June 28, 2015 Don Riley

God’s Glory: The Psalmist Answers Micah

Psalm 19

Good morning dear friends at Woodland Presbyterian Church. The turmoil and national events of this week remind me of an illustration pastor E.V. Hill once gave. It is a series of cartoon boxes or squares. You see the comic strips and they lay out in little frames. He was very animated as a preacher, and I cannot copy his exuberance. Forgive me if I show you some of his animation. In the first box you see an egg. In the second little cartoon square, you see that the egg is cracked. The third you see a little chick looks straight out. The next view the little chick looks to the right. The next square, the little chick looks to the left. In the final square the chick tries to take the egg and close it over himself. And E. V. Hill in his great preaching said, “Little Chick, you cannot go back. You can’t bring that egg back together.” He went on and said that first the little chick looked out and saw violence, gang warfare, carjackings, and murder. Then the little chick looked to the right and saw young people on drugs, college students dying from alcohol overdoses, young post college aged individuals committing suicide. Then the little chick looked to the left and saw our Supreme Court decisions and he wanted to pull it back together. Then the chick tried to close the egg, and hide from all the trouble. But did you notice that the little chick looked straight, looked to the right, looked to the left, but the little chick did not look up? That’s what we are going to do this morning. We are going to look up to God. We are going to put our minds on the things above. We are going to consider the glory of God.

The bible is full of questions. Great questions like the one asked about Adam and Eve, “Where are you?” God knew. Or to Cain with regard to Abel, “Where is Abel your brother?” God knew. Jesus said to his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Jesus knew.

Well, Micah, the contemporary of Jeremiah, facing the pre-exile threat of Judah’s destruction asked the question, “Who is a God like you?” I want you to turn to Psalm 19 for our answer to Micah. Yes, David came before Micah, but it is just like God to have the answers in place before the question is even asked. That is a confessional acknowledgement of a reversed chronology for those dealing with the timeline.

Psalm 19 is a treasured Psalm. C.S. Lewis said Psalm 19 the greatest poem in the Psalms. It possesses one of the greatest lyrics in the world. Micah asks, “Who is a God like you?” David the psalmist in Psalm 19 gives a three-fold answer in 2 categories, 2 distinct categories, general revelation and specific or special revelation. “The heavens declare the glory of God.” The scriptures declare the God of Glory. Nature reveals there is a God. Scripture reveals who He is. A threefold outline would include verses 1-6, God the creator; verses 7-11, God the instructor; and verses 12-14, God the redeemer. But let us concentrate of the first two aspects, general revelation and specific revelation, for now.

“The heavens declare the glory of God.” Heavens. In Jewish cosmology there were three facets of heaven, or to put it another way, there were three heavens. The atmosphere of clouds, rain, lightning, that was considered the first heaven. The sun, moon, and stars, that was considered the second heaven. And the spiritual real place where The Trinity resides with all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ, the third heaven. And remember Paul said he was caught up in the third heaven.That’s the real heaven where you go as a Christian when you die All three are covered in this Psalm. “The heavens declare the glory of God. The sky proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech. Night to night reveals knowledge.” You know it is interesting, the Jewish people were forbidden (Ex. 20 4-5; Deut. 4:14-19; 5:8,9) in Exodus and Deuteronomy to worship the objects in heaven. They worshipped the Creator, not the creation. The existence of creation implied the existence of a Creator. The reference to Creation is called general revelation.

Let me give you three observations about general revelation. General revelation is continuous, its abundant, and it's universal. This general revelation is continuous. “Day after day they pour forth speech. Night after night they display knowledge.” That’s continuous. Famous people come and go. Kingdoms rise and fall. Wars come and go. Have you ever thought about this? The sun comes up day to day. Every single day. Every single night of every week, of every year, year after year, and they have done this since creation. Now we are not to be faulted for taking this for granted but I want you to just marinate on that. No matter what changes in the world, the sun still comes up. And then you have night. One of you is probably thinking, “I hope this sermon gets a little deeper than the sun comes up. That’s what he’s got for us today? The sun came up? OK” But general revelation is continuous and abundant.

General revelation is abundant. It pours forth speech. In the original Hebrew language, the image is literally of a gushing spring. If you look at the stars, they testify abundantly. If you study the human body, you will find it testifies abundantly to who God is. You can study a flower, a blade of grass, a snowflake, the intricacies of the atom, the nature of light, physical laws like gravitational attraction, the second law of thermodynamics or relativity--all of these testify abundantly to a divine mind that lies behind them. Famous biologist Edward Wilson claims there are 1.6 billion species of fungi. 10,000 species of ants, 300,000 species of flowers, 4-5 thousand different mammals, over 10,000 species of birds. People who come up with life lists on birds are lucky if they come up to 1,000. So this points to the fact that it is continuous, it’s abundant and its universal.

If you notice further down in the passage, verses 3 and 4. “Voice goes out into all the earth, these words to the ends of the world.” And then 4 and 5 he says, “In them he has set a tent for the sun which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, like a strong man runs its course with joy. It rising is from the end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.” (v. 4b-6) You see David the Psalmist spent a great deal of his shepherding time outside observing nature. He watched the sun day after day. It reminded him of a bridegroom leaving the marriage pavilion to claim his bride and a vigorous athlete running a race. And notice verse six it says “Nothing is hidden from its heat.” This verse is a good transitional segway, a fine link from the witness of the physical creation to the witness of the Word. Because the scripture sometimes warms us, penetrating and sometimes burning and scorching like fine dross heated to reflect the person of Christ.

It is not enough to just be aware that there is a God. We needed something to reveal the character of God. We send missionaries, and you have a couple coming next Sunday, because God not only predestined who would come to him but how they would come to him. If you ask a 5 point Calvinist or someone in evangelism, “Why if people are predestined, why evangelism?” God predestines the people but he also predestines the methodology. He said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them all that I have taught you.” Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

So now in 7-11 you have scripture. We have special revelation, or specific revelation. If you are looking at your Bible I want you to see 8 times God is mentioned. The first mention in this song is God which is El, the name that speaks of God’s power. But the next 7 times God is mentioned the term Lord, Jehovah, is given which is the name for the Covenant God. So he goes from the general revelation God, Elohim, the first mention. And the rest all the way through the passage, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord. That’s a covenant relationship with us, Jehovah. There is no conflict between His creation and His covenant scripture. There is no conflict between what He does in the universe and what He says in His word. You see, a perfect God does all things perfectly. A perfect God gave us a perfect Bible in the original language. I believe in inerrancy. It means the original autographs that God gave us were perfect. Because either man judges scripture or scripture judges us. And to say that there are are flaws in the Bible is completely taking to task the character of God. It is by His word that He created the world . It is by His word that He sustains the world (Ps. 33:9,11).

In verses 7-11 we hear six different names for God’s word, six different attributes for God’s word, and six different ministries of the word. “The law is perfect.” “The testimony is sure.” “The precepts are right.” “The commandment are pure.” “The fear is clean.” “The rules are true.” The Law is the Tovah, but it also refers to all of God’s revelation. The testimony refers to the 10 Commandments. The precepts are the detailed instructions in scriptures. The commandments are another name for the law. The fear is a most unusual, seldom ever used name for scripture. But all the scholars say he is calling scripture the fear of the Lord. The rules are the verdicts. Look at the benefits and how they minister to us. The perfect law revives the soul. The sure testimony makes us wise. The right precepts rejoices the heart. The pure commandment enlightens the eyes. The clean fear endures. The true rules produce righteousness. Look at the benefits of the word of God. They are to be desired. They are to be tasted. They are to be heeded. They are to be a blessing.

Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Creation is a wordless book that everyone can read because it needs no translation. Scripture in the hand is fine. Scripture in the the head is better, but in the heart best of all.” The way we treat the Bible is the way we treat the Lord. The way we treat the Bible is the way we treat the Lord. If we ignore the Bible, we ignore the Lord. Many of you tweet, text, email, Facebook, Instagram. We live on our devices. The way we treat the Bible is the way we treat the Lord. I’ll get around to you someday Lord. I’m sure you are somewhere in the house. The way we treat the Bible is the way we treat the Lord. I worked my way through seminary speaking at different high school youth groups. I remember one group wanted me to speak on the Bible. They were all fired up about talking about the Bible, but none of them in this high school youth group had brought a Bible. I spoke on this passage, Psalm 19 to a group of cub scouts one time.It was a large conclave down at Camp Currier. There were like 500 Cub Scouts. I walked out and this little boy said, “Hey mister! Mister, do you really believe that stuff?” I went, “Yeah, actually I do.” He said, “Where’d you get that? Where’d you get that stuff?” I said, “I got it in the Bible. Do you have a Bible.” He said, “You know as a matter of fact, my parents collect Bibles. They have hundreds of Bibles. They have a case with rare Bibles. They have Bibles with golden edges. They have Bibles that are hundreds of years old.” I said, “Well which one do you read?” And he said, “I’ve never read one.” I said, “I tell you what. Open up John, the gospel of John and start reading it and see if what I just said was true.” I said, “You’ll never remember my name, but the only change that will change about you will be everything.” The word. It is the word before us. We do have Christ the Redeemer as a witness within us. You see interestingly enough, the end of Psalm 19, the Psalmist knew about hidden faults (v. 12). He knew about presumptuous sins (v. 13). He knew what it meant to be blameless (v. 13). He knew what it meant to be innocent (v. 13) He knew that the Lord was His rock (v. 14). He knew that the Lord was His redeemer (v. 14).

I hope I do this lovingly and graciously. Before the Supreme Court reached its decision this week, before the results were in, I had planned and prepared Ps. 19. Quite frankly I wasn’t thinking about it. I wasn’t even sure what day it was going to come down. Every scholar who address Psalm 19 includes Romans 1 because of the key verses and key thoughts of verses 19 and 20 which say, “For what can be known about God is plain to them.” He is talking about general revelation. “Because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that are made. So they are without excuse.” This New Testament passage affirms the power of creation to demonstrate God’s creative power, God’s glory through creation. God has plainly demonstrated His power, His nature, ever since the creation of the world.

The logic is since there is a creation, there is obviously a Creator. The Romans teaching is found right in the middle of a passage addressing unrighteousness. (Rom. 1:20) “They are without excuse.” Verse 21 says, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.” Verse 24 says, “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.” Before you think that we are going to get off on a particular topic, I want you to see verse 29 because it lets none of us escape. “They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They were full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossipers, slanderers, haters of God” The list goes on.

Be encouraged dear friends at Woodland. I am not going to preach on the sin of homosexuality. There is enough sexual sin in all of our congregation for us to separate this sin out. I have, for the past 16 years, facilitated a group at the Christian Psychological Center for people who have struggled with sexual addiction. I have dear friends who are homosexual. I have a relative that is homosexual. This is real to me. This is not some political statement. I have dear people that I know. But there needs to be courage from the pulpit. But this week, the Supreme Court institutionalized sin. It is not an act of love to dishonor God and his word. How you view the Bible is how you view God. And God was left out. But you know, it is not new to me. When I was in the PCUSA, the denomination in which I was ordained, a denomination I dearly love, with people I still dearly love, I served at Cordova Presbyterian Church as their minister in the PCUSA. I served as president of the Dallas Presbyterians Pro-Life Group after Roe v. Wade in 1973. And I went to the general assembly every year and had people come up to me and get in my face who were pro-death. They wanted to argue and I just wanted to listen. They were shocked. I don’t want to fight. Tell me your view. I’ll listen.

I think one of the wisest things anyone can do is to acknowledge that God is on the throne and God is in control. God is on the throne. God is in control. The EPC put out a statement at their general assembly this very week which I will read. Because nothing I have said this morning contradicts what your denomination officially says. It is very short. It is very loving, and we need to hear it. It is on the Woodland web site. “The Evangelical Presbyterian Church grieves today’s ruling of the Supreme Court, which illustrates the continued disregard for the biblical, traditional, Judeo-Christian values upon which the foundation of our nation was founded. As the church, we continue to rest our faith in the sovereign God and the authority of His Holy Word. We pray faithfully for our nation and our leaders as so commanded by scripture. We bear no malice toward those with same-sex attraction; in fact we love them with the love of Christ. However, as a Church, we must adhere to the biblical definition of marriage rather than a cultural one. We recognize that civil governments adopt policies that do not align with biblical values. However, those policies must never require that people of faith abandon the clear teaching of Scripture, forfeit the right to proclaim those truths, or change their beliefs or practices.” I think the Evangelical Presbyterian Church presented you with a loving, godly statement. This quite frankly leads us to the hope in the redemptive work of God. Remember what we read from Micah? In Micah chapter 7, verses 16 through 18, it says God forgives iniquity. God passes over transgressions. God delights in covenant love. God has compassion. He casts our sins into the sea. God takes all of our sins and puts them in the depth of the sea.

When you love someone and they do things that hurt themselves by making bad choices you are grieved. You are saddened. Because I love America, I am grieved and saddened. God’s glory and the knowledge of God’s glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Moses was hidden in the Rock of Ages, hidden in The Person of Jesus Christ, from all that God was doing and was going to do. Micah asks, “Who is a God like you?” Habakkuk, when he saw the evil of the nation and asked God, “How can you let this go on?” Remember he said, “Are you inactive? Are you indifferent. Are you inconsistent?” God told him to go to prayer. And he gave 3 G’s: grace, glory, and government. He said in verse 4, “The just shall live by faith.” He said in verse 14, “The knowledge of God’s glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” And then he said in verse 20, “The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silent before him.” He was saying, “Live by faith, my glory will be revealed, and I am in control.”

What will you do? Last Sunday morning, so many of you said nice things. But one of you came up to me, because of the sermon about prayer, said that they were going to go home and spend an hour in prayer seeking God’s glory. I challenge to to read your Bible daily. Start July 1st and I’ll join you. Read his word. Know that he is a redeemer and changer of lives. I also want to recommend a book by a lady named Rosara Butterfield. It’s entitled “The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert.” It’s an English professor’s journey into Christian faith, an amazing book. Rosara, at 28, had finished her PhD in English Literature. She said, “I was a teaching associate at one of the first and strongest women’s literature programs in the nation. I was recruited to take on faculty and administrative roles, and at the age of 36 I was one of the few tenured women at a large research university, a rising administrator, a community activist. I was one of the radicals. By all standards I had made it.” She was at Syracuse University, and avowed lesbian, head of the lesbian and gay studies programs. She was a champion of all that the Supreme Court celebrated. And this book is about a pastor and his wife invited her over for dinner and just started answering questions. The didn’t debate her, they just treated her like a friend. I the pages that follow she says, “I share what happened in my private world in what the Christians call ‘conversion’. This is simply too tame a word to capture and too refined to capture the train wreck I encountered when coming face to face with the living God. I had to give up everything.” Are you playing with God? Are you playing with him? How you view the Bible is how you view God. She is happily married with children because of the redeemer, the rock, who changes and transforms. If God is not real, if he is not impacting your life, let me encourage you to confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Faith comes from hearing and hearing the word of the Christ. As Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.”

I am going to give you an opportunity to receive Christ because you know it doesn’t happen in Presbyterian churches often, and we need to give people the opportunity to meet Jesus. I’m not going have you stand up, raise your hand, or handle snakes. I’m not going to have you do anything but do business with God. I’m not going to have you sign anything except say, “Lord, I need you. Please come into my life as savior and Lord.” And if you do pray this with me, I want you to let me know afterwards. Because if there is not change or transformation in your life then why are you here? If you do not have the joy of the Lord in your heart, then why are you here? Don’t worry about the Supreme Court decision. Know this, that God is in charge, and he loves you with an everlasting love. And he is not wringing his hands and not reading Time Magazine. He is reading eternity. And nothing has changed him. This is a great nation. You can still sing, “America, God shed your grace on thee!”

May God be praised and may God receive the glory as you look to him as Lord and savior. Gracious Father, these are difficult ties for us because we see dimly. But then one day we will see face to face. Heavenly father, we ask you to come into our lives as Lord and savior. Teach us to be able to confess Jesus and believe in my heart that you raised him from the dead. Lord, I want you to come into my heart for the first time. I want you to be my Lord and savior. For those who have been indifferent. who have lacked the joy, Lord I ask that they would recommit their lives this morning. Fire us up to read your word. Fire us up to know that the just shall live by faith and the the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. You are in your holy temple. You are on your throne. Nothing that happens in and around us will impact or change your holiness for which we praise you in the matchless and wonderful name of Jesus. Amen.