

CHRISTIAN AUTHOR C.S. LEWIS CALLED PSALM 19, “THE GREATEST POEM IN THE PSALTER AND ONE OF THE GREATEST LYRICS IN THE WORLD.”

THE QUESTION HIS WORDS ELICIT FROM MANY OF US UNDOUBTEDLY IS—WHY?

I MEAN PSALM 19 IS NICE POETRY AND A WORTHY HYMN OF PRAISE TO GOD, BUT- GREATER THAN PSALM 23, OR EVERY OTHER POEM IN THE PSALTER-REALLY?

IT IS MORE THAN LIKELY A VAST NUMBER OF PEOPLE WOULD STRONGLY DISAGREE WITH LEWIS’ DECLARATION ABOUT THE 19TH PSALM.

EVEN SO, THE FORCE OF HIS DESCRIPTION SUGGESTS IT MIGHT BE PROFITABLE FOR US TO LISTEN MORE CLOSELY TO THE WORDS AND THE MESSAGE WITHIN THE VERSES LEWIS FOUND SO BEAUTIFULLY INSPIRING.

ATTENTIVE LISTENING TO THE FIRST FEW VERSES OF THIS PASSAGE PROVIDES ONE’S EARS WITH A SYMPHONY OF PRAISE TO GOD OUR CREATOR, PLAYED CONTINUOUSLY BY THE SUN, MOON, AND STARS.

INDEED, AS THE VERSES SUGGEST THE MUSIC OF THEIR VOICE POURS FORTH, OR IT COULD BE SAID, BUBBLES UP AND OVERFLOWS INTO THE UNIVERSE.

A LESS POETIC” NEW CENTURY TRANSLATION” DESCRIBES THE PRAISE IN A WAY THAT IS EASIER FOR MANY PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND, SAYING:

“THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE SKIES ANNOUNCE WHAT HE HAS MADE. DAY AFTER DAY THEY TELL THE STORY, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT THEY TELL IT AGAIN.

THEY HAVE NO SPEECH OR WORDS, THEY HAVE NO VOICE TO BE HEARD, BUT THEIR MESSAGE GOES OUT THROUGH ALL THE WORLD, AND THEIR WORDS GO EVERY WHERE ON THE EARTH.”

WHETHER ONE RELATES BETTER TO THE POETRY OF A TRADITIONAL TRANSLATION OR THE PLAINER SPEECH OF A CONTEMPORARY ONE-THE MESSAGE IS THE SAME:

THE MESSAGE IS THAT THE UNIVERSE ITSELF RECOGNIZES AND GLORIFIES GOD WHO HAS CREATED IT. THIS BRINGS US TO THE PORTION OF THE PSALM THAT SEEMS TO BE A MINOR “ODE TO THE SUN”.

BUT WHILE THESE VERSES MAY APPEAR TO BE GLORIFYING THAT MOST MAGNIFICENT OF ALL THE STARS IN OUTER SPACE, THEY ACTUALLY POINT TO GOD.

INDEED THEY DESCRIBE HOW THE SUN, IN ITS OBEDIENCE TO THE ROLE GOD CREATED IT TO PERFORM, GLORIFIES THE CREATOR.

THIS DECLARATION OF THE SUN’S SUBMISSION TO GOD, ITS CREATOR, IS NO SMALL STATEMENT.

AFTER ALL, THE SUN THAT ENABLES LIFE TO EXIST ON EARTH BY PROVIDING LIGHT AND WARMTH TO THE PLANET- WAS OFTEN WORSHIPPED AS A GOD.

BUT NOTICE HOW DAVID, THE AUTHOR OF THE PSALM, PLACES THE SUN ON EQUAL BASIS WITH THE STARS AND MOON, AND THE PLANETS OF THE UNIVERSE-IN PRAISING THE CREATOR.

THIS REMINDS US THE GLORY OF THE SUN IS GREAT, YET THE SUN IS STILL PART OF THE REST OF CREATION.

NOW WE COME TO THE IRONY OF DAVID’S MESSAGE THAT IS FOUND IN HIS DESCRIPTION OF PARTS OF CREATION WE WOULD CALL INANIMATE.

THEY ARE WITHOUT CONSCIOUSNESS, AS HUMANITY UNDERSTANDS IT. NONETHELESS THEY ARE DESCRIBED AS BEING MORE AWARE OF GOD THAN MOST PEOPLE.

INDEED IT IS IRONIC THAT HUMAN BEINGS, WHO ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF OUR CREATOR, ARE OFTEN LESS LIKELY TO RECOGNIZE AND PRAISE GOD THAN ARE OTHER PARTS OF CREATION.

AND YET, PEOPLE ARE NOT COMPLETELY BLINDED BY THEIR OWN SENSE OF SUPERIORITY OVER OTHER PARTS OF CREATION, AS THE PSALM ITSELF, WRITTEN BY ONE MAN, DEMONSTRATES.

INDEED, DAVID RECOGNIZED THE LORD GOD IS NOT ONLY THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE AND THE AUTHOR OF LIFE, BUT OF THE LAW AS WELL.

BIBLICAL LAW, OFTEN CALLED THE TORAH, IS VIEWED BY DAVID AS A CREATION OF GOD AS GREAT AS THE SUN.

INDEED THE LAW LIKE THE SUN ENCOMPASSES ALL THE EARTH, AND GIVES FORTH ITS OWN SPECIAL LIGHT.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE EFFECTS OF THE LAW'S PERFECTION, FOUND IN PSALM 19:7 HAS BEEN TRANSLATED IN TWO MAIN WAYS:

THE KING JAMES VERSION SAYS: "THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT, CONVERTING THE SOUL."

BUT MOST OTHER TRANSLATIONS SAY: "THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT REVIVING THE SOUL."

IT SEEMS TO ME GOD'S LAW BOTH CONVERTS AND REVIVES OUR SOULS.

THE LAW SHOWS US GOD'S WILL AND LOVE, AND CALLS US TO RESPOND BY OBEDIENCE, SO WE MIGHT ENTER INTO AND MAINTAIN, A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.

AND ONCE WE SUBMIT TO OUR CREATOR, GOD'S LAW CONTINUES TO GUIDE US AND RENEW US IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.

YOU SEE THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE LAW AS FOUND IN PSALM 19 AND ELSEWHERE, IS NOT THAT IT IS A BURDENSOME SET OF RULES IMPOSED UPON HUMANITY.

BUT RATHER THE LAW IS A GIFT FROM GOD WHO THROUGH IT IS OFFERING A LIFELINE TO THE CHILDREN OF ADAM AND EVE, SO WE MAY ONCE AGAIN, GLORIFY OUR CREATOR WITH OUR LIVES.

OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW IS A WAY OF HAVING COMMUNION WITH GOD, AS WELL AS BEING TRUE TO OURSELVES, LIKE WE WERE BEFORE SIN ENTERED THE PICTURE.

THE STATUTES OF THE LAW THAT MAKE US WISE- ARE THE INDIVIDUAL COMMANDMENTS GOD HAS ISSUED.

THEY ARE TRUSTWORTHY IN THAT BY FOLLOWING THEM WE WILL NOT GO ASTRAY.

THE PRECEPTS, WHICH ENABLE JOY, ARE GENERAL RULES OF CONDUCT, PRINCIPLES ESTABLISHED TO GUIDE US IN LIVING BY THE COMMANDMENTS.

GOD'S COMMANDS, WHICH GOVERN HUMAN LIFE- ARE RADIANT, LIKE THE SUN. THEY ARE ESTABLISHED TO LIGHT OUR WAY- OPENING OUR EYES TO WHAT IS GOOD AND RIGHT IN GOD'S SIGHT.

THE FEAR OF GOD, IS NOT A TERROR OF GOD'S WRATH, BUT RATHER AN AWARENESS OF AND RESPECT FOR- GOD'S HOLINESS AND POWER, AS WELL AS GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THE ORDINANCES ARE THE JUDGMENTS AND THE JUSTICE OF THE LORD OUR GOD, WHICH UNLIKE HUMAN RULINGS, ARE ALWAYS DEPENDABLE AND RIGHT.

THE PRAISE OF GOD'S LAW, AND ALL THAT FLOWS FROM IT, IS UNDERSTOOD BY THE PSALMIST TO BE OF GREATER VALUE THAN MATERIAL WEALTH OR THE SWEETEST FOOD.

AND SO- DAVID DECLARES THAT KEEPING THE LAW, THAT IS FOLLOWING GOD'S WILL, IS ITS OWN REWARD.

PSALM 19, THEREFORE, NOT ONLY IS A HYMN OF PRAISE TO GOD, IT ALSO SERVES AS A REMINDER AS TO WHY WE SHOULD OBEY GOD'S RULES.

BUT WE SHOULD TAKE NOTICE OF HOW THE FINAL THREE VERSES OF THE PSALM TURN OUR ATTENTION AWAY FROM LAW, ONTO GOD.

THERE DAVID CONFESSES AND REGRETS THE INABILITY OF HUMAN BEINGS TO BE SAVED BY PERFECTLY KEEPING THE LAW.

INDEED, IT IS NOT THROUGH OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S RULES AND WILL, BUT BY THE GRACE OF GOD ALONE WE CAN BECOME BLAMELESS AND INNOCENT OF GREAT TRANSGRESSION.

AND THE FINAL AND MOST QUOTED VERSE OF THE PSALM EXPLAINS WHAT OUR GOAL SHOULD BE:

“MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATION OF MY HEART BE PLEASING IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, MY ROCK AND MY REDEEMER.”

THUS VERSE 14 SUGGESTS THAT OUR FOCUS SHOULD BE MORE ON PLEASING AND PRAISING THE RULE-MAKER, THAT IS- ON OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, THAN ON STRIVING TO BE PERFECT THROUGH THE LAW.

THE PARABLE JESUS TOLD IN TODAY'S READING WAS A WARNING TO THE INSOLENT THAT WHILE GOD IS PATIENT WITH SINNERS, THERE WILL COME A TIME OF JUDGEMENT.

THIS IS WHY THE LANDOWNER IN THE STORY DOES WHAT NO RATIONAL HUMAN BEING WOULD DO, AFTER THE TENANTS MEET HIS REASONABLE REQUEST WITH VIOLENCE.

NOT ONLY DOES THE OWNER SEND MORE SERVANTS AFTER THE FIRST IS BEATEN, AND THE SECOND KILLED, HE SENDS HIS SON UNARMED AND UNGUARDED TO THEM.

WHO WOULD DO SUCH A FOOLISH THING? THE ANSWER IS GOD, WHO SO LOVED THE WORLD HE CREATED THAT HE SENT HIS SON TO DIE TO SAVE IT.

THIS PARABLE, DRAWN FROM THE IMAGERY OF ISAIAH FIVE, IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE AN ALLEGORY OF GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS PEOPLE, AND SPECIFICALLY THEIR LEADERS.

THE INSOLENCE OF THE MAJORITY OF THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN PARTICULAR, LED THEM TO DISOBEY GOD IN THEIR HEARTS.

AND SO WE CAN SEE THAT THE VINEYARD IS ISRAEL, THE LANDOWNER IS GOD, WHO PROVIDED ALL THE RESOURCES NEEDED FOR HIS PEOPLE TO PROSPER.

THE TENANTS ARE THE JEWISH LEADERS BOTH RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR, AS WELL AS THE PEOPLE.

THE SERVANTS ARE THE PROPHETS GOD SENT THROUGH THE AGES TO CALL HIS PEOPLE BACK TO WORSHIP AND SERVICE.

THE SON, OF COURSE IS JESUS HIMSELF, WHO WOULD SOON BE KILLED BY THE VINEYARD TENANTS.

THE NEW TENANTS WERE LATER UNDERSTOOD BY THE CHURCH- AS CHRISTIANS.

BUT BEFORE WE REST CONTENTLY IN THE KNOWLEDGE WE HAVE INHERITED THE VINEYARD, WE SHOULD REMEMBER THE WARNING OF THE PARABLE NOW APPLIES TO US.

INDEED, THROUGH SCRIPTURE GOD IS ASKING US TO TAKE AN HONEST LOOK AT HOW WE HAVE AND HAVE NOT RETURNED TO THE LORD WHAT HE ASKS FROM US.

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT THE WARNING OF THE STORY AS APPLYING TO WE WHO ARE THE CURRENT TENANTS IN GOD'S VINEYARD IT CAN BE UNCOMFORTABLE.

OUR DISCOMFORT IS MEANT TO BE A GOOD THING, IT CALLS US TO REPENT, AND TO SEEK GOD'S HELP TO PLEASE HIM IN OUR WORDS, ACTIONS, THOUGHTS, AND WILL.

TODAY IS WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY, AND THE SACRAMENT ITSELF POINTS US TO A MESSAGE FOUND IN EACH OF THIS MORNINGS SCRIPTURE READINGS.

WHEN WE LOOK TO THE BREAD- LET US REMEMBER THE VERSE JESUS QUOTED DURING HIS TESTING IN THE WILDERNESS: “ONE DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.”

HERE WE LOOK TO THE COMMANDS AND PROMISES OF SCRIPTURE, LIKE WHAT IS SUGGESTED BY PSALM 19.

THE CUP POINTS US TO THE FRUIT OF THE VINE AND THIS CONNECTS TO THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD.

IN PARTICULAR IT POINTS TO JESUS' STATEMENT THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS GIVEN TO THOSE WHO PRODUCE FRUITS OF THE KINGDOM.

BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE SACRAMENT POINTS US TO THE REASON WE HAVE THE HOPE OF FORGIVENESS THROUGH CHRIST.

THIS HOLY MEAL POINTS US TO JESUS AS OUR ROCK AND REDEEMER, AS WELL AS GIVING US SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT.

THUS THE POWER OF THE MEAL, WHICH MAKES THESE ORDINARY ELEMENTS HOLY, IS THE SPIRIT OF GOD, AND THE FAITH THOSE WHO PARTAKE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

WHEN WE RECOGNIZE JESUS AS OUR ROCK AND REDEEMER AND SEEK HIM, WE RECEIVE THE MOST PRECIOUS TREASURE OF ALL, WHICH IS A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

THIS RECOGNITION AND ACCEPTANCE IS EVERYTHING. THERE IS A STORY FROM THE OLD WEST THAT ILLUSTRATES HOW OFTEN PEOPLE MISS WHAT IS RIGHT BEFORE THEIR EYES.

IT IS A MODERN PARABLE FOR HOW PEOPLE CAN MISS THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THEIR MIDST.

THERE ONCE WAS A LARGE ROCK ON THE EASTERN SLOPE OF THE ROCKIES ALONG THE TRAIL TO THE WEST COAST.

IT WAS ENCASED IN DIRT AND PROTRUDED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TRAIL SO THAT TRAVELERS HAD TO GO AROUND IT, LEST THEY STUMBLE OVER IT.

FINALLY SOMEONE TOOK THE TIME TO DIG IT UP AND ROLL IT INTO THE NEARBY STREAM, AND THERE IT BECAME A STEPPING STONE TO HELP CROSS THE WATER.

YEARS LATER A MAN DUG IT UP TO USE AS A STEP INTO THE CABIN HE BUILT NEARBY.

THEN, ONE DAY, THE MAN'S GRANDSON, WHO WAS A GEOLOGIST DECIDED TO EXAMINE THE STONE MORE CLOSELY.

AFTER SCRUBBING AWAY THE DIRT AND GRAVEL AND GRIME- HE FOUND THE LARGEST GOLD NUGGET EVER DISCOVERED ON THE EASTERN SLOPE OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

ALL THOSE DECADES PEOPLE PASSED AROUND IT OR STUMBLED OVER IT, AND THEN STEPPED ON IT, BUT NONE OF THEM EVER REALIZED ITS IMMENSE VALUE.

THINK ABOUT HOW DIFFERENT THEIR LIVES MIGHT HAVE BEEN IF THEY HAD ONLY KNOWN THE GOLD NUGGET WAS THERE WAITING TO BE A BLESSINGS TO THEM.

JESUS IS THE MORE PRECIOUS STONE. HE IS OUR ROCK AND REDEEMER WHOSE WORTH CAN NOT BE MEASURED BY ANY OF THE TREASURES IN CREATION.

JESUS, OUR SAVIOR, IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

PRAISE THE LORD, HE IS NOT CONTENT TO WAIT TO BE DISCOVERED BUT ACTIVELY PURSUES OUR ATTENTION AND RECEPTION, IF ONLY WE WILL OPEN OUR SELVES UP TO HIM.

BY THE GRACE OF GOD THROUGH HIS SON, AND THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, MAY KING DAVID'S PRAYER BE A PRAYER FOR EACH ONE OF US:

"MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATION OF MY HEART BE PLEASING IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, MY ROCK AND MY REDEEMER." AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY – PSALM 19 AND MATTHEW 21:33-43

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