December 2/3, 2023

Creation

Christmas in Context Series

Psalm 19, 29, and 8

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Years ago, G. K. Chesterton wrote, “The world will never starve for want of wonders, only for want of wonder.” Research shows that we lose about 90% of our imagination and creativity between the ages of 5 and 7, to such a degree that when we reach the age of 40, as an adult, we retain about 2% of the imagination and wonder we had at the age of 5. I would like to invite you, this morning, to engage your imagination and go with me on a journey to “Wonder”, at the awesomeness of our Creator God.

I'd like to do that through three Psalms. If you have a Bible this morning, we want to start with Psalm 19. The idea of God as the Creator God is a major theme in both the Old and New Testaments, and I believe there are things about God that we can only learn through the wonder of what He has made. Psalm 19, verse 1 opens:

> **The heavens are telling of the glory of God;**
> **And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.**
> **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.**
> **Their line has gone out through all the earth,**
> **And their utterances to the end of the world.** (*NASB Psalm 19:1-4)

Psalm 19 opens declaring that God has made Himself and His glory and His majesty known through what He has created. It has gone to the ends of the earth. It's very much like Paul said in Romans chapter 1: that God's glory—God's power and presence—is so evident through what He has made, to everyone around the world, that there's no one that could ever say, “I didn't know there was a God.” Paul also says that people may suppress the truth, but the evidence is very clear. We've been going through Exodus, and we may marvel at the stubbornness of Pharaoh to deny the obvious power and presence of God. But I find myself wondering. As 21st century Americans, are we so much different, or do we suppress the truth that seems so abundantly clear? My favorite line, in this part of this psalm, shows up in verse 2: **Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.**

Now, think about this. Back in the ancient world, this was written about 3000 years ago. So without technology and all the advances that we take for granted, everything was primarily about what you could see with the naked eye. So during the day, think about it. What do you see? I see blue sky; I see maybe some clouds, and I see the sun. But think about how different it is at night. Literally, ***night to night unveils the knowledge*** is what it says. It’s the idea that in a culture where there was no artificial lighting, and dark was really dark, it's as if God would pull back the veil and you see the depth and the complexity and the beauty and the wonder and the mystery of the universe God

has made. Here we are 3000 years later. We could easily say what has been unveiled to us is a hundred times more than what David had available to him. In 1990, the Hubble Telescope was launched, and the images it has provided of what is out there in our solar system are absolutely breathtaking. Check it out: (Video captured by the Hubble Telescope)

I just find the beauty and the wonder and the majesty and the complexity of what God has made, to be staggering. It's important to understand we're not just saying that God creates beauty, that God is mysterious. We're talking about the fact that beauty and color and majesty and mystery and wonder actually are rooted to God; they originate in God. Literally, everything we're trying to do in the fine arts is an attempt to emulate and copy what God has already done in creation. It's a staggering concept. In verse 1, when it talks about the **expanse declaring the work of His hands**, we've seen in Exodus the emphasis on the idea of God's hands, His power and His presence. This is a great imagery of God as the Craftsman, God as the Maker. The universe is the ultimate Maker's mark where you see the handiwork of a wondrous, mysterious, beautiful God.

Let's imagine that we took a trip to an art museum that housed many of the most beautiful paintings in the history of the world, and we go all through this art museum, but one of the things that's kind of curious is, there's nowhere in the museum where it identifies who the artist was. We think this is odd, so we get to the end, and we ask the guy, "We're curious why there's no identification of the artists for these great works of art?" And the guide tells you, "It's the craziest thing. This used to be a paint factory, and we had a gas leak. There was a tremendous explosion, and it exploded paint all over these canvases, and this is what resulted. There is not a single person who would buy that explanation. It is utterly, utterly ridiculous. It's interesting to think about this beauty, this majesty, this complexity, this wonder that has been there all along, but we are literally the first generation who has ever seen it. No other people in the history of the world have ever seen this, which raises the question, "Why would God do that? Why would God create such beauty and wonder and mystery and complexity in the universe if no one can see it?" And the only real answer is, "Because God sees it and He delights in it. It brings Him pleasure." It's like an artist who has painted a magnificent painting and just steps back and takes deep delight in what has been made.

I don't know what your view of God is, but often it's a pretty black and white, stagnant view. God is the boss…God is the king…God's this…God's that. But often we don't think of God as the Artist, as the Craftsman, as the origin of beauty and color and wonder and mystery. This is a whole other side of God that's beautiful. It also causes me to wonder, "What was it all like in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 before everything fell apart? God Himself named the garden "delight…paradise". Just how beautiful was that garden? If this is just a glimpse of the beauty of the handiwork of God, what was it like? There's also a reminder that one day it will be redeemed back, and we'll get the answer to that question when God ushers in the new heaven and the new earth, a world of such beauty and color and majesty, it's hard to even comprehend today.

Next, I'd like to skip to Psalm 29, one of my favorite psalms. It's another psalm of David, and it opens with these words:

> **Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty,**
> **Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.**
> **Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name;**
> **Worship the LORD in holy array.** (Psalm 29:1-2)

So David is calling the **sons of the mighty** to worship. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew term translated **worship** at the end of verse 2, literally means *to fall on your face.* So he is inviting the **sons of the mighty** to fall on their face before the glory and the majesty of this God. So who are the **sons of the mighty**? The sons of the mighty are *the movers and shakers*. They're the power-brokers of the world. They're the rulers. They're the rich and the famous. They're the people who think they themselves are God. It's the people that laugh at God. It's the people that mock God. It's the people that think they themselves have replaced God, and David's call is, "I would suggest you sons of the mighty, you fall on your face before this God." It sounds a lot like Moses with Pharaoh. "Don't trifle with this God. Don't mess with Him."

So what is it that's causing David to say this? Well, that's what the rest of the psalm is about. David is somewhere toward the north, probably in the mountains of Lebanon. He can see Mount Hermon, which is clear up in the northern boundary of Israel. He's looking out over the Mediterranean Sea, and he is watching a violent, raucous thunderstorm, and this psalm is about the raw power and wonder of that storm. As he goes through the description, you can imagine the storm coming from over the Mediterranean, over the coastal plains, through the mountains of Lebanon, and on past. The way the psalm is written captures the explosions of thunder, followed by those echoes of the thunder across the waters and in through the mountains. So I'll try to point that out as we go.
Verse 3:

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
(That's the explosion of the thunder. There's kind of an echo to that. The God of glory thunders the rumble. And now the echo):
The LORD is over many waters.
(Again the explosion. Verse 4):
The voice of the LORD is powerful,
(The echo):
The voice of the LORD is majestic.
The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
Yes, the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

The **cedars of Lebanon** were fabulous. They were incredible, and a source of great pride. But as David watches this violent storm go through, these magnificent cedars that were the source of such great pride for them, were nothing but a twig. God could snap them like nothing because of the incredible power He harnesses. That's what he's talking about in verse five. Verse 6:

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
(He's talking about the mountains.)
And Sirion (which is another name for Mount Hermon) **like a young wild ox.**

If you've ever seen a young calf shortly after it's born, they're uncoordinated and they kind of dance around, kind of spaz out. So as David is watching these cedars in the mountains in the storm coming through, it's as if they're swirling and bending and moving, and it looks like the mountains are dancing and spazzing out under the great power of this storm. Verse 7:

The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire. (The lightning as it crashes and explodes)

The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; (That's the thunder boom.)
The LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. (That's the echo through the mountains.)
The voice of the LORD makes the deer to calve
And strips the forests bare;
And in His temple everything says, "Glory!" (Vs. 7-9)

(The storm is so utterly terrifying, it even makes the deer calve. A ceaseless imagery of all creation bows before the power and the majesty and the glory of this great God.)

We here in the Midwest have some great, violent thunderstorms. I happen to like those. I like the crash of the thunder. I like the violence of the lightning. It's kind of this awesome moment. In 1505, the great reformer Martin Luther was enrolled in law school, and was traveling down a path one evening when he got caught in one of those absolutely terrifying, violent storms. It so shook him, so terrified him—he was so sure God was going to strike him dead—that he literally fell on his face on the road and there he remained until the storm had passed. He was so shaken that he immediately withdrew from law school and joined a monastery, which began a trajectory in his life of trying to figure out, "Who is this utterly terrifying God?" Maybe it sounded something like this. (Video of a violent thunderstorm)

David goes on in verse 10:

The LORD sat *as King* at the flood;
Yes, the LORD sits as King forever.

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David witnesses the awesome power in the lightning and the wonder of this storm, and he is reminded that God is the King. God sits on His throne. He sat on His throne over the flood of Noah's day, and He still sits as King over the universe. "Don't mess with this God. Don't trifle with Him…because He sits as King."

Can you imagine the sons of the mighty, the movers and the shakers, those who mock and make fun of God, those who think they're in charge, standing before this God in an awesome violent thunderstorm? What are they presenting before God? What are the idols they're holding in their arms to show God how incredible they are? Their houses? Their bank accounts? Their cars? Their fame? Their titles? What exactly is it they're holding on to before this God that convinces them they're something in the presence of this awesome God? In that moment, they're nothing more than a little speck that God could flick away. "Don't mess with this God. Don't trifle with Him."

I love a raucous summer thunderstorm, but I am not afraid of this God. I do find myself, however, very thankful in that moment that I am not at war with this God. When you experience the power and just the raw majesty of a storm, it makes me think, "What would it be like to feel like you're at war with this God?" I am so thankful I have been reconciled through the blood of Jesus, and that I stand right with this God. We're not at war, because what a terrifying thing that would be! And that's how David ends the psalm:

The LORD will give strength to His people;
The LORD will bless His people with peace.

To the sons of the mighty, I suggest you get on your face before this God, but for the people of God, the raw power and majesty of the storm is just a reminder that this is the God who is our **strength**. This is the God who delivers us. This is the God who gives us **peace**, which is the Hebrew word, "Shalom". No matter what I'm going through in life, no matter how hard it gets, this is the God that gives me what I need to flourish. And a raucous thunderstorm reminds me, "That is the God who is there for me."

The last one is Psalm 8. In my opinion, Psalm 8 is the best Old Testament text for rightly identifying the basis of our significance. In our culture, the counsel of the culture is, "If you want to feel significant, spend all day, every day, staring at yourself in the mirror because that's where it comes from. I'd suggest to you that's a really good way to ruin an otherwise pretty good day. David has a different perspective. Verse 1:

> **O LORD, our Lord,**
> **How majestic is Your name in all the earth,**
> **Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!**
> **From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength**
> **Because of Your adversaries,**
> **To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.** (Psalm 8:1-2)

That's a review of some of the things we've already talked about. Verse 3:

> **When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,**
> **The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;**

When David ponders the things we've been talking about this morning, **when I consider**…**the work of Your fingers**, this is a great imagery. We had, in Psalm 19, the idea of God's hands. He's the craftsman who has crafted the universe like an artist. This is a similar image but a little bit different. It's **fingers**, and it's talking about a potter and a piece of clay. It's very similar to the imagery in Genesis chapter 2 that God, as the potter, formed Adam from the dust of the ground. So, God is the great potter that has formed the universe exactly the way He wants it to be.

So think of it this way. A lot of people, when they think about God, they think about the universe, and God is out there somewhere in it. It's kind of like Santa Claus. He's out there somewhere. But that's really not the way it is. The universe is not bigger than God. The imagery here is that God is the potter, and the entire universe sits on the potter's wheel. And then He molds it and shapes it exactly the way He wants it. God is transcendent. He is outside of His beyond. He's bigger than the universe. God is so big that the universe sits on His pottery wheel, and He shapes it, and He forms it, and He makes it mysterious. The second part of that verse says: **The moon and the stars, which You have ordained**. That Hebrew word for **ordained** carries the idea of *carefully placed*. So, since it's Christmas season, think about a Christmas tree. You take your ornaments and you carefully place this one here, and this one goes here, and this one goes here. That's the word. So the universe is like God's Christmas tree and God is the decorator. He places the moon and the stars, "You go here," "You go here," "You go here." It's beautiful! But it raises a question, the same question, we're probably thinking. If all that's true, then verse 4:

What is man (mankind) **that You take thought of him,**
And the son of man that You care for him?

I think it's the same question you've come out of Genesis 1 with. A God that is so big…so big to create the universe, how could anyone know a God like that? How could God even know who I am, and much less, "Why would God even care?" We feel so incredibly insignificant. The Hebrew word that's translated *man*—**What is man**—is actually a very unusual word and carries the idea of *weak and frail*. David is feeling like, "Who am I, weak and frail that I am, that this God would even think about me, and the **son of man**—that's the more familiar term, the son of Adam—the son of the earth. According to Genesis 2, we are just well-formed dirt. So, who are we compared to the majesty and the wonder and the beauty of this God?

Verse 5: **Yet…(**If you're inclined to write in your Bible, I would circle the word **Yet**. (Yet, here's the truth of it):

Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

The idea of a *little bit lower than God* carries the idea that there is God, and then there is all creation. But there's this middle layer—made a little lower than God—and that is people made in the image of God. What David means by crowned with glory and majesty, is to be made in the image of God, to know God, to experience a relationship with Him, and to represent Him and rule over the creation that He has made on earth. Two of the most repeated terms in the 3 psalms we've looked at, are **the glory and the majesty of God**. So, we look at what God has made. We look at the wonder of what God has created, and we're blown away by the wonder, and the bigness, and the mystery of it all…***a God of such glory and majesty***! And David is blown away by the truth that, yet ***He has made me in such a way that He has crowned me with that same glory and majesty***. Of everything God has created, you are His favorite…for no other creation has been crowned with glory and majesty other than people made in His image.

Let's imagine I bump into you this week. You're out and about, and I say, "Hey, how's it going?" And you say, "Aw, not very good. I'm having a bad week; I feel like I have no value. I feel like I don't matter; I have no significance." And I say to you, "I'll tell you what. I'm going to crown you with **glory and majesty**." After I leave, you're going to be like, "What was that? I mean, he's lost it," because here's the problem. I don't have the glory and majesty to give you. I don't possess it. It's not mine. But that's the whole point. The wonder of creation is the glory and majesty of God on display. It is His, and in a way, that is just as stunning to comprehend. He has made us in such a way ***to share the glory and the majesty***. He has crowned me with glory and majesty to know Him and to represent Him and to live in relationship with Him. So he ends the psalm by saying:

O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth! (Vs. 9)

The way to experience significance is not by spending all day, every day, looking at yourself in the mirror. It's a good way to ruin every day. But, rather, cultivate a high view of God, because the more we understand and wonder at the glory and the majesty of God, the more we understand what it means to be made in the image of God and to be crowned with glory and majesty. A higher view of God means a higher view of self. It's absolutely stunning! It takes me back to Genesis chapter 3, where the illusion is that God would come to the garden in the evening, in the cool of the day, and He would stroll with Adam and Eve through the garden and take deep delight in just spending time with them.

Here's the staggering reality. What God wants from you is for you to desire to spend as much time with Him as He longs to spend with you, just delighting in who you are as a person crowned with glory and majesty. It does raise an interesting question though. What happened…what happened? The world is a mess! We look at everything around us and it's like, "Man, what happened?" That's a really good question, and it's a question we should answer. We'll try to do that…next week.

Here's your assignment for the week. At the beginning of the Advent season, my invitation to you is, "Slow down, and take some time to wonder." Maybe some evening this week, when there is a clear night sky, get out of town, away from all the artificial lights, and spend some time staring into the night sky. See the glory and the majesty, the beauty and the wonder of God's hand, and try to comprehend, "How is it possible that a God of such magnitude would crown me with glory and majesty, and invite me into a relationship with Him, both now and forever?" How is that possible? "The world will never starve for want of wonders, only for want of wonder."

Our Father, we're thankful this morning that You are an absolutely magnificent God who has put His artwork on display, the ultimate Maker's mark, that we might get just a glimpse of Your beauty and Your majesty and Your wonder, and then, God, to try to comprehend how a God so big, so vast, so powerful, so beautiful, that You would choose to crown me with glory and majesty, and that You would give up Your own Son that I might live in relationship with You. Lord, may we have a wonder-filled week. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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