

“WHERE CAN WE KNOW ABOUT GOD?”

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Sermon Texts: Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20; II Peter 1:3-4

Introduction.

Mankind is incurably religious. Monkeys don't ask questions about where they came from. Cows have zero curiosity about the meaning of life. Even as smart as dolphins are, they have yet to show any interest in why questions or what their purpose on earth is.

Mankind alone of all the creatures on this planet is incurably religious. Cultures and tribes going all the way back to the beginning of time have practiced religious rituals. I am not aware of a single tribe or culture or people group that has ever been discovered that didn't give evidence of religious beliefs and practices. Certainly there are plenty of atheists around, but never a completely atheistic culture or people group.

I like the old story about the atheistic cultural anthropology professor who took his class to observe some remote native tribe. They saw a man dancing around in a clearing chanting and cutting off the head of a chicken and spreading the blood around. The professor is completely dismissive and mocking and ridicules the backwardness of it all.

But the uneducated African native is far closer to the truth than the educated Western professor. The native believes there's a power greater and higher than him who is worthy of some kind of honor or worship. He believes this power is personal, that it has something to do with him and his life. And he believes that somehow blood is important to the relationship.

Mankind has always had thoughts and ideas and beliefs about deity and a consciousness of sin and morality. We are religious to the core. The question is where do those thoughts come from? Where do we get our ideas about God?

If God is infinite and incomprehensible and spiritual and invisible as Article One says, then how can we know about God and what He is like? It's really one of the most important questions there is, because knowledge of God determines our eternal destiny.

Revelation.

The source of our knowledge about God is called revelation.

Idle speculation is a fool's errand. No amount of guessing could get us to the truth. If we are ever going to know anything about God, He will have to reveal Himself to us.

Christianity rests completely and solely on the self-revelation of God. If God remained silent, we would know nothing about Him. We cannot reason from here to there. God's self-revelation is the only source and foundation of our knowledge of Him. And we can only know about God what God chooses to reveal about Himself.

God's self-revelation says three things about God. *First*, He is a personal God who communicates, He is not silent but speaks. *Second*, God tells us things that are not knowable by

any other means. **Third**, God has created man with the ability to receive communication from God and the ability to understand it.

Article Two, based on the teaching of Scripture, says that there are two books by which we can learn about God. The book of creation and the book of Scripture.

The First Book of God, General Revelation, Creation and Nature.

We often refer to the first book as General Revelation. We gain knowledge of God and something about God's character and nature from nature, from God's creation.

This book of general knowledge is general in its content and general in its audience. This book of knowledge gives a general knowledge about God as creator and sustainer and is generally available to all mankind. Everyone can read this book even the ignorant and illiterate.

Article Two gives three headings under this book, creation, preservation, and government.

Creation

In creation God went public. Psalm 19:1-6 extols the wonderful revelation God has made of Himself in all of creation, in the heavens and the earth.

The heavens and the earth are great preachers whose voice is heard loud and clear and render every human being without excuse.

Day after day, night after night, every single day every single human being wakes up to a symphony of praise to the glory of creation's God. We open our eyes to the splendor of a supremely great, creative creator God. Every waking moment pours forth more proof and evidence of the knowledge and wisdom and power of God. God continues to go public every single day for all to see in every language, among every people group.

To open your eyes is to see God. There is no spot in the universe where you cannot see some glimpse of His glory, the whole earth is full of His glory and His glory covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

All creation is like a mirror in which you can contemplate and meditate upon God. As a magnificent building causes one to praise the craftsmanship and skill of the architect and builder, so all creation calls us to worship the wisdom and skill and power and ability of the master creator.

With every improvement of the telescope and the microscope new glories are revealed. With every new discovered more words, more language pouring forth speech concerning the creator.

One day all the scientists of the world will affirm what all Christian theologians of the world have been saying for centuries, "This Is My Father's World."

To speak of Mother Nature is a denial of God. Nature doesn't have a mother, nature only has a Father, a divine Father. The Greek goddess of the earth was Gaia, and Gaia worship or earth worship is increasing in our day. It's idolatry and blasphemy to give credit and glory to another besides God.

We should glory in the God of the birds that sing, the mighty mountain grandeur, the flowing rivers, the fierce storms, the crashing waves, the beautiful forests and great plains, the towering redwoods and oceans teeming with life. Look, notice, watch, observe, contemplate, just take it in and meditate on it.

To contemplate God's creation and reflect on Him glorifies Him. Glory in His greatness, glory in His works. Read the Psalms and learn the language of adoration and praise.

Preservation

Article Two doesn't just have creation speaking but also the preservation and government of God. His power and divinity are all around us all the time.

Colossians 1:16-17 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, ***and in him all things hold together.***

Hebrews 1:3 he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

We think things are held together by gravity or by centrifugal and centripetal forces, but back behind those forces is the word of His power.

God not only created the universe but through His Son He controls the universe He made. From the beginning of the universe to this very moment God is actively upholding and sustaining and preserving and protecting His creation.

This activity of God in creation reveals His sovereignty, His providence, His care.

Heidelberg Catechism:

Q.27. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD?

A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty - all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand.

Government

God reveals knowledge of Himself to us in His creation, in His upholding and sustaining of His creation and in His governance of His creation.

God rules and overrules by His power and authority, by His laws. All the laws of science and physics and mathematics are God's laws. In fact the word law is meaningless without a lawgiver. To speak of laws without speaking of a lawgiver is folly.

This speaks also to God's direct involvement in human history. Everywhere in history if we will look and notice we can see the direct hand of God.

"All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved." (HC, Q&A28).

Acts 17:24-27 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he

needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.

By this we see God's ever present power and authority and will. By this we see that God is personal, interested, involved.

The Content and Limit of General Revelation.

General revelation is like a giant mirror big enough for everyone to see. This mirror of creation reflects back to us the glory of God. In it we see the fingerprint of God in all of His handiwork. Creation points to a creator God.

Or as Calvin puts it all creation is a theater of the glory of God. All the world is God's stage. Paul says:

Romans 1:19-20 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 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 have been made. So they are without excuse.

How can we not be awed by the vast power of God in all the universe? A flare on the sun can equal millions of nuclear bombs and that's less than the flick of God's wrist. If God just speaks the word "galaxy" there it is with a hundred billion stars, how much power is that?

We can know something of God's divine nature and invisible attributes in creation, that He is eternal, powerful, invisible. We can know that He is nothing like us. We can see that He is wise and creative in nature's design.

I would add that we can get a glimpse of His justice and wrath when His power is revealed in destructive ways as in a great storm, a hurricane, a tornado, an earthquake or a tsunami.

When the Bible says "The fool has said in his heart there is no God" (Psalm 14:1) the reason he is a fool is because God has given him enough evidence. He is foolish for ignoring it and will be without excuse before God. No one will be able to stand before God and claim they didn't have a clue. They are without excuse because they have sinned against the knowledge they have received.

All nature reveals is that there is a God and we are conscious of a fear, a fear that things are not right between Him and us. Nature is sufficient to convict us and convince us and leave us without excuse. The fault is entirely ours, and not Gods.

Romans 2:1, 5 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, ... 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

But as we affirm what the book of creation teaches us we must also acknowledge the *limits* of this general revelation. We learn about an eternal, powerful, wise creator so much so that every human being is without excuse in the final day, but we cannot learn of God as Redeemer.

We need help reading the first book, we need some reading aids, some assistance. We need a special revelation. Because of the depravity of our minds we have no way for finding our own way to our Savior.

The Second Book, Special (or Specific) Revelation, Scripture.

Psalms 19:1-6 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

But:

Psalms 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

The first book is awesome, but it cannot make us wise to salvation. We need our Bibles to reveal to us that God is also a redeemer. And of the two books the second is clearly superior to the first (notice more openly, as much as we need).

Scripture is superior to nature because only Scripture lights the path of salvation. Moses outranks Orion and Pleiades and Andromeda and the Milky Way, and Jesus outranks Moses.

If the first book is a mirror, this second book is a pair of prescription glasses that enables us to see much more clearly who God is and what He is like. The Bible makes God visible, plain, open to our spiritual senses. Here God pulls back the veil and uncovers Himself.

II Timothy 3:15 ... the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.

Ephesians 1:13 ... the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation ...

The Scripture is the permanent, objective and reliable revelation of God to mankind for all ages and in all places and in every circumstance. This is God's means for bringing us to salvation.

Application and conclusion.

These two means by which God reveals Himself, general and special revelation, are ***God's show and tell***. In Creation God shows Himself, in Scripture God tells about Himself.

Indeed the heavens declare the glory of God but we cannot know the true nature of our glorious God without His further revelation of Himself in Scripture and through Jesus Christ.

This is a precious treasure, a gift of God's gracious love, given to us for our salvation. We should repent of ever taking it for granted.

The importance and superiority of this second book is seen in that there are five more articles in the Belgic Confession devoted to it. Next week we will explore more in depth the Written Revelation of God.