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The Heavens and the Law

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world...The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of

the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” Psalm 19:1-4, 7-9

There are two great books that declare the glory and power of God our Creator. They are the Book of Creation and the Book of the Law. The psalmist describes both books in Psalm 19. Creation itself testifies to the Creator God. There is no language barrier and no geographical limitations to this witness. Anyone should be able to understand that there is a Creator God, even though we might not understand a lot of details. The Book of the Law extolls the virtues of the laws and testimonies of God. Surely, the way God speaks to us most intimately is through the inspired word. These aren't just the ideas of men, these are the truths of God that have been delivered by the inspiration of his Spirit.

In this issue we are happy to welcome Ron Collins and his son Brian Collins as our writers. They have lived in the Los Angeles, CA area for years and worship with the Sepulveda Church of Christ. We appreciate these two men and their dedication to the kingdom. ...lsg



The Book of Creation

Much to the dismay of my family, friends, and casual acquaintances, I do not have a great desire to travel. I did not obtain a passport until I was past seventy years old and still have not used it. I live only miles away from the world's largest ocean, the Pacific, and rarely go to experience it. When I tell people I am nearing retirement they automatically think I will use the additional time to travel. It is doubtful that will likely happen. I have a great affinity for my reclining chair. However, living in Los Angeles has afforded me the opportunity to meet, work with and enjoy stories from people that have lived all around God's created earth. One man challenged me to travel so I might correct any misconceptions I might have collected along life's journey. He related that he was from a faraway country, had dark skin and spoke with an accent. He had planned to go to Oklahoma but feared from what he heard that he would meet greatly prejudiced people. Instead, to his surprise, he said they were extremely friendly and kind (congrats to all of you in the great state of Oklahoma). He wondered what misconceptions I might correct if I traveled. I am sure he is correct that I have some faulty views in my head of foreign places. One belief I have would not change if I traveled the world over; it could only be enhanced. It is the belief in the greatness of God.

All I must do is walk out my door, look up and see God's glory. In Psalm 19:1 David tells us to look up and see God's majesty. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." No one has an excuse for believing there is no God. The Psalmist exposes such foolishness in Psalm 14:1, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." A song written by Thomas R. Sweatmon frequently pops into my mind when I stroll in the evening. He wrote: "Walking alone at eve and viewing the skies afar, Bidding the darkness come to welcome each silver star; I have

a great delight in the wonderful scenes above. God in his power and might is showing his truth and love." The sky is, perhaps, the most universal confirmation of God's greatness, but is not the only confirmation of God's greatness. Jesus challenges us in the Sermon on the Mount to look at birds or flowers to see God's handiwork. Looking at the gorgeous colors as well as the fragrance of flowers shouts to us that God is the creator. The waterfalls and mountainous peaks in Yosemite say that there is a mighty God. Man cannot begin to match the colors of Autumn in the New England states. From the Alps to the sands of the Sahara, they testify that God created and saw, "It was good."

The descendants of Abraham had the blessing and challenge of God's direct intervention in their lives. They knew that if God were with them, they would triumph but if they disobeyed, they would fail. What about those people that were not in this special covenant relationship? How were they to know about God? Paul addresses this question in the first chapter of Romans. In verse 20 he explains that God is evident in his creation, so all are without excuse. He continues and points out that we became so smart in our own imagination that we became fools. This foolishness led to worshipping our own man-made gods which we invented. Today the same earthly wisdom continues. We love to worship the created more than the Creator. Deuteronomy 4:19 warns us that when we look into the heavens instead of seeing God's majesty we can be driven to worship them instead of Him.

Paul continues in Romans to the sad descent that occurs when we fail to see God in his greatness. We fall into a sinful life that destroys us. In verses 24-27 he first notes the immorality that we invite to fill the lust of the heart. God does not force us to do his will. He lets us choose our own path. Unfortunately, this allows us to go deeper into a sin-

ful life. Our society today applauds and celebrates the immoral. Everything from homosexuality to making a mockery of the sanctity of marriage. It is invading the church much like it did for the church at Corinth. I recently did some talks on the letters written to the churches in the New Testament. I asked what we could be expecting if a letter was written to us as individuals or to our congregations. Paul couldn't believe that a man was with his father's wife. He said even the pagans don't do such things. Would he be appalled at our moral compass? Young women dressing and exposing themselves in the same way the world dresses. Language that is not seasoned with salt and pure.

Paul continues in Romans and addresses not only immorality but a whole host of other problems. He points out the arrogant attitude that is so prevalent, slandering, envy, disobedient to parents and even murder. When we fail to see God's beauty in all his creation there is no end to the depths we can fall. We have always wanted to be in control. It started when Eve decided she should be as smart as God. Instead of appreciating him and his glory we begin to make things up. In the book of Job, we see men reasoning about Job's situation and they are sure they have it figured out. They are all on the same page, except Job, so they must be right. In chapter 38, God has heard enough of their foolish reasoning and begins to reprimand them. God's proof that he is right is mainly based on the grandeur of his creation. He wants them to explain it all. The rain, the snow, oceans, the stars, and on and on. We may have some explanations today but surely God is saddened as we try to leave him out of the creation. In all our brilliance, are we able to duplicate what he created?

None of us can use the excuse we didn't get the message. His message is all around us that he is God and he is Creator. Our only question should be, "How do I honor this great Creator?" Perhaps because David spent so much time in the fields tending to sheep he often looked to heaven to see

the stars. It seemed to stir a great many thoughts. In Psalms 8:3-4 he writes, "When I consider thy heavens, the works of thy fingers, the moon, and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man that thou art mindful of him? The son of man that thou visitest him?" In a manner, every day we see his creation from the smallest sparrow to the highest mountain; we should be humbled. Just like the Apostle John when he saw the Almighty in Revelation and fell at his feet dead, we should be amazed at all that is about us. Does it drive us to worship him? Do we without question put him first in all our plans? How is it that God cares so much for us? He gave us this wonderful world and then His only begotten Son. Who knows, maybe I might take a trip to see more of God's creation and appreciate him even more.

...Ron Collins

Panorama City, CA

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 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, 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. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Romans 1:18-23

The Book of the Law

On an early morning in August, we awoke before the sun rose to drive along a long and winding mountain road in California to arrive at the entrance of a trail that would take us to the bridge to nowhere. Every so often, Felicia and I would do something like this when the kids spent the night with their grandparents. A little adventure.

As the sun started peeking through, it was far busier with hikers than I expected. I would soon learn that this bridge to nowhere is a popular bungee jumping locale. An old man with a cane asked my wife and I if we would be bungee jumping today. I didn't even know there was bungee jumping here. I said, "I don't think so; we're just hiking to the bridge." The bridge was constructed by prison workers in 1936 as part of a road that would cut through the San Gabriel Mountains. After a flood in 1938 washed away much of the road before it could be completed, the project was abandoned leaving a beautiful 120' high bridge to nowhere.

The old man gave us some advice. He said, "Just follow the people in the orange hats. They know where they are going."

The old man gave us some advice. He said, "Just follow the people in the orange hats. They know where they are going." Little did we know that this rocky trail crossed through the San Gabriel River about a half dozen times and it would be easy to get lost. The orange hats were the people that worked with the bungee jump outfit. They hiked this trail daily and knew everything about it.

A fit, young man in an orange hat was giving a speech to a group that had signed up to go bungee jumping. Felicia and I decided to get ahead of them while they were receiving their instructions

from the orange hat. It was not long before an orange hat passed us on the trail. And it also wasn't long until we realized we better follow that orange hat. The trail seemed to disappear, so we looked ahead to the orange hat and said, "I guess we should go that way." And when the orange hat left our view, an uneasy feeling set in that we may be going the wrong way. So we quickened our pace until we could see the orange hat again. There was comfort in following someone who knew the way on this 9.5-mile hike.

King David was known as a man after God's own heart. I don't know what exact qualities make David a man after God's own heart, but as you read the many psalms of David, you will find a man who loves the Law of the Lord. So, I wonder if that is not a large part of what makes God look at David and say that man right there has a heart like mine.

In Psalms 19:7-11, David proclaims the great qualities of the Law of the Lord. This law is perfect, converting the soul. You see, I can criticize you for sinful behavior and you can criticize me, but it often will do no good. The notorious Al Capone was quoted as saying, "I have spent the best years of my life-giving people the lighter pleasures, helping them have a good time, and all I get is abuse, the existence of a hunted man." We can delude ourselves into thinking all kinds of evil is good. Al Capone, with the destruction he orchestrated on society and individuals alike, was able to convince himself that he was a good guy just trying to help people have a little pleasure in life.

I can tell you something is wrong, but only when the word of God is invoked does it become an immutable law. And when we realize that God almighty speaks, then our souls can be converted.

David goes on to tell us the testimony of the Lord

is sure, making wise the simple. I imagine David reflected on many of the simple laws that God handed down to the nation of Israel through Moses. He likely understood that laws like the Passover were not simple rules to follow to appease God, but very wise instructions that were good for the soil of the land, good for the health of the human body and so much more. We can spend our entire lives diving deeper into the word of God and see how good this stuff is.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. Life gets easier when we grow beyond the age of questioning God. It is not a bad thing that we question the Bible. Before we become Christians, and even as young Christians, it is good to ask if this is right. Did God actually say this? But after challenging the word of God so many times, you will find it is trustworthy over and over again. It is at this point that you find a comforting guide for your life. A heart that is rejoicing and eyes that are enlightened. There is a great deal of peace that comes with the Law of the Lord.

Peter would hear people question if these stories about Jesus really happened. He wrote in 2 Peter 1:16-21 that these were not cunningly devised fables. There are fables out there, meant to trick us and take advantage of us. Peter says, "I was there, and I am telling you first-hand what I saw and heard. This is not a trap." Peter was trying to get people past this point of challenging what they were being taught to the good part where we completely trust in Jesus.

David continues in his psalm, the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. Many things change and we observe that it isn't like it used to be. But a proper fear of the Lord does not change over time. We must understand that the consequences of breaking God's law are quite real and consistent.

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous

altogether. I have noticed a lot of reporting on rulings from judges in our U.S. legal system only to see them overruled very quickly by another judge within days. The one judge implying the other judge ruled incorrectly. The Lord judges and you can know it is the final word, and it is good.

The law of the Lord serves as a warning against our own self-destruction.

And then David goes on to tell us how much we should desire these laws, testimonies, judgments, and fear. As much as we desire to collect gold, we should desire these things from God. As much as we crave for sweet goodness like honey, we should crave these things from God.

The law of the Lord serves as a warning against our own self-destruction. The laws are not hoops for us to jump through to please a demanding God. They are a guide that will give us comfort and show us the way.

Felicia and I made it to that bridge to nowhere. The person in the orange hat reliably guided us through a difficult path. The odds that we would have made it there without the orange hat to follow were low. It was comforting and a joy to walk a beautiful path, even if it was challenging and confusing, with a guide that gave you confidence you were going the right way.

You know life is the same way. There will be times when the Law of the Lord is the only way to know if you are heading in the right direction. And difficult as life may be, it is a beautiful adventure when guided by God.

...Brian Collins

North Hills, CA

Reflections of the Psalms: Psalm 8

Have you ever gone out on a clear, moonless night, looked up and stood spellbound by the beauty of the heavens? You have? Good! Then you can begin to picture in your mind what David was probably doing when he wrote Psalm 8.

In Psalm 8, we find two great themes. First is the majesty of God; and second, is the surprising importance God has given humanity. The Psalm begins and ends in an unusual way, in that, it begins and ends with the same words. And how appropriate those words are!

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” Have you thought that when YOU have looked at the stars? One of the great blessings that exist in this universe is beauty. No scientist can explain “why” beauty exists. I’m sure that God could have made everything function very well without beauty, but He created a beautiful universe for us to live in and appreciate.

Not only is the glory of God set above the heavens, but it can also be found upon the lips of children and infants. Children always have a “trust” and an acceptance of God that comes from within. As children grow-up, they are “taught” better, but God’s glory can surely be found upon the lips, and in the purity of a small child. David’s thoughts may have turned to children because of the sound of children in the background. We don’t know, but his eyes and thoughts were drawn back to the picture of the stars.

Invariably, as we look at the stars, we begin to compare our own lives and importance against that dazzling array. David certainly did that, “When I consider your heavens...what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”

That is a good question. When we consider ALL that God has made, why ARE we so Important in

His plans? Compared to the universe, our lives are little more than a brief spark - most animals are bigger, stronger, or faster than we are. So, why us? Within the Psalm, no answer is given. The “whys” are to be left to God. It is sufficient to know that we are important.

Verses 5 through 7 do give a hint of God’s plan for mankind, “You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet...” God’s purpose for man was, and is, to rule. That sounds very noble, but as we look around, the world does not seem to reflect God’s purpose.

The writer in Hebrews observed the same thing, but he also wrote that God’s purpose has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The world, and those joined to the world, is under the sentence of death. This world will pass away, but all who are joined to Jesus Christ will see the fulfillment of God’s Plan. Peter said that Christians are Holy and ROYAL priests. We are part of God’s royalty because we are part of the King.

When David looked at the heavens, his insignificance and the insignificance of mankind became painfully clear. But think about it. Today, we can go beyond David’s thoughts. Look up at the heavens. Look at the infinite distances, the majestic beauty, and the sense of eternity. Then consider that in Jesus Christ we will be alive long after the seeming eternity of this universe is just dust and memories.

By himself, man is a weak and rather pathetic creature, but when man is joined to God through Jesus Christ, then he shares in the divine nature of God.

Yes, the universe is awe-inspiring. But the true beauty rests with our Lord. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

...Jim Shelburn

San Antonio, TX

He Has Blessed Us

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without defect before him in love, having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire, to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he freely gave us favor in the Beloved, in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him to an administration of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in him. We were also assigned an inheritance in him, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who does all things after the counsel of his will, to the end that we should be to the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ. In him you also, having heard the word of the truth, the Good News of your salvation—in whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is a pledge of our inheritance, to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of his glory.” Ephesians 1:3-14 WEB

From Ephesians 1:3 to Ephesians 1:14, Paul, in the Greek text, uses one long and continuous sentence. He begins this letter by praising God for the abundant blessings which are in Christ. As Christians, we have much for which to be thankful. In addition to the rich and full blessings found in Christ, Christians also have become members of God's family. As members of His family, Christians are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, a guarantee

of our inheritance. Considering this passage, I would invite you to consider the rich and full blessings we share in Christ.

...Steve Ellis

Pasadena, TX

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.
1 Peter 1:3-5*



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