

Focus: Psalm 19

Psalm 19 has some real bangers. How many times have you heard “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord, our strength and Redeemer” as an opening prayer for a preacher? It may be a little old-timey, but a preacher is hard pressed to improve on this invocation from verse 14 of the psalm.

My personal favorite verse is, “the fear of the Lord is clean and endures forever.” ‘Fear’ and ‘clean’ are not words that we often associate with each other. Fear might be better understood in this context as ‘awe’.

In my day-to-day life, I say “awesome” far too much. I misapply this word as something excellent or magnificent. ‘Awe’ - at its most psalm 19-esque – gives us a bigger window to see the world through. That bigness might make us a little woozy if we are used to seeing the world through a pinhole. Awe gives us a bigger windshield for our soul and cleans the glass too! We can see an awesome world around us. Forgive me when get lazy with this word because I will say awesome more Sundays than not. My new sneakers are cool, but they’re not awesome

Other Fans of the Psalm I’m not alone in my psalm ranking. Rabbis and preachers have returned to psalm 19 regularly. C. S. Lewis said, "I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world". The Rabbi’s derive meaning from 19 too, but are careful not to get too excited. They want to make sure that we don’t fall in love with the creation over the creator, because creation is only a pointer (albeit a great pointer) to God and God’s revelation (Torah).

The Torah enlightens humans, just as the sun lights our way - Shlomo Yitzchaki aka Rashi (died 1105 AD) French rabbi

Sun and the Torah both point to the glory of their Creator - Abraham ibn Ezra (died 1167 AD) Spanish Rabbi

The Torah is more beautiful and whole than the Sun -David Altschuler (died 1769) antisemitism drove his family out of Portugal. They resettled in the Czech Republic where he was a Rabbi in Prague.

Just as sunshine conveys God's glory in the physical world, the Torah expresses God's glory in the spiritual realm - Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser aka “The Malbim” died 1879, Polish Rabbi

See what I mean? The Rabbis are fanboys of the psalm *in context*. They love a good sunrise as much as anyone else but rabbis, preachers, and the psalmist all encourage us to never stop seeking the Creator.

Structure of Psalm 19 is all about ‘speech’ and how creation is talking to God. This is a perfect, clean, enduring, enlightening dance with the Redeemer in three acts.

Act 1: Creation speaks to God --verses 1-6

Psalm 19:3 Although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard, 4 Their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world. 5 In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun.

The image of God making a huge tent for the Sun just makes me smile. I am awed by this fearsome/awesome imagery that opens my mind's eye to a bigger world beyond a work-a-day life. I love that 'speech' is so much bigger than human mouths. God, creation, and the Torah all teach us the way of life and won't stop 'talking' about it. Clint McCann in his book *Psalms* says of all three acts, "Psalm 19 intends to teach."

Act 2: The Torah speaks to us - verses 7-10

Psalm 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent. 8 The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the Lord is clean and endures forever.

The first time this Psalm really stood out to me was when I was an "aspirant" for ordination. I was trying so hard to be an unimpeachable model of faithfulness. I wanted the Commission on Ministry to give me their stamp of approval at Camp Allen in Texas. My white-knuckle approach was exhausting and looking back - unnecessary. I am not a superhero even if tried with all my might. God is clean, enduring, and sustaining, especially when I hear and see the world speaking. This Torah 'law' is a gift from God. Rejoice that God's Torah revelation teaches you how to live – the psalmist tells us.

Act 3: The Servant speaks to God - verses 11-14

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

The Rev. John Price was my friend and co-conspirator in ministry at Palmer Church in Houston. He died in 2021 after a very full life. When he preached, he always opened his sermons with verse 14. I can still hear and see him trying to pattern his daily life after these words. He did a pretty good job of embodying "The servant" described in Act 3 of Psalm 19. I think you might hear me opening my sermons more often like this. It's clean and an enduring way to start anything. It also helps me remember my servant friend, John, with gratitude. **Todd**