

**Psalm 19.1-6**  
A Sermon Written in the Stars  
Sermon #1 in a Series on Psalm 19

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on October 22, 2006.

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**Main Idea:** *The heavens preach a sermon that demands a response from everyone.*

**Introduction**

In a 1959 issue of the *Journal of Science*, Dr. Freeman Dyson (professor of physics at Princeton) theorized that we are increasing our energy use so rapidly that we would soon consume the earth's reserves and need more of the sun's energy than could possibly reach our planet. (Since the sun radiates in a sphere, and we are but a small dot 93,000,000 miles away, we only "catch" about one billionth of the output of our nearest star.) Dyson suggested we build a gigantic sphere around the sun, capturing all of its energy. The "Dyson Sphere" since has fascinated science fiction writers and filmmakers.

Our sun produces so much energy that the Dyson Sphere would need to be at least as large as the earth's orbit, otherwise the sun's heat would vaporize it. Such a sphere would have a surface area of 109 quadrillion square miles (15 zeros), making it 540 million times greater than the surface of the earth! Dyson suggested we use Jupiter for the material to build his sphere.

As hot as our sun is, it is "cool" compared to other stars. The hottest are thought to be 100,000 degrees Fahrenheit on the surface, ten times the temperature of the sun. And other stars are also believed to be much larger. Our sun is 860,000 miles in diameter. About 1,000,000 earths would fit inside it. Another way to picture it is this: if you drove a car at 60 miles/hour, non-stop, day and night, it would take you 17 days to circle the globe. To do the same on the surface of the sun would take 5 full years (1825 days). Yet the larger stars are thought to be so big that the same trip around their surface, without stopping, would take 12,000 years (4.38 million days)!

And there are billions of stars. No wonder they fascinate us. I love Michael Card's song, *Starkindler*:

A billion bright and holy beams from a light that's traveled far.  
Began the trip from his fingertips, O the wonder of the stars.  
Affirm the signs and seasons, so silently they sing  
of the wonder of their Kindler, of the power of their King.  
O the fiery suns above us, in the vast veil of the sky,  
are your servants, flames of fire, are your silent, holy guides.  
And like the star-led magi, they guide our souls to you,  
as they shine a light of awesome love into eyes that see anew.

And yet, for all their immensity, for all their power, for all their numbers, for all their glory, God places them in the heavens with the briefest word. **Genesis 1.16:** "God made the two great lights—the greater light [the sun] to rule the day and the lesser light [the moon] to rule the night—and the stars."

We are not told the specifics of David's writing Psalm 19, but the details are easy to imagine. He was a shepherd—he spent many nights in the open field, often looking into the deep darkness and wondering over the relative insignificance of humanity. We know this from **Psalm 8.3-4**: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”

The vast veil of the sky humbled David because it preached the power and glory of God. David heard the sermon; he also realized no one could avoid the message. Then in the midst of his meditation, the darkness flees before the ascending sun—he had spent the whole night in contemplation and praise! And in the same way that he awoke in the morning and left his tent, so did the sun. Delighting to obey the will of God, it rises ready and rejoicing to run its race.

C. S. Lewis called Psalm 19 the “greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.” James Boice observed that many of the selections in the Trinity Hymnal are based on Psalm 19, and this is because “it is clearly great poetry...” and “a profound statement of the doctrine of divine revelation.” (*Psalms, Volume 1*, 161).

This Psalm describes both types of revelation, what Bible teachers often call, “general” and “special.” Let me explain those briefly.

Look at verse 1 and you will see the only time God is named in the first 6 verses. The Hebrew word, 'el [ <sup>ל</sup>אֱלֹהִים ] is used, which can denote either the generic word “god” or “the true God” or even, “the mighty one” (referring to men or angels). Creation, then, tells us something very general about God—he is the mighty maker of heaven and earth. God is there and it is he “with whom we have to do,” it is he “to whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4.13). We do not yet even know his name or what he demands or what pleases him. General information is all creation gives.

Next week, God willing, we will study part 2 and see, not the title 'el [ <sup>ל</sup>אֱלֹהִים ] given in only the first verse, but God's personal, covenantal name, give 6 times in three verses. In your English Bibles it is the word, “LORD,” sometimes pronounced “Jehovah,” or “Yahweh.” It is God's name of redemption, the special name given Moses for God's covenant people to use. Having meditated on general revelation, David recognizes that we need more. The *world* proves there is a God; the *Word* brings us to him.

Today let's meditate with David on the world in which we live and what it tells us about God. I have entitled this message, “A Sermon Written in the Stars,” because the heavens, the sky, the sun and stars have a message for us.

## 1. The Sermon in the Stars Insists We Believe In God (Psalm 19.1)

Sir Isaac Newton designed a scale model of our solar system then gave the plans to an exceptional craftsman. He built the model beginning with a large brass ball in the center which represented the sun. Revolving around were smaller balls attached to spokes of various lengths, each representing a planet. The spokes were geared together so that a crank on the front moved the “planets” in their orbits around the sun.

One day Newton was in his study reading when a friend came to visit. The friend was drawn to the amazing model and began to slowly turn the crank. He was delighted and cried out: “This is tremendous! Who made it?”

“Nobody,” Newton answered without looking up from his book.

His friend showed confusion: “No, Sir Isaac, you did not hear me; I asked, ‘Who made this wonderful model?’”

Looking up, Newton said with a perfectly straight face, “Nobody made it. The balls and gears just appeared and put themselves together!”

His friend was visibly upset: “You think I am a fool! Of course somebody made this! He’s a genius, and I’d like to meet him!”

Newton set his book aside and slowly walked across the room toward his friend. As they stood in front of the model, Newton said, “This is a but a poor imitation of our universe. Yet I cannot convince you that this model, this toy, has no designer or maker. But you have often said to me that the solar system, which this model represents, ‘just happened.’ Now tell me, is that the logical conclusion of a scientist?”

Sir Isaac Newton was a Christian who knew that the “heavens declare the glory of God; the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” His friend professed to be an atheist, though God plainly reveals his existence in his works.

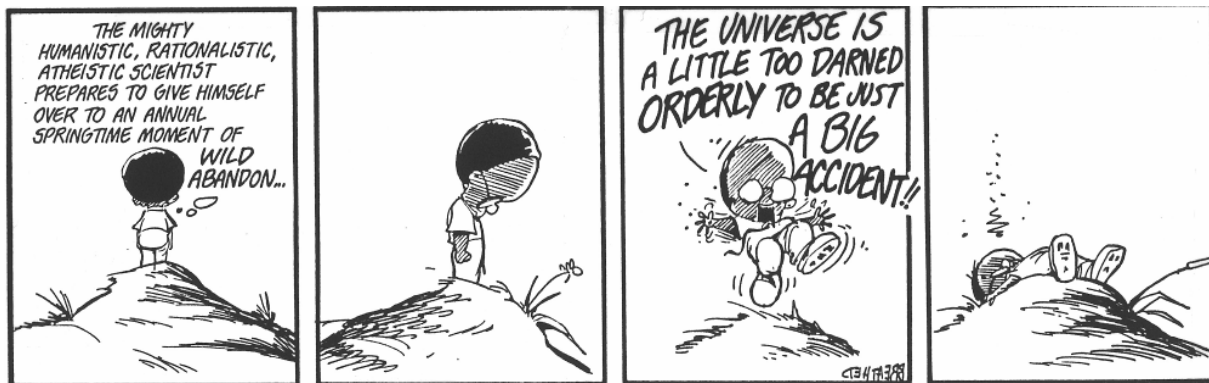
**John Chrysostom** (c. 400): “God has placed the knowledge of himself in human hearts from the beginning.... Did he send them a voice from above? Not at all! God put before them the immense creation, so that both the wise and the unlearned...might ascend to God, having learned through sight the beauty of the things which they had seen.... On what basis will the heathen claim at the judgment that they were ignorant of God? Did you not hear the heavens speaking more clearly than a trumpet through the well-ordered harmony of all things? Did you not see the hours of night and day remaining constant, and the good order of winter, spring and the other seasons remaining both fixed and unmoved...? Did you not observe all things abiding in order and by their beauty and their grandeur, preaching aloud of the Creator?”

The sermon in the stars insists that we believe in God. The Apostle Paul tells us the same.

**Romans 1.19-20** “For what can be known about God is plain to them, 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 have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Let me apply this to three groups.

For any who are atheists or agnostics—you have no excuse. You know there is a God who made the heavens and the earth as surely as Sir Isaac’s friend knew someone made the model of the solar system. Look and listen: the stars “silently sing of the wonder of their Kindler, of the power of their King.” Like Oliver in Bloom County, we are all without excuse, knowing the universe is too orderly to be just a big accident.



For you who fear the loss of respectability if you believe in the God who made the world in six days—you are being misled intentionally. Your friend or coworker or professor may claim intellectual passion and scientific curiosity, but she deceives. God is *not* asking for a blind leap of faith; he is asking you to *open your eyes*. Never a watch wrapped a wrist that was not made; never a star spun in space that does not reveal his handiwork. Only the blind cannot see this; do not close your eyes in order to be like them.

For you who already believe, learn from this passage how to defend the faith. One of the kindest things you can say to a friend who claims not to believe in God is: “I do not believe you.” Not with anger or pride, but with deep conviction and compassion—for God has made it plain. Everyone listening to the stars hears the call to acknowledge the mighty maker of heaven and earth.

But belief alone is not sufficient. For the sermon also insists we honor and praise God.

## 2. The Sermon in the Stars Insists We Honor and Praise God (Psalm 19.1-4a)

When we stand to sing we hear music and we know that someone is playing the keyboard. But when we listen carefully we find more than the mere fact of a pianist. We hear the character of the one who plays.

It is not simply that Kathy’s fingers pound the keys. In her playing, we hear her skill, we sense her discipline, we recognize her attention to details, we feel her love for music, we appreciate her passion for worship and the glory of God, and when we listen most carefully, we recognize her love for us in serving the church with the gift of music. The music proclaims the “glory” of Kathy.

David reminds us of precisely the same about creation. The heavens not only reveal the existence of God, but his *glory*.

- Do not a “billion bright and holy beams” scream of the awesome immensity of God?
- Does not the perfect regularity of the rising and setting sun speak of his attention to exacting details?
- Do not the colors and shapes and sizes of the planets and stars describe his love of variety and beauty?
- Does not the unalterable consistency of the phases of the moon and season on earth prove his absolute control over all of creation?
- Do not the orbits of the planets around the sun and the orbits of the moons around their planets proclaim the vast power of the God who upholds all things by his word?
- Does not the invisible interaction between gravitational and centrifugal forces witness to the wisdom of God?
- Does not the warmth of the sun communicate his care and compassion in providing the exact climate needed for life on earth?
- Do not the moon’s tides, with their cleansing motions over the shores and their circulating power which stirs and prevents a stagnant ocean and scours shipping channels and sweeps away sewage discharges, show us that God loves his people and provides for their every comfort?

The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky proclaims his handiwork. Lest any complain they have not heard, notice three things about the sermon in the stars:

*First*, it is a sermon preached at all times—the stars are *diligent*. Verse 2: day after day, night after night, the story is told: “There is a God; it is he who made you and all things; and to him belongs honor and praise and glory.”

*Second*, it is a sermon preached in all languages—the stars are *learnéd*. Verse 3: there is no speech and no words where their voice is not heard.

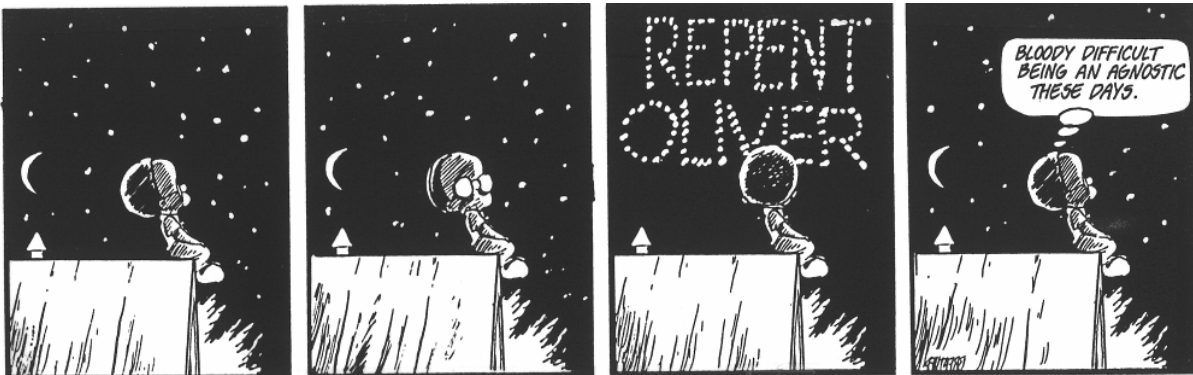
*Third*, it is a sermon preached in all places—the stars are *catholic*. Verse 4: their message goes throughout all the earth.

We have all heard; but we also all have failed to heed, as Paul reminds us. After asserting our lack of excuses, he says in **Romans 1.21**: “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.”

General revelation is insufficient, because although it shows us that we *ought* to give honor and thanksgiving, it has no answer for our failure. We must have the Word to reconcile us to God. And that begins the transition to special revelation.

### 3. The Sermon in the Stars Insists We Submit and Confess to God (Psalm 19.4b-6)

Earlier I showed you the Bloom County cartoon in which Oliver admitted that the design of the universe insists he believe in God. Now notice the cartoon which appeared next.



In a certain sense, verses 4-6 add little to the theology of this Psalm. The sun joins the rest of creation to reveal general things about God. Most pastors and Bible scholars, however, have recognized that there is an additional characteristic of the sun which is different from the other heavenly bodies. The moon and stars in the skies above preach; the sun, as it were, reaches out its hand and touches. It presses upon us as no other heavenly light does—nothing is hidden from its heat.

**James Boice**: “This line links the witness of the physical creation to the witness of the Word, for the Scriptures are likewise penetrating, warming, and lifegiving, while also searching, testing, and purifying.”

Look at the sun, feel its burning heat and realize that the God who makes such fantastic orbs must be dealt with. Rather than worshipping the Creator whose gracious favor has given us the sun, we have set our hearts and affections on our own pleasures. The sun and stars obey their maker; we have not. Will we learn from their joy to humble ourselves and seek God’s mercy?

## 4. Conclusion

There is one final thing we must notice today. In the Bible, another sun is mentioned.

**Malachi 4.1-6:** “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act,” says the LORD of hosts. “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

The sun of righteousness who rises with healing has been shown to be Jesus Christ.

As the sun is the center of our planetary system, so Christ is the center of the universe, the center of the Bible, and especially the center of the gospel. Thus he must be the center of the church and of your life. Does your life revolve around Christ and his word? Do you base your thoughts and actions upon him and his ways?

The sun is also the life for our planet. The dark side of the moon remains 280 degrees below zero. Without the sun, the earth would be a lifeless rock. So without Christ, there is no life. Is his word your warmth when fears freeze your soul? Are his promises the nourishment for your heart when you are down and discouraged? Is he the light of your path and obedience to his will your joy?

A ninth-grade teacher had to give one student an F. The boy reacted as though the teacher had caught him by surprise, by asking, “How come?”

“You didn’t pass a single test,” the teacher explained. “You never turned in one homework assignment. You would not participate in classroom work.”

The boy stood there in silence for a moment, then exclaimed, “And you mean you flunked me for *that*?” (*Reader’s Digest* [4/79], p. 64.)

There is a God; that is plain to all. A day is coming when the heat of the sun will be nothing compared to the heat of his wrath. Only the sun of righteousness, risen from the dead, can deliver. Will you place your hope in him both for your salvation and your sanctification?