

Psalm 19:1-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-19/psalm-191-6/>

God's creation speaks of His glory. The heavens, the stars, the sun, all speak of His essence as Maker and Lord of all.

The heavens are telling, David writes. Look up! This passage is full of verbs of revelation—*telling, declaring, reveals*. The *heavens are* communicating with us. Listen and see with more than just your eyes. Listen and see with your entire sense of experience.

Much more than a small spirit of animism, assigning spiritual causes to lifeless objects, David invites us to witness and hear the articulate testimony of the heavens above for they *are telling* us something important in ways as beautiful as they are powerful. They are *telling* us about the One who designed them. We can learn of the Creator through what He created. All of creation speaks to the glory of God, but David picks the macro-creation that nobody can miss!

The subject matter of the *telling* is of paramount importance. David is not focused on the *heavens* themselves, which for all their might are merely part of creation. In the *telling*, creation is acknowledging the Creator. *The heavens are telling of the glory of God*. With one clear, incisive phrase David immediately establishes two things.

- First, more than merely existing, the true God (Hebrew “El”) is and brings existence itself to life.
- Second, the divine character of God permeates creation with a continual testimony to His unique glory (Hebrew “kabowd”—abundance, honor, splendor).

David's declaration of God's unequalled glory presages the prophet Jeremiah's wonder-struck declaration before the Lord: “There is none like you” (Jeremiah 10:7).

The Septuagint Greek Old Testament, LXX, the first widely accepted translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek (written for an increasingly Hellenized Jewish world) renders the word *glory* as “doxa.” While intending to capture the Hebrew ideas of abundance, honor, splendor and the like, it also directs the reader to the idea of “observed essence.” God's *glory*, by this additional insight, reflects the grandeur of the Lord because it is an observable disclosure of His very nature.

The Apostle Paul, well educated in the schools of the Pharisees, was undoubtedly familiar with both the Hebrew and Greek scriptural writings. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul lays out a “glory map” for believers to consider. Everything has its own “essence” or nature, it's own particular disclosive glory (“doxa”). No one entity's glory is like another's; each is unique. For example, each star in the night sky has a glory particular to only itself. Those who would follow Jesus Christ are—through faith—to reflect the glory of God through abiding in Him, and bearing His fruit (John 15:8).

The structure of ancient Hebrew poetry is not found in rhyme or meter, as is often the case in English poetry. Some of the distinctive poetic devices used in the Hebrew Scripture, as in the Psalms, instead utilize such strategies as a) parallelism of thought and image, b) personification, and c) repetition. The Hebrew listener is sought to be drawn in to the poetic experience by clear and well-placed ideas acting in concert to arrive at inspiring conclusions.

The second phrase of Psalm 19:1 uses the device of personification: *And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands*. Here the stars and other heavenly bodies are personified as speaking. They preach. They are *declaring the work of His hands*. The perfect verb tense *declaring* indicates an ongoing, constant repetition. The *expanse* of the “heavens” continuously declares God’s glory, by illustrating His creative genius, among other characteristics. In fact, God’s characteristics can be observed by anyone willing to see (Romans 1:20).

In Psalm 19’s very first phrase David drew attention to God’s preeminence and glory as the Origin of creation. The second poetic line or phrase of verse 1 provides an echoing, parallel image that essentially repeats the “preaching” activity of *the heavens* but casts it within the entire length, breadth, depth, and height of that creation: *their expanse*. Using the conjunctive *And* links the continuous heavenly *telling* to the never-ceasing witness resulting from God’s evident, visible, and ongoing handiwork in creation. *And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands*. David confidently points his listeners to the creation glory that belongs alone to the one true God from whose *hands* comes all that is created.

To grasp the enormity of God’s creative work, one must be willing to see and acknowledge what is happening in the heavens, visible across their enormous expanse. Creation gives full voice to God’s primacy and might without the impoverishing limits of human speech or intellect. Verses 2 and 3 present a pair of delicately balanced opposition of terms that serve to emphasize the uniqueness of God’s glory and power revealed through His work of creation.

- *Day to day pours forth speech* (v. 2a) and yet
- we are told there *is no speech, nor are there words* (v. 3a).

How is such a continuously abundant flow of *speech* actually speechless, bereft of vocabulary? Again, verse 2b tells us that *knowledge*, specifically knowledge of God’s handiwork, is disclosed majestically in the horizon-to-horizon panoramas of repeated nighttime skies. Yet, in verse 3b, that abundant disclosure of knowledge is characterized as voiceless.

David’s poetic constructs push his listeners to realize that God’s self-revealing disclosures in creation are deeply experiential and as fluid as relationships between cognizant individuals can be. It is not words, vocabulary, or an approved lexicon of acceptable terms that are required to enter into this particular divine conversation with the Creator. It is something else: presence and perception. To grasp the enormity of God’s creative work, *the work of His hands*, one must be willing to see and acknowledge what is happening in the heavens, visible across their enormous expanse.

The last part of this first section is the first part of verse 4, which says *Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world*. The *line* (Hebrew “qav”)

being spoken of here brings to mind a measuring line. As God asked of Job, relative to the expanse of the cosmos He created:

“Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line (“qav”) on it?”
(Job 38:5)

The idea seems to be that the expanse of the heavens showing God’s creative work sets forth a standard of reality. Just as a measuring stick displays a standard of measure, the created universe shows a standard of reality, in this case a reality of God’s glory as its creator.

There is no place on earth that this *line* or measure is unseen—the *utterances* (words) of the heavens are “heard” *to the end of the world*.

The Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 to answer a question regarding whether there are some humans who have not heard the “good news” of the gospel. Paul asks:

“But I say, surely they have never heard, have they?”
(Romans 10:18)

Paul answers “Indeed they have;” in the same verse, then quotes Psalm 19:4a,

“THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH,
AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD.”

In this case, Paul uses a Greek word translated “words” for the Hebrew word translated *utterances*, indicating that the *utterances* of the heavens convey content, informing any onlooker of God’s creative glory. Paul substitutes “voice” for “line” perhaps summarizing the verses that have come before.

We might find surprising this assertion by Paul, since it comes immediately following Paul’s assertion that humans preaching the gospel is a beautiful thing:

“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!’”
(Romans 10:14-15)

It seems Paul is saying that that even though God desires humans to preach His good news, to preach His word, and that is a beautiful thing, it is not necessary in order for humans to have “heard” His good news. That is because God imbedded that good news within His creation, and it is readily observable for anyone willing to see (Romans 1:19-20).

The next section praises God for the revealed word that He gave through the Bible. Whether it is the spoken word of God, the written word of God, or the observable reality of God’s creative genius in nature, all things point to the good news of God’s character and care for all that He

made. This points to a theme of scripture, that God's glory is on display all around us. The more science progresses, the more it becomes inconceivable that life began without a Creator—THE HEAVENS DECLARE. Holding on to a materialistic thesis has become more and more untenable. This is why Psalm 14:1 tells us "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'."

The final movement within the first section of Psalm 19 is an energetic and imaginative romp through the daytime sky. Verses 4b-6 portray a sweeping view of the sky's canopy arcing from the eastern horizon to the western. David has observed the routine track of the stars, planets, moon, and sun across those skies. The journey of the celestial bodies visible at night are followed on by what is seen during the day.

Within the daytime sky God has placed the sun, the most visible and powerful of all the observed celestial bodies, whose light and heat are not to be denied. *Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them.* David gives delightful poetic character to the sun as a *bridegroom* rising to make his appearance with great joy.

The sun's daily appearance is not an event characterized by timidity. It is like the confidence that surges happily from a *strong man* dominating the race set before him. The radiated light and heat of the sun's daily course reaches across the entire circuit of its journey. The sun's catalytic presence is evident to all, as is God's glory and power throughout all creation.

David implies there is an order to what is visible in skies each day and night that cannot be dismissed as fortunate circumstance: it is a well-conceived, reliable design. The rhythmic, active spectacle occurring in the created heavens each day and night is available to be seen, to be experienced, throughout the entire earth. Without a *voice*, this aspect of creation is nevertheless clearly discernible and visible in even the remotest parts of the world.

A premonition is found here related to what Jesus, echoing the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, would ask so many centuries later: "Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?" (Mark 8:18). The Apostle Paul confirms the active self-disclosures of God that are to be found within the wonders of the created order in his writings (Romans 1:20, 10:18). God's character as disclosed in creation is so clearly displayed that it requires a deliberate refusal in order to miss.

Those who do miss it are, therefore, "without excuse." One is also reminded of the classical English author Jonathan Swift (1667-1754) and his oft-attributed observation: "There are none so blind as those who will not see."

Biblical Text

For the choir director. A Psalm of David.

¹ The heavens are telling of the glory of God;

And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

² Day to day pours forth speech,

And night to night reveals knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there words;

Their voice is not heard.

**⁴Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.**

In them He has placed a tent for the sun,

**⁵Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber;
It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.**

**⁶Its rising is from one end of the heavens,
And its circuit to the other end of them;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.**