couple of days...you might want to use that time to read the tale of another great polar expedition -- led by Ernest Shackleton...
- [pic of Shackleton]
 - he too led an expedition to the South Pole...only his ship was made of wood...
 - [pic of the Endurance before it was smashed]
 - and they also got stuck in the ice...and they lived on the ship for a period of time and they tell the unbelievable story of the ice slowly crushing their ship to pieces...
 - [pic of the Endurance after it was smashed]
 - what's amazing is that Shackleton survived and was able to orchestrate the eventual rescue of his crew over a year later...
 - one of the artifacts that remains from that expedition was Shackleton's Bible...
- he was raised in a very godly home and Shackleton said his favorite Bible verse was Job 38:29 - "'From whose womb has come the ice? And the frost of heaven, who has given it birth?'"
- can you imagine Shackleton and his crew listening to the ice crush what appeared to be their only means of survival?...and standing in awe of the power of God's creation?...

- the point of all of this is -- if we'll let it -- the power of God's creation has a way of glorifying man and putting mankind in our proper place...
- I've been in airports on Thursday and Friday of this week -- which turned out to be a very interesting time to fly...
 - just getting to the airport Thursday morning was a challenge...
 - and then walking airports the next two days and seeing the word "canceled" on flight after flight on the departure boards...
 - and man can devise all the technology he wants...all the aerospace engineering and the computer systems, etc -- and we're very thankful all of that...
 - but this week proved again -- it's no match against the frost of heaven and he who has given it birth...
- friend, when that happens -- it's a sign of God's grace...it's a sign of His general revelation of himself to man...
 - of the heavens declaring the glory of God...
 - wise is the person who marvels at the declaration instead of sitting around plucks blackberries...
- let's also put this in context seasonally...

C. Remember that the Creator is the One whose birth we just celebrated.

- friends, the gospel of Jesus Christ is written all over this weather story as well...
- John tells us that ... John 1:1-5 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.
- Paul made a similar point to the Colossians... Colossians 1:16-17 - For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.
- this same powerful Creator was willing to be born in a manger and then hang on a cross for our salvation...
 - that means that the powerful weather over the coming days should even increase our amazement of the gospel...
- there's also an attendant warning to all of this...and that is...

D. God's wrath is reserved for those who suppress this truth.

- I recognize that there are plenty of people who scoff at the idea that the world was created by God...or that there are any lessons from the events that are unfolding in these next few days...
- Here's what Scripture says about that...
- Romans 1:18-25 - For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for

an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

- I do not make this next statement with any degree of joy or superiority at all...but as a pastor I have to say it -- there is probably no passage of Scripture that describes much of what is occurring in our culture right now more clearly than those verses...
 - man in his rebellion has suppressed the truth of God he has been given...
- now, where does David leave us?...because I realize you still might say -- but I don't like this weather, and I'm not sure how to handle this weather...
 - well friend, it's very important to note that in Psalm 19, David did not leave us at the foot of general revelation as if that was the final say...because what does he turn our attention to next?...special revelation, in this case, the Word of God...
- I think a snowstorm is a good time to quote from the Belgic Confession of Faith, don't you?...
- this is from article 2, on how we know God...
 - We know Him [God] by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things of God, even his everlasting power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men and leave them without excuse. Second, 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.
- that is exactly what David is doing in this text...and the point is...
 - II. We Need Special Revelation (God's Word and God's Son) to Help Us Interpret and Respond to the Challenges of Creation.
 - these two subjects are connected in this passage for a reason...and it's a reason that can be especially helpful to us in the next few days...
 - what is it about the Word of God that can give us confidence and direction and hope regardless of how high the snow totals go and how low the wind chills become...
 - A. The nature of the Word of God.
 - how does David describe it in this Psalm?
 1. Perfect - v. 7
 2. Sure - v.7
 3. Right - v. 8
 4. Pure - v. 8
 5. Clean - v. 9
 6. True - v. 9
 - in other words, the Scripture is a sufficient guide to help us think about and respond to what happening in creation...
 - Albert Barnes quote
- now, what does David say about...
- B. The effect of the Word of God.
 1. Revives the soul - v. 7
 - we don't have to be disheartened and depressed during times like this...
 2. making wise the simple - v. 7
 - we can respond to challenges in ways that are biblically wise...

- if you say -- how do I avoid eating blackberries the next few days?
- one possible answer is to get out your Bible and an electronic concordance and look up all the references of God as our Creator, or the creation, or the heavens...and let special revelation help you interpret general revelation

3. rejoicing the heart - v. 8

- for some people, this weather has been more than a minor inconvenience...
- like one of our missionary families, Seth and Darla Curtis and their children...
 - they were able to make it back to the states before Seth's father Roger passed away...
 - I think we've announced it enough that you have also made the connection that Seth is our pastor Curtis' brother...
 - so they have just gone through the terrible trial of their father passing away in a very short period of time...
 - and now Seth and Darla and their children are making their way back to the Congo where they serve as missionaries...
 - traveling internationally with small children is difficult under the best of circumstances but they've been caught up in the middle of this snowstorm and all the flight delays it's caused...
 - yet they are posting jokes on FB about their travels...like the one where Darla said... Got to "love" being "THE MOM" of the kid who throws up in the airline Que.
 - the point is -- when you have the Son of God in your heart, and the Word of God in your hand, you can respond to trials with a revived heart, with biblical wisdom, and with God-given joy that shows that you have submitted yourself to the sovereign plan of your Creator God...

4. enlightens the eyes - v. 8

- one of the ways that's true is that we can take our gaze away from ourselves and place them on the needs of others during the next few days...
 - a. snow shoveling for those who live around us, senior citizens, singles (mention -- we'll have to be very careful because of the temps -- we don't want to endanger anyone -- touch base with Pastor Johnny Kjaer)
 - b. opening both community centers as shelters - touch base with Pastor Andre Ballard at FE or Pastor Josh Greiner at FW
 - the point is that the Word of God has us reinterpret bad weather and see possible opportunities for ministry to those who may be hurting...
 - c. looking for opportunities with your neighbors...(develop our theme for this upcoming year -- loving our neighbors -- these may be some great days to do that..., cf calling your neighbor -- hey, I'm heading to Meijer, can I get anything for you...)

- the argument in verse 9 places more emphasis on Scripture itself...

5. enduring forever - v. 9

6. righteous altogether - v. 9

- that's why David then talks about...

C. The value of the Word of God

- Psalm 19:10-11 - They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

- we also have a group of young people from Faith Christian School on their way to the Dominican Republic -- and they too were caught up in the effects of all these flight cancelations...
- well, think of all the parents who have faithfully taught those young people the Word, and all those Sunday school teachers, and youth workers, and Christian school teachers who have faithfully taught those young people the Word...
 - to what end -- so that they are equipped to handle the challenges of life -- some if not many involving some aspect of God's creation...
 - when you let the heavens declare the glory of God -- then you marvel at the declaration not curse at it...
- see, the goal of all of this is -- thinking biblically about the weather in a way that draws us closer to the Son...
 - this Creator died so that we could handle challenges victoriously...
- it's also important to note the way this Psalm ends...in a way that is practically and specifically introspective...we could say it like this...

III. This Weather, Viewed Through the Lens of Scripture, Can Lead Us to Repentance.

 - Psalm 19:12-14 - Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.
 - so, how could the Word of God be used to lead us to repentance during a winter storm and thereby help us become more like Christ?...
 - here's one answer...to remind us of...

A. The importance of learning contentment.

- compared to the rest of the world...you and I are extremely rich...regardless of where we find ourselves on the economic scale in this country...
- how many pairs of shoes did you have to choose from this morning to keep your feet warm?...
- how long will it be when you leave this building until you find yourself in a warm car?
- how likely is it that you will sleep in a warm bed after having consumed warm food?
 - Philippians 4:11-13 - Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.
- we are about to have an opportunity to be reminded of the many reasons we have to be content...

B. The importance of trusting in God's plan, not ours.

- hey, I've got places to go and people to see the next few days, how about you?...
- Proverbs 3:5-6 - Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.
- Proverbs 16:9 - The mind of man plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.
- do you know where I'm scheduled to be this week?...The Dominican Republic...in the Caribbean...to speak at a conference for the churches there...

- I hope the Lord is smart enough to know I need to do His work this week!!! (cf. David's point about the sins of presumption...)

C. The importance of guarding our thoughts and words.

- there is a real sense in which this is an evangelistic Psalm...
- and you better believe a watching world will be on the lookout for how the people of God respond to this challenge...
- David summarized that, didn't he -- Psalm 19:14 - Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.