

He Is Not Silent

Psalm 19

The popular atheist Richard Dawkins was asked by Ben Stein, "What will you do if one day you die, and you find out there is a God, what will you say to Him?" Richard Dawkins responded by quoting an atheist far more erudite and intelligent than himself, Bertrand Russell. Russell said that if he died and suddenly came face-to-face with a God he had always denied, he would say, "Sir, why did you take such pains to hide yourself?" Dawkins, along with many other atheists look at the world, and say, "Where is God? Why doesn't He make Himself obvious? Why doesn't He show Himself?"

But the attitude of Russell and Dawkins is not uncommon. Why doesn't God show up, they say? Why is He so quiet and hidden?

That kind of thinking leads to another kind of objection. What about all the people in the world who have never heard the Gospel, never heard about Jesus, perhaps never even seen a Bible? How can we possibly believe that God would hide himself from most of the people of the world, and send the life-giving Gospel to just a few, while leaving billions of people in total ignorance of Himself?

If these objections are true, then they are very damaging to the Christian faith. Why would the Creator of all be so inconspicuous, and why would he be so silent?

But in fact, the Bible teaches the very opposite of what these objections suggest. Far from being a quiet hidden God, the Bible teaches that God is a speaking God. He is and He speaks. He is a communicator, and His communication is both clear and constant. God speaks, and speaks so publicly and audibly, that denials of His speech become an example not of ignorance, but of wilful denial. God makes Himself so obviously known, that the objection that He is unseen and hidden amounts to a deliberate censorship of God.

Psalm 19 is one of the most beautiful and compelling celebrations of the speaking God. Psalm 19 tells us that God's declaration of Himself is so public, so obvious, so clear that only moral rejection can account for atheism. Psalm 19 not only answers the questions of why doesn't God make Himself more obvious to people? and what about those who have never heard?, it shows us how God has spoken and speaks. It details the vast arena of God's speech, and also the preciseness and clarity of this speech. The psalmist celebrates the three canvases on which God's message is written: God Revealed in Nature, God Revealed in Scripture, God Revealed in His People. This Psalm answers these accusations by showing us what kind of God the living God is.

I. God Reveals Himself in Nature

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.

The heavens – which in Scripture refers to three things – the sky, the cosmos of Sun, moon and stars, and the finally the abode of God. Here, the psalmist means the first two – the sky and the cosmos above it. Firmament refers to the expanse above, the sky. Now look at the two verbs. What actions do the heavens and the firmament perform? They declare and they show. Those are acts of communication. Literally, the heavens are telling, and the sky is proclaiming.

The psalmist is speaking about the created order, all of creation, all of nature, and he chooses the biggest and clearest example of how creation declares God. He could have chosen anything in the created order, and indeed, many other places in Scripture do. He could have chosen the plants or the trees, he could have chosen the animal kingdom, the oceans and their teeming millions, he could have chosen the weather and storms of the world, he could have chosen anything that can be seen,

heard, tasted, touched and felt. But instead he chooses that most public, most visible, most known phenomenon in creation – the sky and what we see in the sky.

Not everyone in the world has seen a giraffe, not everyone has been scuba diving, not everyone has seen a volcano, not everyone has felt an earthquake or seen snow-capped mountains. But every human being has looked up and seen the heavens during the day and during the night. Even those born blind have felt the sun on their faces. Across the globe, all mankind has looked up to see this vast blue dome we live under, seen the mighty gathering of clouds, the fierceness of storms and lightning. From ages uncounted, all men have looked up at night and hushed their voices under the cathedral of the stars. This is the most public possible speech, the loudest and most widely available message.

What are they preaching and teaching? What are they saying?

What is that message? Verse 1 says all this proclaims God's glory and His handiwork. What someone makes tells you a lot about the person. Walk through someone's home, and the decorations and the furniture and the paintings reveal something about that person. Listen to someone's poetry, or writing, or music, and you learn so much about who that person is. Taste someone's cooking, look at their garden, look at the business they built, look at the software they wrote, the movie they made, the music they play, and you are looking through a window into someone's soul.

Now with our space telescopes, we have seen more than the 3000 stars visible to the naked eye. We have learned that our galaxy has 100 billion stars. We have learned just in the last 100 years that ours is one of 100 billion galaxies. That means there are conservatively 10 Octillion stars, that's 1 with 27 zeroes behind it. Do you know that Isaiah 40 says that God has a name for each of these stars? Our most verbose language, English, has just over a million words. God has individual names for 10 Octillion stars, the tiniest fraction of which we have taken to naming NGC53241B, because we just don't have the words. The size, the grandeur, the power are staggering: galaxies colliding, black holes devouring, cosmic clouds light years across with wind storms. Who knows what vistas can be seen from Heaven's balcony? Our window is enough to tell a message.

Consider the sun in verse 5 and 6:

In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, 5 Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.

Pagan nations have worshipped the sun. But this psalm says that God made the heavens as the house for the sun. The sun rises like a Hebrew bridegroom on his day, headed enthusiastically to meet his bride. It seems to have the robust strength of a sprinter getting ready for his race. What kind of person's handiwork includes a ball of nuclear fusion burning at millions of degrees Celsius at its core, and keeping the Earth in a perfect orbit around it?

So what does the created order say about God's glory?

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, (Rom 1:20)

As man looks up, these declare and teach clearly and unmistakably that we live in a world that has been crafted, shaped and made by a Person. This Person has enormous power, to have crafted all this. That person has enormous wisdom, to have intelligently thought of it and made it work. And that Person has enormous goodness, to have made it so beautiful.

Now this doesn't mean that people see the cosmos and then begin reasoning and working out that God exists. It is not that they see, add up evidence, and then arrive at the conclusion that God exists.

No, God's existence is built into the human being. Look at verse 19: *because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. (Rom 1:19)*

John Calvin put it this way, "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty." The knowledge of God is hardwired into a human, and creation is verifying and illustrating what man already knows: all this was made by a powerful, wise, good person. Man looks up, and the heaven are shouting and proclaiming and preaching-, "The God that you know exists – he made all this." Knowledge of God is in the human and he is being assaulted by its sights and sounds all the time. Look at verse 2.

2 Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge.

God's revelation in the heavens and in the sky is 24/7. Day to day it pours forth speech, night to night it reveals knowledge. Since the 1950s, man has been scanning the cosmos for radio signals from an extra-terrestrial civilisation. They listen, hoping they might come across an intermittent broadcast by aliens who happened to be spraying the cosmos with their radio broadcasts. And all along, God's unbroken, unceasing, unremitting broadcast of himself in the sky takes place 24 hours a day and has for all the millennia of human history.

How widely does God speak? If we are not convinced yet, look at verse 3.

3 There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world.

There is no place on Earth, no speech or no language group, where the message of the heavens is not heard. The line, which means the measure, the extent of their message goes through all the Earth, and their words to the end of the world. When people say, "What about those who have never heard?" the answer is, "No one has never heard!" Every square inch on Earth has been exposed to this declaration of God's goodness and greatness. Look again at verse 6, speaking of the witness of the sun.

6 Its rising is from one end of heaven, And its circuit to the other end; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. (Psa 19:1-6)

Wherever you are, the message of the Heavens reaches you – the heat of that gloriously beautiful orb will reach you and shape the climate you live in. The regularity of the sun, the days and months, the seasons speaks of orderliness, regularity, faithfulness, beauty.

In theology, we call all this general revelation or natural revelation. It is God speaking generally to all mankind. It actually includes two other areas not included in this psalm: the human conscience, according to Romans 2:14, and God's works in human history (according to Acts 17:26), where God has worked providentially and miraculously. Whether you look *out* at the created order, or whether you look *in*, at the human soul, or whether you look *back* into human history and culture, you see God's handiwork. You see what He has made – the universe, and the human being with the image of God. You see morality within every human being. And you see God having moved in every culture in the world. Paul and Barnabas said to the pagans in Lystra: " 16 *who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. 17 "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."* (Act 14:16-17)

Now the thing about general revelation is that it is not clear enough to reveal specifics about God. You cannot look at waterfalls and understand the will of God. You cannot look at the sky and arrive at the Ten Commandments. You cannot look at the stars and understand the story of redemption and

the meaning of the Gospel. General revelation does not reveal a theology clear enough to believe. You cannot be saved by general revelation alone.

But what you can do with this is recognise that the Creator is personal, moral, beautiful, powerful, wise and good. You could take general revelation and earnestly seek the personal knowledge of who this Creator is. In fact, that's what Paul told the Athenians that it was meant to produce.

26 "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; (Act 17:26-27)

And in Scripture, we have some examples of that. We see the Magi, who read the general revelation in the stars and went seeking after Messiah, and they were led to Jerusalem, to the Scriptures that spoke of Bethlehem, and to Messiah. We have Cornelius, a Roman who seeks after the one true God of Israel, and God sent him Peter, who preaches the Word of God and leads him to Christ. But what we find is that apart from the drawing of the Holy Spirit, what does man do with general revelation? *who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (Rom 1:18)*

21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom 1:21)

Man knows God exists, he hears and sees the ongoing declaration, but he deliberately replaces the true God with gods of his own making – false gods, gods of naturalistic evolution, gods of new age spirituality. In other words, no one is a true atheist. Men put their own idols in front of their eyes to block out the knowledge of God, men put on headphones and play their own idolatrous soundtracks to drown out the loud preaching of creation of God, but no one is inherently an atheist.

Man has the natural ability to rightly interpret all this, but lacks the moral ability. He knows what general revelation does mean, and it means what he doesn't want it to mean: that he is personally accountable to a moral, wise, and great Creator. So he suppresses the truth, puts on dark shades, puts earplugs on, and says, “Why does God take such pains to hide Himself?”

Now you can see why Paul says that all men are without excuse. When you have a 24/7 ongoing declaration of a God you intuitively know exists, and you ignore and suppress that truth, not once, not twice, but every moment of your life – you are without excuse. General revelation is enough to condemn every man as a God-rejecter, as a conscious and deliberate idolater.

But God has not only spoke generally in nature. God saw fit to speak even more clearly.

II. God Revealed in Scripture

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. (Psa 19:7-10)

At first, it might seem as if this Psalmist has completely changed topic. Is he playing a completely different tune to what he was just speaking of? Not at all. The topic is still how God speaks, how God declares and shows Himself. He has spoken of general revelation, of how God has revealed Himself generally, and now he moves to speaking of how God has revealed Himself specifically, from general revelation to special revelation, from nature to Scripture, from the world to the Word.

What you have here is six triads, where God's special revelation is given six titles, with descriptions, and effects. The law, testimony, statutes, commandments, fear, and judgements are perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, enduring, true and righteous, and they will convert the soul, make wise the simple, rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes, endure forever.

The first thing you should notice about the difference between general and special revelation is that

in first 6 verses, we have only the title God – Elohim, the broadest, most general title for God in the Bible. But now in these verses we have the law of the LORD, testimonies of the LORD, and each of those is the Tetragrammaton, the personal name of God, the unpronounceable name of the four letters yod, he, vav and he, which is sometimes rendered as Jehovah or Yahweh. This is the personal name of the Creator God, and He only revealed this personal name through special revelation. You couldn't find out His name through the stars or the sky, you needed God to communicate in words.

Second, notice that each of the titles shows you that special revelation reveals the actual will of God. Law, testimonies, statutes, commandments, fear, judgments: these all are titles of a personal authority giving instructions, counsel, decrees, a code. You could not know what God wanted by looking at clouds and the ocean, but in special revelation it becomes clear.

Third, notice that special revelation is perfect. Whereas the general revelation of creation is mixed because it is tainted by the curse, that is not the case for special revelation. You look at the curse of sin bringing pain and sorrow to the created order, and it is a mixed message. But here the special revelation of God is untainted by sin or the curse. These verses tell us it is perfect, and sure, and right, pure, clean, endures forever true and righteous altogether. It is better than gold and sweeter than honey. God's Word is, in a world tainted and fallen, confused and decaying, the one thing that is absolutely perfect.

Fourth, notice the effects that special revelation will have on the soul. God's Word, converts the soul (brings you to salvation), makes wise the simple (disciples you), rejoices the heart (enables communion with God), and enlightens the eyes (gives you insight). Animals, rivers, lakes, sunsets, and the stars cannot save your soul, disciple you, bring you into conformity with God, and help you to understand the world. Indeed, to rightly understand general revelation, you need special revelation.

The Bible tells us that God did this in various ways. *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, (Heb 1:1)*

Sometimes God spoke in an audible voice, sometimes he sent angels to speak, sometimes the angel of the LORD spoke for God and as God, sometimes he gave dreams, sometimes he gave visions. He gave direct messages to prophets.

Now God seems to have done this in a limited way for various cultures. Job and his friends, Melchizedek, and believers from Seth to Noah must have had some kind of special revelation. But there was one culture that God chose to focus the vast majority of all His special revelation on, and that was the Hebrew culture. On this group of people, from Abraham through to the apostles, God gave dreams, visions, personal visitations, miracles, prophecies. And then, in the fullness of time, came the greatest special revelation of God to man. Into this Hebrew culture, the essence of God the Son was joined with a created human nature on the womb of a Jewish peasant girl, Mary. This is why Hebrews says

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds (Heb 1:1-2)

Nothing has ever revealed God to man like the Incarnation. The coming of Jesus is the clearest message of God to man. The words of Jesus, the works of Jesus, the life of Jesus is God revealed to us. *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (Joh 1:18)*

But of course, these acts of God speaking to the Hebrews happened at a particular time. The Incarnation had to happen at a particular time in the world's history. It cannot be repeated for all people of all times. And for that reason, God did another marvelous act of special revelation.

Along the way, he had these prophets write down and record, and the Holy Spirit inspired the result. So we had first Moses giving us the first 5 books, and then Joshua and Samuel recording the history into the time of the kings. And then we have the psalms and wisdom literature coming in that time. And then as Israel declined into idolatry, God sent the prophets, who became the authors of many books of Scripture. Even into exile and then returning, God led prophets and scribes to record the history and the prophecies, until the 39 books we call the Old Testament were complete. And then after the coming of Christ, God has several more Hebrews, either apostles or close associates of apostles give us the words and works of Jesus Christ, and the acts of the Holy Spirit after the ascension, and the instruction for the New Covenant.

God providentially made sure that His people recognised those works that were inspired, and collected them into the standard, or canon of Scripture. And more than that, the Bible is the most translated book into 531 languages, with 2883 languages having some portion of the Bible, and still the most widely published, sold and distributed book in history, with over 5 billion print copies.

Special revelation is gracious. God does not have to give this to a world rejecting general revelation. But He did. Again, is God hiding? Or is man refusing to see? Is God whispering? Or is man blocking his ears?

General revelation – creation, conscience, and human culture. Special revelation – all God's communication culminating in Christ and the completed canon. But the last verses of this psalm reveal a third way God declares Himself to the world.

III. God Revealed in His People

11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward. 12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. 13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression. 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. (Psa 19:11-14)

Now as I read this, I wondered why the Scripture was described here in six ways, and not seven. Seven, after all is the perfect number, and God's Word is perfect. My guess is that the seventh thing is broken off and separated from it, and placed in verses 11-14 because it is the result of God's Word, and not God's Word itself. It is the people that God's Word creates. David now begins speaking about himself, which he refers to as 'Your servant'. He has moved from the Word to what the Word creates. We believe we are born again by the incorruptible seed of God's Word, as the Gospel is preached to us from it.

God's Word creates a people. He Redeems these people as verse 14 says. These people become the living witnesses of God to the world. But unlike God's Word, we are not yet perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true and righteous altogether. But we are the way God's perfect special revelation gets fleshed out and declared to the world. If God's Word has no humans in which it lodges and changes, it will be a perfect book, collecting dust somewhere in the world's libraries.

But God's people become the vessel for God's Word to be known and shown. *2 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. (2Co 3:2-3)*

God said to Israel that His name was being blasphemed among the Gentiles because of their behaviour. God's people carry God's name. We who are saved carry the light of the Gospel within us. *6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in*

earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2Co 4:6-7)

For this reason, David is very concerned in these last verses with his testimony. Since God's people are God's ambassadors, since God's people are the media that transmit God's Word, David wants as little corruption in that transmission as possible. He wants to be free from sin.

Specifically, he wants to be free from two kinds of sin.

In verse 12, he wants God to reveal to him his sins of omission – the sins he is not aware of, the sins of failure, and wrongdoing without clear knowledge.

In verse 13 he wants forgiveness and cleansing from presumptuous sins – the sins he did on purposes, knowing full well they were evil. And in fact, the Mosaic law had no sacrifice that atoned for presumptuous sins. **Num 15:30-31** *But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him. "*

If David's life is free from secret sin and presumptuous sin, then he will be blameless and innocent of much transgression.

But David does not only want to put off, he also wants to put on. In verse 14, he summarises all of his life in terms of words and thoughts, speech and attitude. Let my words, and my thoughts, be acceptable, be pleasing to you, my strength, and my Redeemer.

And what will he then be, if he is a blameless believer with words and thoughts that are pleasing to God? He will be a clear communicator of God's Word. He will not distort the message. He will walk wisely and honestly before watching unbelievers. His life will declare the glory of God. His life will declare God's Word, which is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true and righteous. He will become a means of people being converted, made wise, rejoicing in God, enlightened.

You can have general revelation, and then special revelation, but if those who are truly redeemed by God do not live blameless lives in thought and word, the clarity of God's special revelation will be marred. That's a fearful responsibility. You and I are clearer statements of who God is than anything the Hubble telescope will reveal. We the means by which the clear, intelligible and revealed will of the Creator is made known to the world. **13** *For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved".* **14** *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Rom 10:13-14)*

Does God speak? Does He reveal Himself? God reveals Himself generally in creation, conscience, and culture. God revealed Himself specifically in Christ and the canon of Scripture. He reveals Himself by fleshing out this special revelation in His church.

On the final day of judgement, it will not be Bertrand Russell or Richard Dawkins asking God, "Sir, why did you take such pains to hide yourself?" It will be God asking each of them, "Man, why did you take such pains to hide from Me?" He is not hidden. He is there. And He is not silent.