

Psalm 19

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Date: 16 June 2024

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[0 : 00] In his famous poem, If, Rudyard Kipling opens with those famous words, if you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you.

! He's giving us sage advice for life. He's describing one of the great challenges of life. Because it's very difficult to keep your head when all around you there is chaos and opposition.

People losing their heads and blaming it on you. And I want to suggest that that is a particular challenge for Christians at this time and at this place.

I guess every age probably says that. Every age probably says, you know, we have peculiar challenges to our time and we really need to keep our heads. But that's probably true all the time. It's especially true at the moment.

In all kinds of ways, people are losing their ability to think clearly and wisely about the world. And when a Christian speaks up to give an opinion, to give a biblical opinion on something, they get vilified.

[1 : 06] And what that does, it makes it very difficult to live faithfully. It makes it very difficult to keep your head when the storm is raging. And I thought, therefore, it would be helpful for us to take a few Sunday evenings to try and help us to get our heads straight on some of the issues of the day.

A couple of weeks ago, we took time to consider some of the implications of the oneness of God from Deuteronomy chapter 6. And I said that there is a consistency and a coherence in the world because God is one.

So when it comes to authority, ethics, and salvation, when it comes to who is in charge, authority, when it comes to how we should live, ethics, and when it comes to how we get right with God and the world that he made, salvation, we don't need to be pulled here and there.

We have one authority. We only need to go to one place, the one true God who has revealed himself in his word. And we need to tether ourselves to his word and live in line with that.

Last week, Johnny Gibson explored several implications of what it means for that one God to be the creator of the world. He made everything. He made it out of nothing. And he made it according to his design, all by his word.

[2 : 22] The implication of that is that God is in charge of the world that he has made and he has ordered his world in a particular way. He and no one else has the right to tell us how to live.

And of course, his creation was good. We live in a world that is full of abundant goodness because it is God's world.

That's true even at the very basic level. Think of how God created the means by which we can function as human beings in the world. The means by which that is possible. You see, he didn't just create basic fuel that has the necessary nutrients to power the machine.

Nor did he just give us a valve on the side of our body by which we pump that fuel in. We could have functioned that way. But God gave us trees that grew mangoes.

And he gave us steak. And he gave us sea bass. And he gave us coffee and ice cream and so on and so on. Whatever your favorites are. And he didn't just give us those things. He gave us tongues that are covered with taste buds.

[3 : 28] So that the refueling of our bodies was a delightful experience. The goodness and the generosity of God is all over his creation. He created it out of nothing, according to his design, all by his word.

So he has the authority to tell us how to live. But he did it with goodness and blessing. And this evening I want us to go to Psalm 19.

And again, it's not a detailed exposition of the psalm. Deuteronomy 6, that sermon wasn't a detailed exposition. I think it's fair to say that what Johnny Gibson did last week was a detailed exposition.

Where there's 300 points. But it's not a detailed exposition. It is, however. I want to consider this psalm and how it talks about this good creator God.

And how he makes himself known in the world. And then I want to pursue one particular implication of that. For how we should think. How we should keep our heads as Christians in the world that he has made.

[4 : 31] So the psalmist tells us, Psalm 19, page 456, verse 1. The heavens declare the glory of God. And the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours out speech. And night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth.

Their words to the end of the world. Psalm 19 describes God's two-fold revelation. The first part of which, verses 1 to 6, are the wordless speech of creation.

And then verse 7, and following the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. That addresses the second aspect of his revelation, which is God's law. The church fathers spoke of God's revelation coming to us in two books.

The book of God's world and the book of God's word. Derek Kidner, the Old Testament commentator, speaks about God's revelation in the skies and the scriptures.

[5 : 36] And this psalm, Psalm 19, holds those two forms of revelation together. Another way of thinking about the two is natural revelation and special revelation.

And this evening, I want to think a bit about the former, natural revelation, and what that means for our culture at this particular moment. But before we do that, it is important to be clear about how these two forms of revelation relate.

So natural revelation, the revelation of God's world, doesn't operate independently of God's word. The Bible scholar Richard Bauckham says, Biblical commands are not arbitrary decrees, but correspond to the way the world is and will be.

See, he's speaking about how the two relate there. Nature doesn't contradict scripture. Both nature and scripture come from the one God. One commentator says, The God who speaks in Exodus and Romans is not a different God than the one who speaks in Andromeda and the Pleiades.

But special revelation trumps natural revelation. Same commentator, Moses outranks nature and Jesus outranks Moses. That's how God's revelation works.

[6 : 47] But nature does reveal something important about God. You can get accurate information about God simply from the way things are in the world that we live in.

The world that he has made. His fingerprints are all over it. And you can get that knowledge without any reference to special revelation. And that has implications for how we live.

So when Christians speak on the issues that our culture gets cross about, people often say, don't they, Don't quote your Bible at me. I don't believe in that ancient little book anyway.

I want to say okay. But the point is that even if you ignore the scriptures, the skies speak of God, as does the world that he has made. The Apostle Paul makes it clear in Romans 1.

He says, For God's invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

[7 : 47] So they, the unbeliever, the whole world, are without excuse. What he's saying there, the Apostle, is the eternal power, indeed the very nature of God, is known from the things that are made.

And the knowledge that arises from this is knowledge that brings moral culpability with it. So we could, in a sense, call it, rightly call it, natural law. The knowledge is not just that God is there somewhere, but that he is worthy of worship and honor.

Paul says that his hearers and all mankind do not do this by nature. We don't, by nature, worship and honor God because we suppress this truth, the truth that is revealed in creation.

Everyone, everyone who has ever been born knows that God is. But we defy the light of his revelation and we refuse him the glory that he deserves. But that still leaves us without excuse before him.

No one will stand before God in the end and say, I didn't know what you were like. We did because the heavens declare his glory, the sky above his handiwork.

[8 : 59] Nature reveals God's character and expresses his purpose. And what that means is that even though our world is fallen and broken by sin and our knowledge, of course, is unclear and imperfect, it's still, the creation still speaks of its creator and reveals its creator's design.

It is evident that living things are created for a purpose. Ears are created to hear. Eyes are for seeing. Vocal cords are for speaking and singing and so on.

Each part of an organ is intricately designed to interact with the others in a coordinated way to achieve God's intended goal according to his design. Things have a natural order.

And because God has established that natural order, we are obligated to use them in keeping with that order. And it makes sense to do that.

You can actually fit a square peg into a round hole. With enough force, it is possible to fit a square peg into a round hole. But to do so is both wrong and foolish.

[10:09] Because it wasn't designed to work that way. We know, don't we, when we're doing that, that we're not cutting with the way this whole thing was designed. Square pegs were not designed to go into round holes.

And in particular, because this is an area of real confusion in our culture at the moment, when it comes to how we think about and how we use our bodies, if the maker has given us a blueprint for what is natural, how we were designed to work, would it not make sense to follow it?

Surely that will be how we work as we should. Surely that will be where true flourishing is found.

Now we could explore this in relation to sexuality and to marriage.

There is an order in creation to both of these realities. And they are both being debated at the very basic level, attacked at the higher level in our culture today.

There is an order to these realities that God has designed. The area, however, I want to focus on this evening is sex and gender. Now to be clear about terms, when we're talking about sex, we're referring to God's design of humanity as male and female.

[11:26] Gender, as a term, refers to the biological differences in those male and female bodies and the different ways these creational distinctions are expressed. So there are two sexes, male and female.

And there are two genders. And these are fixed realities. In the creation account in Genesis 1 that you heard last week, one of the things that the narrative highlights is the distinction between human beings and everything else.

The sea creatures and the birds were created, we're told, according to their kinds. The animals, the same. But when God created mankind, he said, Genesis 1.26, Let us make man in our image after our likeness.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. All the other creatures were created according to their kind.

There are different species of fish and birds and mammals and so on. But the only distinction in humanity is male and female. So gender is part of the essence of who we are.

[12:36] Ethnicity, class, ability, these are all secondary differences amongst humans. But gender is assigned by God and it is fundamental. This also means that gender is binary, male and female.

Now according to the LGBTQ plus charity, Gallup, to say that is transphobic. And they define that as, quote, intolerance of gender diversity based around the idea that there are only two sexes, male or female, which you stay in from birth.

And intolerance of gender diversity based around the idea that there are only two sexes, male or female, which you stay in from birth. That is their definition of transphobic. And if you post the description that I've just given on X, formerly known as Twitter, or even like a tweet that says something like that, that could end your career.

But I want to say, however loud the cries of the mob become, male and female, boys and girls, that is how nature is ordered.

Now, the fallen nature of our world mean that there are complexities that arise. Up to around 1% of people are born with complications in their chromosomes or reproductive organs.

[14:04] Klinefelter syndrome, where men are born with two X chromosomes, affects 1 in 500 men. And what is being called intersex, where a child's sex at birth is ambiguous, affects 1 in 5,000 births, 0.02%.

As well as this, gender dysphoria is a recognized medical condition. These are exceptional, but they're part of life in our broken world, and we should have compassion for those who suffer in this way.

However, that compassion is very different from the ideology that is being pushed across our culture, and particularly in our schools and universities, that gender is culturally constructed and not

linked to your given body.

I saw a woman wearing a t-shirt a while back that said this, gender is a pseudoscientific product of Western colonialism. It is a manipulation tactic of capitalist societies.

Outside of our cages, a hundred genders will bloom. I had to stop her in the street to get all of that, to make sure I was reading it right. That's quite a slogan for a t-shirt.

[15:10] But here's the thing. If you disagree, whether it's in the staff room or at work drinks or on your social media, you will likely pay a heavy price. There have been more than a few people in high-profile roles that have felt the heat.

A while ago, there was a professor at Oxford, Professor Selina Todd, who was being escorted to lectures by security because of threats from trans activists who didn't like her comments on keeping ladies' toilets for ladies.

We've got to keep our heads when this is going on all around us. We don't want to have to live with security to get us to and from our office.

We don't want to be called a bigot. None of us want that. Because of that, we can easily get swept along. How do we keep our heads? Well, first of all, we need to understand that this is a deliberately orchestrated tide that we're swimming against.

The big shift happened, you remember, back in 2015 when the former decathlete Olympian Bruce Jenner came out as transgender and was fated with a cover story on Vanity Fair magazine titled, Call Me Caitlin.

[16:25] Caitlin Jenner was then announced by Glamour magazine as their Woman of the Year. There is an agenda driving the whole thing. And the reason that we can say this, the reason we know this, isn't just some sort of shrill voice from the Christian right.

The reason we can say this is because of a shift in what we are expected to do with those kinds of statements. What used to be demanded of us was tolerance.

We need a place for people who see the world differently. We need tolerance from people that hold different views. But tolerance was soon replaced by affirm. You have to agree with the person's choice.

If that wasn't far enough, we've now gone further still and you have to celebrate those decisions.

We've gone from tolerance to affirming to celebrating. And if you don't celebrate, if you don't cheer where the culture tells you to cheer, you're a hater and a bigot and there is no place for you in our society, our company, our business, our social group, or whatever it might be.

Now, one of the biggest pressure points is with children. On the one hand, the culture, because the culture is pushing this message and your three-year-old son starts dressing up in his sister's dresses and tells you he prefers playing with dolls and with toy cars, you might think, oh, I wonder is he in the wrong body?

[17:50] There's a lot of talk about children being in the wrong body in our culture today. Lots of people are talking about this. Maybe that's the case. And then you go onto the internet and, well, that just makes the confusion worse.

On the other hand, non-binary gender is being taught in schools as fact. So what ends up happening is that in schools, these things are normalized and our children think that it's perfectly okay.

And for adolescents, you guys that are teenagers, because it's the new thing, let's be honest, well, it becomes the cool thing. And that's what the cool kids want a bit of.

Add to that then further, the push for medical intervention. In some cases, children who identify as being in the wrong body are being given drugs to alter their natural development and even surgery to reassign their gender.

If Christians aren't clear on God's design and what is natural in this and clear with our children, we won't keep our heads and we will get swept away.

[19:02] It shouldn't need to be said that young children aren't best equipped to define themselves. And so much of the dressing up and the playing is part of their normal development.

When my sons dressed up as princesses, I laughed, I told them it was funny and I did that precisely because it was the wrong way around. The reason it's funny is because it's the wrong way around.

And I made sure that they knew that that sort of thing was only appropriate as a bit of a joke.

I certainly didn't think perhaps they're in the wrong body. And I certainly didn't think that they needed therapy or surgery. Thankfully, some medics are speaking out about the dangers in 2016,

which is now, it feels like, several eras ago in this whole area.

In 2016, the American College of Pediatricians published a paper and in it they said this, quote, Young children are being permanently sterilized and surgically maimed under the guise of treating a condition that would otherwise resolve in over 80% of them, this is criminal.

There's also a growing caution for the surgery among adults as well. Dr. Paul McHugh, psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, the hospital where sex change surgery was pioneered, he stopped doing it.

[20 : 14] McHugh says this, I concluded that to provide a surgical alteration to the body of these unfortunate people was to collaborate with a mental disorder rather than to treat it. This is good news.

However, the culture wants to call those who speak in this way transphobic. We need to see that they are shouting against the natural order of things written into the fabric of God's creation.

No amount of hormone injections, no amount of surgery, and no amount of cultural pressure to agree can change the deep created givenness of our sex and gender.

And to push against this is dangerous, and it's incredibly destructive. About 10 years ago, a chap called Nathan Verhulst ended a long, painful journey with gender confusion, aged 44.

Born a girl, there were multiple surgeries with multiple complications. Nathan hated the outcome, despised what he had become, and because it was legal in Belgium where he lived, he was euthanized by lethal injection.

[21 : 32] That is utterly, utterly, utterly tragic. It is just so wrong for any bearer of the divine image. So we need to see, and we need to be very clear, that there is a better way.

The God who made us, the God who is our good creator, who has written a revelation of himself, and established an order of how things are to be in his world, he didn't, having created us, just leave us to it.

Nor did he cut us loose even when we walked away from him, choosing our own path in his world, trying to redefine ourselves apart from him, trying to push back against his good ordering of things. He didn't just leave us to it. He made a way to restore our brokenness, even the brokenness of our bodies and our minds. This God, this good God of creation and natural order, sent his Son to live the life that we should have lived, to die the death that we deserved.

God dealt with sin in all its forms. He dealt with brokenness in all its forms, and three days after his death, Jesus was raised again to new life, a new life that he offers to anyone who puts their faith in him.

[23 : 05] And it is in this union with him that broken men and women find wholeness and peace. Look, while we remain in these bodies that we have, we will always struggle in some way.

We're all broken people, whether it's sexually or emotionally or physically. If you're struggling, you're in good company because we're all broken in some way.

But the promise that Jesus offers, the promise that Jesus offers is one of deep rest for our souls.

Indeed, the Apostle Paul tells us that when we are united to Christ by faith, we are a new creation.

We get a new heart, and we experience new life. Now, that newness won't be experienced fully until the Lord Jesus returns, but until then, God the Holy Spirit is renewing our minds.

He's renewing our desires as we trust him all the way to glory. At the heart of this gender ideology that is swirling around us in our culture, at the heart of it all is the thought that as individuals, we define ourselves, and that freedom is found in being the most authentic version of ourselves.

[24 : 27] So we get to define ourselves, we get to set the terms for our own life, and we find freedom in being the most authentic version of ourselves that we can be.

And look, if we aren't created, if we're just bags of cells doing what bags of cells do at this temperature, well then, there's nothing ultimately wrong with messing around with your gender or even being euthanized in the end.

But that's not true of us. We were created by a good God to live according to the way he has designed the world. And there is a better way than that, a more human way and that is to see that we bear his image, we bear the image of God and he has defined us.

And because he has defined us, we matter. And our bodies and how we use our bodies matter. And the most authentic version of ourselves is who we are in Christ, the one who redeems us.

And it is in him where we find peace, where we find wholeness, where we find, well, it's in him where we find our true selves and where we find freedom.

[25 : 49] It's in him where we find hope. That's why we're running Hope Explored, so that people can see that it is in the Lord Jesus Christ that there is hope and freedom and significance and purpose.

And it is in Christ in the end that creation is brought to fulfillment, that the order of things that are revealed in the creation, as the heavens declare the glory of God, as the sky above proclaims his handiwork, day to day as the speech is poured out, the wordless speech of creation, revealing the God who made us for a relationship with him, in the end, it is the Lord Jesus who brings that creation to fulfillment in the marriage of Christ and the church.

And that is a fulfillment, that is a destination for broken people. Whether we're broken by where we are in our culture or some other expression of our sin, it is in Christ and only in Christ where we find peace.

And that's what we're all longing for. So go to Christ. Go to Christ if you need to for the first time or go again for the millionth time because it is in him where there are pleasures forevermore.

Let's pray together.