

“The Heavens Declare”

15 August 2021 - Led by Ray Speer

Welcome & Call to Worship

Hymn of Preparation: How Great Is Our God

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Psalm 19

Sermon:

As many of you know, I am an electronics engineer by profession. So how do engineers think... well... in general we deal in facts and data... we don't like to have unquantifiable risk or unknowns So you may see a little of that come out in today's talk. We are all influenced and moulded to varying degrees by our experience.

I. God Revealed in the Heavens

And that's a great thought to start on as we look at Psalm 19. In David's young days he would have spent many nights in the open air looking up at the stars and marvelling at their majesty. For David there was no doubt, ■ 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.'... this is God's glorious work of creation... There is no 'comic coincidence' theory in David's young mind. Through the lockdowns and over the summer months one of the things I have really enjoyed was going on hikes in the mountains around Dublin ■ and up in Donegal ■ but the highlight was a trip Mark and I took to Skellig Michael. ■ The 7th century monastic settlement on a rock about one hour's boat ride off the coast of Kerry... and also the location for scenes in Star Wars, The Force Awakens. In places like this everyone, regardless of faith, has an appreciation for the natural beauty and even a sense of awe. But David's words do not come from some warm fuzzy feeling... he says v2 'Day after day they (the heavens) pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world'. OK, this is where the engineer in me begins to start asking questions... pour forth speech... reveal knowledge... what knowledge.

As a young shepherd David would have spent many nights out on the hillsides tending his sheep and would have laid on the ground and looked up at the sky. He would be very familiar with the patterns of the stars and would have recognised the movement of the constellations over the course of the year. These constellations form a calendar in the sky and this would have been essential knowledge for a shepherd, it informed him when to bring the rams to the ewes, when to come down from high pasture and when to prepare for the lambing season. The stars also mark the time of year for the Hebrew festivals. So there is knowledge revealed night after night.... and of course this is completely consistent with what God said in Gn 1v14... "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years".... But is there more to it?

In the following verses v4, David goes on In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth. This is excited and expectant language. A bridegroom coming out to meet his bride... an emotion filled description. In the last couple of weeks we've all witnessed Olympic competitors... we've seen the tense expectation on their faces on the starting line... and we've witnessed the unbridled joy of winning gold and being declared champion. This highly expectant language which David uses I believe is suggesting that the 'revealed knowledge' in v2 is something far more than just a celestial calendar. David knows he is looking at the handiwork of the creator God.

II. Mazzaroth, The Gospel in The Stars

Let me take a few minutes to introduce you to an idea I have found fascinating... The Mazzaroth and The Gospel in the Stars. ■ The Mazzorath is the ancient Hebrew name for the Zodiac with its 12 star constellations and signs. Now let me quickly say this has absolutely nothing to do with the astrology nonsense or horoscope predictions that you will find in the papers or elsewhere. If anything that just goes to show that things God created for good can so easily be twisted, distorted and abused. Archaeologists and historians believe that the Mazzorath or Zodiac dates back to the very beginning of civilization... but are puzzled about its origin.

Certain Christian scholars believe that God has communicated his plan for the redemption of mankind by creating a gospel narrative in the stars... specifically in the 12 constellations of the Mazzaroth. Let me very quickly explain the concept by using the constellation of Libra ■ as an example. Libra is Latin for 'balance' and the symbol associated with the constellation Libra is an old fashioned weighing balance. If you think that the constellation signs get their names and symbols because the stars form some sort of 'join the dots' picture... you are incorrect. The constellation names and symbols come from the narrative that unfolds when you read and interpret the ancient star names in order of their brightness... brightest first and so on.

The stars in Libra in order of brightness are;

- **Zuben al Genubi**... meaning Price Deficient
- **Zuben al Chemali**... meaning Price Which Covers
- **Zuben al Akrab**, meaning Price of Conflict
- Another thing you need to know is that the constellations also have associated stars called 'decans' and the decans for Libra are
 - **Crux**, the Cross
 - **Lupus**, the Victim
 - **Corona**, the Crown

You can see how these ancient star names create a narrative, telling the story of Jesus's suffering on a cross, to pay the price for the rebellion... sin of all humankind... a price that we could never pay on our own and would always be deficient, so Jesus became the victim, died on a cross, crowned with thorns, to set the balance of justice right.

Each of the 12 signs of the Mazzaroth tell of a different episode of God's redemption plan. If you want to find out more about this there are many books on the subject. The one I have is ■ **Mystery of the Mazzaroth : Prophecy in the Constellations**, Tim Warner.

Could this 'revealed knowledge'... possibly handed down from the patriarchs... be what David is excited and expectant about. Is 'revealed knowledge' like this...900 years after

David what led the Magi from the east to follow the star to find the baby Jesus in the stable in Bethlehem? ■

Interestingly... God gave Adam the job of naming all the animals in Gen 2v19, but several passages in the Bible refer to God himself naming the stars, Psalm 147v4, He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.

In the book of Job... God speaks of constellations by name, Job 38v31... the Pleiades, the bear with her cubs, that is Ursa Major and Ursa Minor astronomical names that are in common use today.

III. God Revealed in His Word

Next... David turns his gaze from the heavens towards the scriptures. He had the Law, the 5 books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and also Joshua, Judges, Ruth and Samuel. David sees the glory of God in the heavens, but he knows all too well that he needs more guidance from God to live life well. David categorises the Law of the scriptures with 6 poetic descriptions... I'm going to take a lead from Ken and organise these into an easy to visualize table. ■

God's Law	Attribute	Impact
Law	Perfect	Refreshes the soul
Statutes	Trustworthy	Making wise the simple
Precepts	Right	Joy to the heart
Command	Radiant	Light to the eyes
Fear	Pure	Enduring for ever
Decrees	Firm	Righteous

Maybe David's experience as King and law maker for Israel led him to these 6 categories, law, statutes, precepts, commands, fear and decrees. David is saying the entirety of the law of God is perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure and firm and when obeyed impacts life with many benefits. David has a 'high' view of scripture. I use the word high in the theological sense... that David considers the written words of scripture to be the very words spoken by God and recorded by man. I share David's high view of scripture... because of what scripture reveals and because of the consistency across all of the bible... old and new testament... when you dig deep... but more importantly because I believe in Jesus... and Jesus strongly affirmed the authority of scripture.

■ Mt 5v17 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

The world says 'if it feels good... then go for it'... but feelings are so often not a reliable guide when it comes to making decisions.

These words of David should encourage each of us to dig into the scriptures, to find an antidote for the challenges of everyday life... to find refreshment for the soul to encourage us to keep on keeping on... to give guidance when tricky decisions are needed... to find joy in all circumstances... to have a brightness in our character that gives us energy... to overcome the constant challenges that so easily niggle niggle niggle away at us... to live

lives that are righteous and honouring to God. David tells us the pursuit of these things has far greater value and brings more satisfaction than any worldly achievement or pleasure... I'll take the advice of a King on that score.

IV. David looks at himself

David looks up at the heavens and sees the glory of God... he looks into the scriptures and sees the divine nature of God ... lastly he looks at himself, v11-v13 and he doesn't like what he sees. I know how he feels... David sees that he falls incredibly far short of God's standard. He asks God to forgive him for the hidden faults... the sins we can't see in ourselves but are often all so very apparent to others... and then asks God to keep him, not to forgive him, to keep him from wilful sins. David had many wilful sins in his youth and had to live life with the consequences. This is a challenge we all face, often we know the course we should take but our rebellious nature takes us in the direction we want to go... all too often away from God.

In closing... David saw the glory of God in the heavens, he saw the greatness of God in the scriptures and in his soul he saw his need for a Saviour. We have seen what David did not see... we have seen the old testament scriptures fulfilled in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In Jesus we see the greatest revelation of God... in Jesus we see the grace of God reaching out to a lost humanity, to you and to me.... and to those who believe in Jesus... God promises to make us heirs to his glorious kingdom. Amen to that.

'May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer'

Praise: You Are Holy (Prince Of Peace)

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: IPH 187 How Great Thou Art

Benediction