

Jump Start
Lesson 3
Listening to God

Personal Introductions (small classes, new people)

Pray

I. Introduction

Let's begin this morning by taking a minute to recap the first two weeks. As we're learning about the basic themes of the Christian life, it never hurts to remind ourselves of what we've covered thus far, and see where we're headed.

Who can recall the theme of the first week? That we are "saved by God." We learned that apart from Christ we are dead in and slaves to sin and that salvation is from first to last a work of God. We also discussed how the fact that God is the author and finisher of our salvation should humble us, give great confidence and assurance in our salvation, and finally how it motivate us to glorify Him with our lives.

Last week we learned that God saves us to live lives that are pleasing to Him, and importantly that He has enabled us to do so by giving us a new nature that is alive to God and dead to Sin. So today we begin a two week look into communicating with God.

The theme today is, "listening to God." This theme presupposes two very basic truths directly from the title:

1. God Speaks
2. We Listen

I think the importance of this lesson, particularly for the new Christian, is to help you understand the nature of how God primarily communicates with you. As Christians we obviously want to know what God's will is for our lives. To know this, we must be acquaint ourselves with how He has revealed Himself to us and what He has revealed to us --- both about Himself and the lives He calls us to live as Christians.

To help us with this we're going to look a Psalm 119

Isn't it a beautiful Psalm? C.S. Lewis actually wrote of this Psalm, "I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world."

II. Vs. 1-6 (Creation Praise)

Psalm 19 can easily be separated into three distinct parts. The first section includes verses 1-6. Let's go ahead and read these first 6 first together?

So how does God speak to us, looking at the six verses? One fundamental way in which God speaks to us is through his creation.

The Psalmist make a general declaration: The Heavens declare the glory of God. So he looks up at the Heavens or the skies, He sees beauty perhaps from the stars or the radiance of dusk or a sunrise and he says that this, whatever he's looking at in all its wonder declares, the glory of God.

Notice the unique actions ascribed to the heavens: they pour forth speech (vs.2), and, in fact, they have strong vocal chords because it says that there is no place where their voice is not heard, even to the ends of the earth. In other words, the creation speaks loudly and clearly, communicating something to all inhabitants under the canopy of the sky.

Q: Well, if they heavens, and I think generally we can include all creation, speaks, what does it say to us? To focus specifically on the passage for a moment, what do the heavens tell us?

There is a creator. So the Psalmist looks up, and sees the beauty of the heavens and it leads him to only one conclusion: there is a creator and this is his handiwork. In fact, we know from Romans 1 that creation is the one big, general clue to the existence of God, known as natural revelation. This clue is so big in fact, that Romans 1:18-20 says that because of it, men are without excuse before God: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For 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, so that men are without excuse."

The truth being conveyed by Paul in this passage is that creation alone makes it impossible for men to live as if there is no God and then excuse it by ignorance. Theologian Matthew Henry has a great way of putting this. Speaking of the heavens, he writes "All people may hear these natural immortal preachers speak to them in their own tongue the wonderful works of God."

Creation, in a sense, preaches to us, so that we have no excuse of being ignorant of God.

Unfortunately, man's wickedness has not only caused him to fail at acknowledging the Creator, but even worse than, as Paul mentions in verse 23 of Romans 1, it has caused him to worship the creation. Undoubtedly, this takes many forms --- from the worshipping the sun and moon, to worshipping each other and ourselves.

In his book Pleasures of God, John Piper has a chapter titled, "The Pleasures of God in His creation." There he writes, "It is clear that there is one main message creation has to communicate to human beings, namely, the glory of God. Not primarily the glory of creation, but the glory of God." He goes on to compare the glory of creation with the glory of God, saying

that loving the creation more or instead of the Creator is like a man being in love with his wedding band and not his wife. There's something wrong and perverse about it.

So, through creation, God speaks to us and tells us that He is there and that He has disclosed His power and character through His creation and it's plain to see. So, instead of worshiping the creation, we are to be like David in Psalm 19, who looks up at the heavens and recognizes it for what is --- a display of God's glory.

Q: Now, what do you think are some things that creation tells us about God?

A: The following are just a few instances where scripture links creation with God's divine qualities:

- His power (Is 40:25-26); ²⁵ "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.
- His wisdom (Is. 40:28); The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom."
- His love/compassion/provision to his creation (common grace, Psm. 145:9, 15-16), etc....,"⁹ The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. ¹⁶ You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing."

So God speaks to us through creation and, first and foremost He tells us there is a Creator. And as we notice and meditate upon what we see in creation, it tells us something of what God is like.

The second point, is only an implicit one, but an obvious conclusion that is important to point out. If creation tells us there is a creator, then it also tells us that we're creatures. We didn't create the Heavens. It's not our wisdom and power that designed what we see in the physical world. We know that. God did. Realizing this forces us to deal with our own dependence upon God. From our own creative abilities, we know that what we create belongs to us, we do with it what we please.

Even if we don't have all the pieces of the Gospel puzzle planted firmly in our minds and hearts, understanding that we are the created and not the Creator is one step toward understanding that we don't belong simply to ourselves but are subject to the one who created us. This recognition of our Creator and His handiwork in creation can play a vital role in giving us proper perspective about who we really are.

We get a glimpse of how this works from the book of Job in chapters 38-42. After Job laments his condition, questions God's justice, and extols his own righteousness before God, God really puts Job in His place, and God does so by reminding Job of the wonder of His creation:

⁴ "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.

⁵ Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?

⁶ On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone-

⁷ while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels ¹¹ shouted for joy?

⁸ "Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb,

⁹ when I made the clouds its garment
and wrapped it in thick darkness,

¹⁰ when I fixed limits for it
and set its doors and bars in place,

¹¹ when I said, "This far you may come and no farther;
here is where your proud waves halt"?...

And God continued.... When he was finished describing the complexity and awesomeness of creation, Job is a completely changed man. He now understands more fully to Whom he was talking and really accusing of being unjust, and his only response was that of humbled silence.

The wonder and magnificence of creation so powerfully described by God Himself, caused Job to realize how dependent he was on God and ignorant he was of God's designs. If Job can't possibly comprehend the designs of God's physical creation, which he can see with his eyes, how could he possibly understand the designs of God's justice, which he can't see with his eyes?

Creation reveals to us the glory of God and our own dependence upon Him.

Q: Ultimately, what does seeing the heavens cause the Psalmist to do? What's his response to the glory of God in the verse 6?

A: He worships / praises God. The very language he uses expresses marvel and wonder and really joy that is entirely directed at God.

So, this summer on vacation, if you relax by watching a magnificent sunset or stare out across a vast ocean and feel humbled by your own smallness and wonder at the power and majesty of God, and if that leads you worship God...well, that is the appropriate response to what God is telling you through His creation. That's the Psalmist's response in Psalm 19.

To summarize what we've discussed so far, one fundamental way in which God speaks to us is through his creation. As Horatius Bonar wrote in his hymn, "O Love of God, How Strong and True": "O wide, embracing, wondrous love, we read you in the sky above; we read you in the earth below, in seas that swell and streams that flow."

God's creation reveals His glory, His power, His majesty, and our dependence.

III. Vs. 7-11 (God speaks perfectly to us in His word)

Well, not only does God speak to us through creation, he also speaks to us through His word. And we see this as we turn to the second part of the Psalm that includes verses 7-11. Let's read this together.

Q: So, specifically, how else does God speak to us, according to David?

A: His law

As magnificent as natural revelation is, at the end of the day, it is mere and incomplete compared to the revealed word of God. Specifically, in Psalm 19, David refers to the Law of the Lord and says that the OT commandments, the divine law of God given to his people. Interestingly, we know from Exodus 31:18 that this law began with God's written Word, as he gave Moses the ten commandments and actually wrote them on the stone tablets with His finger.

I think it's instructive to note that at the time that David is writing Christ had obviously not yet come, the New Testament had not be written, yet we see here that through the Law, God had disclosed to the Israelites His character and His moral will. And David affirms a) that God speaks or reveals Himself to us through His Word, and b) that His Word is perfect.

So, in this one Psalm, we have the two primary ways given to us that God speaks to us: Through His creation and His Word, in this case the Word being the Law, which David describes as perfect.

And part of their perfection lies in their effect, to revive the soul, to give life.

Well, let's look further at how the Psalmist describes God's word. In addition to being perfect, it is trustworthy (vs. 7), it gives wisdom (vs. 7), it is truth (vs. 8), it brings joy to the heart and light to blind eyes (vs. 8).

And, why does it have this effect? Well, because God's word, his law, has God, the omniscient one, our creator, as its author. These byproducts of God's revelation through His law, such as joy, enlightenment, and wisdom, are proof of their divine origin.

There is a tendency by some to neglect the Law as somehow unimportant because of Christ. The gospel is the good news of Jesus, the Law simply bogs us down like the Pharisees. However, it's important for us as Christians to remember a couple of things with regard to God's revelation in His law:

First, Christ didn't come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. So it still reveals to us God's holiness and how he desires us to live. We know from the Gospels that the summary of the law and prophets (OT) is to love the Lord our God with all our heart soul and mind and our neighbor as ourselves.

So, on one hand, we know that Christianity is clearly not about a legalistic list of rules, do's and don'ts. On the other hand, the commands found in God's word reflect His perfect holiness, the beauty of His moral character and helps us know the sort of lives God has called us to live.

Secondly, the law also reveals our own sin (Romans 7) and points us to accept Christ, the only one to ever fulfill the law perfectly, as our substitute. It reveals to us our inability to live in complete accordance with God's moral law and subsequently our need for Christ and his work on our behalf.

Well continuing on in our passage...

So valuable is God's revelation through His Word, that David compares the law to gold and silver. (v. 10). In fact, he says that it is far superior to an abundance of the purest gold. We know that gold makes one well to-do, much gold makes one rich. Essentially David implies that God's ordinances, laws, etc. make one rich in wisdom, joy, and truth.

There are a few truths to note as we consider the value of God's laws...

First, and most importantly, value of God's Word lie in the fact they lead us a fuller and more intimate knowledge of God Himself.

We see this very clearly in Proverbs 2:1-5 it says, "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,² turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,³ and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,⁴ and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

And according to Proverbs, the way to get that knowledge is to seek after God.

Additionally, as God's laws lead us to knowledge of Him, they also have added benefits according to our passage.

Q What in verse 11 does David say God's laws do for us?

A: They warn us and grant us great reward.

First, we are warned, meaning that obedience to God's laws are designed, in part to protect us from evil. I've been reading through Proverbs recently, and that book is a great example of how following God's ways as expressed in His law keep us from evil. So, Proverbs is a great resource if you want some practical wisdom that teases out more fully what David says here: namely that's God's word, as expressed through his law, warns and protects us.

And secondly, David says that in keeping them there is great reward. We've already noted that it brings us knowledge of God. From *this* passage we also see that it will keep us from evil, as well as give us joy and wisdom in this life. But we also know that ultimately our reward for obeying God's word is not finally even in this life, but in the next life, where Paul tells us that "no eye has seen, no ear has heard of what God prepares for those who love Him." (I Cor. 2:9).

So backing up, for a minute, if God reveals to us His power, wisdom, and love (common grace), sort of generally, through creation, then His word, expressed through His law reveals to us His moral character (holiness), and how he desires us in fact to live.

To summarize 7-11, God communicates to us is directly through his Word: what theologians call special revelation. This is the means through which God has communicated particular things about Himself and his will for our lives.

Any questions?

IV. Verses 12-14 (Prayer of forgiveness and acceptance)

Lastly, let's look at verses 12-14. Let's read this together...

Q: What is the psalmist's response to God's natural revelation in creation, and His direct revelation through His word?

A: It seems it causes a self examination of sorts. So after reflecting on the glory of God revealed through His creation and the truth revealed in His Word, David is clearly humbled. He recognizes his imperfection and sinfulness, which leads him to confession before God and finally a prayer to be blameless before God.

And then notice that the psalmist closes with a prayer that his words and meditations will be pleasing in the Lord's sight. David's desire becomes to please God.

I think even in a church like CHBC where God's word is faithfully preached, it is easy to not allow it affect us. So, David here provides a great model for us. He not only takes time to meditate on God's revelation, but he's challenged by it in a way that leads him to humility and prayer for God to change Him. So the question for us is: are we like David? Are we taking time to consider God and what He has said to us? And are then diligently asking Him to use His word to change us?

These are good things to meditate on this week as you go about your everyday life.

Well, before we move on...I just want to briefly highlight the **The Implied theology (theological insight) of Psalm 19:**

1. God's glory, majesty, power and dominion is evident to all through natural revelation in creation. (vss. 1-6; cf. Romans 1)
2. The Scriptures are God's inerrant and infallible special revelation, revealing his righteous requirements and giving life to those who obey them. (vss. 7-11)
3. Man's response to God's revelation, whether natural or special, should be humble repentance and faith. (vss. 12-14).

So, essentially, Psalm 19 gives us a helpful framework for How God speaks to us, what he tells us, and what our response to his revelation should be.

Any questions?

V. 2 Timothy 3:14-16

Ultimately, the priority of God's word is taught not only in the OT, but also in the New. Before Christ ascended to Heaven, He promises his disciples that the Holy Spirit would be sent to remind them everything they had been taught by Christ, and also that the Holy Spirit would reveal to them the truth behind what they had seen and heard with Christ.

Theologian Wayne Grudem writes that "the apostles, then, have authority to write words that are God's own words, equal in truth status and authority to the words of the Old Testament Scriptures. They do this to record, interpret, and apply to the lives of believers the great truths about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ." (2 Peter 3:16/I Timothy 5:17-18)

In 2 Timothy 3:14-16, we have a strong New Testament affirmation of the priority of Scripture being the way God speaks to us. It's on your handout. Can I get someone to read this out loud?

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to *make you wise for salvation* through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Q: What is the source of Scripture? Where does it come from?

A: God (vs. 16, God-breathed)

Paul's words reinforce the truth that Scripture is the primary way in which God's speaks to us. *How much of Scripture is God-breathed?* All of it, not just the NT. And not just our favorite books - even the challenging and more obscure portions – they're all God-breathed and useful for our growth in holiness and godliness. They all tell us something about God and how we are to live as His children.

For example, we will never fully understand the depth of God's sovereignty if we ignore the book of Exodus and how God led his people from Egypt and provided for them. Nor we will we understand his faithfulness and justice if we ignore the prophets. And importantly, we'll never understand how the Old Testament anticipates Christ and how Christ fulfilled the OT Law, if we ignore the first five books of the Bible. So, if you're a new Christian, in particular, it's important to realize that all of God's Word is profitable for you, today, as you continue to walk with the Lord.

That is also why you'll notice that the preaching at CHBC alternates between the OT and NT over the course of the year, and why you will always hear a Sunday evening devotional on the same theme but from the other Testament than what was preached earlier in the morning. This is to drive home the point that all of scripture is God-breathed and that it's all useful for instruction.

According to our passage, the Bible is God's means to accomplish two things: First, he says it makes us wise unto our salvation.

Q: What do you think Paul means that it makes us wise unto salvation?

A: That everything we need to know about how to be reconciled to God is found in them. Scripture is not primarily to teach us how to be good stewards of our money or to help us with that tough relationship we may have. Rather, it's to point the way to God. It makes us "wise unto salvation."

Secondly, we also see the Scriptures equip us for every good work. Again, Paul is taking us back to this concept that a Christian's life should be characterized by good works. We saw that as one application of being "saved by God" and then "Living by God's Ways," and we see it again here. And it's not just that we are to do good works and then not given any clue as to what this means. Rather God's Word has been given to us, and it equips us in all that we do.

In considering this, I think it's important to note how practical the Bible is for our lives. I've often heard Christians say that nowadays people want sermons that are practical. And they do it such away that they seem, at least, to mean that you have to get real creative with Scripture to draw much practical application out of it.

But Paul says that Scripture equips us to meet to every good work that God has called us to do. Most fundamentally, it reveals who God is, who we are, and how we can be reconciled to Him. With that knowledge, it then equips us to live a life that reflects the hope we have in Christ.

So, for instance, the Word tells us how to behave as a spouse or as a parent toward to our children, towards our neighbors, how to worship God, what it means to live an honest and upright life, How Christians should treat one another. It also has much to say about anger, lust, temptation, what should motivate your faithfulness in work, how to be truly humble, how to be good stewards of your earthly blessings. And the list can go on and on...The point is that God has spoken to us perfectly through His word and by knowing it, we are equipped with everything we need to not only meet life challenges, but to overcome them in a way that glorifies God.

So when Christians say, "God spoke to me in a dream, or in prayer, and told me to do this and that..." we must be careful. It is possible that God will choose to communicate through extraordinary means, however that is not his MO – and he will never command us to do anything contrary to his will as revealed in Scripture. He has chosen to reveal himself to us in His word – which has its fulfillment in the person and work of Christ. So, every experience we have and any illumination of truth we make think we gain from God, but always be viewed through the lens of Scripture. That is how God has disclosed Himself and His ultimate will for our lives, namely to be holy and blameless before Him. (Mark's article...)

Any Questions...

VI. Conclusion

We've seen that God reveals Himself to us through his creation, and more importantly, through His word. His creation displays his majesty, his power, and his knowledge. Creation reveals the character of God just as thumb-print reveals the identity of a man. However God's word, his

laws and ordinances, speak perfectly to us as they give life and light, and provide warnings and rewards. They are also integral to our salvation, and teach and equip us for every good work.

So how can we know God's will for our lives? Fundamentally, we simply need to listen to what he has already said to us. That means we want to be students of the Bible, by reading and meditating on it daily, by studying it with other Christians, by faithfully attending the public preaching and teaching of God's word, and then by applying it prayerfully to our lives.

Two book recommendations. If you're interested in thinking more about the role and authority Scripture should play in our lives, read JI Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*. If you're looking for help with a daily plan of meditating on and applying Scripture to your life, try DA Carson's *For the Love of God*. Both are on the bookstall and are excellent resources.

Next week – Talking to God