

The Works of His Hands
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Every summer when I was in HS I went to a camp in the Black Hills of South Dakota. The camp is called Camp Judson and it's nestled in the landscape just a few miles from Keystone and Mount Rushmore (so, if you've visited the Mount Rushmore you were really close to Camp Judson). To this day, the scenery provided by the Lord to me as a teenager at Camp Judson is the most memorable of my life. I remember waking up in the cool mornings and walking to the showers with the sun trying to peek past the tips of thousands of Black Hills spruces on the hills. And in the afternoon a hot 90 degrees would warm the rocks and the earth as we played volleyball and basketball as the 1880 train would whistle by and the tourist would wave. Camp Judson had an outdoors amphitheater made out of the native rock in the area and after a time of worship we'd all scatter for 30 minutes of quiet time with the Lord. I remember finding a rock ledge near a small canyon where I would sit, read the Bible, pray and think. At least once every trip I would wake up at 3:30AM to make the 2 hour hike to the top of Mount Baldy, a nearby mountain peak whose very top was bald of any tree or bush. And there we would watch the sun rise. To the south you could see the plains of Nebraska. Wyoming was in view over the majority of the Black Hills to the West. You could even see the backside of Mount Rushmore (and yes, they all had their pants on). A significant part of what made my Camp Judson experiences so wonderful and inspirational was God's creation around me.

Have you had experiences like that? Times where your gaze upon nature, your gaze upon creation added to your spiritual or religious experience? I bet that has happened to many of you. Maybe it was on a beach as you gazed upon the ocean that spoke of the length and breadth of God's love for you in Christ. Maybe it was in mountains where the mountain caps reminded you of the height of God's faithfulness. Maybe it was fishing in Canada where the stillness of the water spoke to you of the peace we have with God. God uses nature, he uses creation in special ways to tell us about himself. It's why some of you choose to go into the woods to cry, "God, can you help me?" when you are struggling and stressed.

I want to show you today from the scriptures why nature has this kind of power. I want to talk about God's design and plan with creation and how we can know God and worship God with his help through creation. After today's message, I pray, you will hunger more for God and would be more eager to take advantage of the gift of God's creation (READ Ps. 19:1-6).

The point of these 6 verses is fairly plain. David states it rather explicitly in vs. 1, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." What's the point? Well, the major point is that God is glorious; God is magnificent. Be amazed, be astounded by our God. But what makes that point? What declares it? What *proclaims* the glory of God? David said, "The heavens declare God's glory; the sky above proclaims his handiwork." So, see God, see his splendor and honor and praise by looking at the work of his hands. See the skies; notice the sun and the moon. And then notice all that the sun shines its light and heat on.

Did you notice that in the Psalm? As David continues his writings, his focus shifts from the glory of the one being proclaimed (God in heaven) to the glory of the one doing the proclaiming (that would be creation). David spills word after poetic word not on God per se, but on God's creation. He says that the message of God's glory resounds throughout all creation. And then he focuses particularly on the sun. He starts in vs. 5 saying that the sun "comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber (what an awesome image... God is so creative in his words. The sun comes out boldly and joyfully like a groom excited to finally be married), and, like a strong man, [the sun] runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat." You can see, can't you, how David marvelous at the course, the power, the significance of the sun over all creation? It's almost like David is lost now in creation rather than lost in God. That's how glorious God's creation is.

Now, lest you think David is missing the point, try this example on for size: imagine me telling you all about my son's science experiment (you're thrilled, right? You'd be hanging on my every word. Next, I'm getting out me and Korby's wedding video... it's even more exciting). And I brag more and more about what my son's science project can do; a robot that's going to change the world. It ties your shoes, it cooks your fried eggs, it can tell you every baseball statistic known to man, and knows the details of every Pokemon character. And finally, it brushes your teeth and tucks you in at night. One day, every household will have one of these robots. What have I been talking about? The robot? So is that what I'm proud in or is that what I'm boasting in? Not exactly. I'm really proud and boasting in my son. Look what *he* made. And that's what David is doing in Psalm 19; he can't stop talking about God's creation, but in the end God gets all the glory.

So what does nature proclaim about God? What does it say? There's probably no clearer teaching on that than Romans 1. At the beginning of a rather depressing section of the Bible that highlights the coming judgment of God on all ungodly and unrighteous people we have these verses about God's intention through creation. Paul just got done telling the readers that ungodly people suppress the truth about God. What truth? That's where our passage comes in (READ Rom. 1:19-20).

Paul makes it pretty clear. Vs. 20 says that what God has made known his eternal power and divine nature in the things that have been made in God's created world. So, when you look at the created world and notice it's intricacies, it's complexities yet simplicities, it's harmony, it's grand breadth, you are getting a picture of the eternal power and divine nature of God. It's there in the trees and the water; God's glory is in the ecosystems; even in the molecular structures.

That explains better what we talked about earlier, doesn't it? It's why when you're sitting on the dock at your lake cabin in the early morning hours or when you're taking it all in when you're camping, or when you're on vacation at gorgeous destinations you are spellbound. It's why you can (dare I say) *feel* God in a way that you don't always. Nature is revealing to you the eternal power and divine nature of God in those moments in the things that have been made. Now, if that's what the scriptures teach, can I make a few points about that?

First, nature speaks and reveals the eternal power and divine nature of God because it comes from God. Meaning, he made it. Just like a 5 year old resembles his daddy, so does creation resembles its maker.

I know there are debates concerning the creation of our world and universe. Some of those debates happen in secular settings; some of those debates happen even within the church. I'm not terribly interested in getting into the minutia of those debates this morning, but what the scriptures say without any ambiguity is that God is the source of creation. Our world, our universe didn't happen by chance or by accident. It happened because of the expressed will and work of the One True God. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. For by him [Jesus] all things were created... -- all things were created through him and for him, and without him was not anything made that was made. It's good to discuss, study and debate. It's good to read the various positions and thoughts about how God made the world; be open to where God takes you through the scriptures and through nature. But there's no need whatsoever to debate where the world came from. It came from God. He is the Creator of the universe and that's why we can see his glory in it.

Secondly, God intends for you to observe creation to observe him. He wants you to look at creation so you can see him. I think this is important to remember. This isn't some happy little accident, if I could quote Bob Ross. This isn't a happy coincidence. God intends for this to happen. God intends for you to observe and study creation to observe and see more of him. Think about what that means? Seeing and observing the creation less regularly and less intentionally means you'll see and observe the glory of Christ in less regular and less significant ways.

So practically, what does that mean? Go camping! Take a trip to Fiji! Make a point of going on that nature hike and look for the handiwork of God! We *ought* to make an effort of observing and experiencing creation so that we can see, observe and experience the glory of Christ.

On a walk with friends a week or so ago we found a tiny caterpillar on milkweed. Many of you know what that means, right? Monarch butterflies often lay their eggs on milkweeds. So, to bring a little nature into our home we took that leaf and put it in canning jar and have watched our little Tiger (what was his name?) eat and grow. And that's what he did, eat and grow, eat and grow. He grew like corn on a hot South Dakota summer day; he exploded in growth!

Then he formed his chrysalis and we've kept watching and waiting. The chrysalis will shake every now and then (I had trouble figuring out if that was me moving the jar of Tiger doing his thing). But we are watching with excitement and wonder. But what are we watching? We are watching the handiwork of God. How can a caterpillar make himself a chrysalis to go into and then come out a butterfly? That's not special effects right? That's not because of a sweet graphic artist; that really happens. And then, once little Tiger is a monarch butterfly he flies south to Mexico to the same forest of pine and oak trees as millions and millions of other monarch butterflies. How does he know how to do that? How do they all know to do that? Instinct, which is a scientific way of saying,

“I don’t know, but it’s quite amazing, isn’t it?” It’s one tiny little “miracle” (can I use that term) of the billions and billions of tiny little miracles God has hard-wired into creation that if you miss seeing, you miss seeing the glory of God.

I like watching TV; I’ve got a few favorite shows. When I was a kid, I played video games. My favorite game was NHL Hockey (even though I never played hockey). But that’s not the handiwork of God and spending more and more time in front of the screen means I spend less and less time beholding the glory of God. If what we are talking about is true, if what God’s word is showing us the direct link between God’s character and God’s creation, then failing to see and enjoy and even recreate in nature is a failure to see and observe the power and nature of God.

Screen time isn’t the only thing competing for our time (and hey, adults, don’t pick on our kids. How many of us have our head buried in our phone, spend hours on the computer or TV ourselves. Point the thumb, FBC). Maybe it’s the call of shopping malls in the concrete jungles of the city? Maybe it’s the casino and the slim hope of hitting it big? Here’s my point: God has designed his creation to serve our souls in a special and unique way. God wants to help us know him better and nature does that in a unique way; in a way that videos, movies, video games, slot machines don’t.

Listen to this sermon excerpt from John Piper; listen hard and think hard because it’s gold:

Do you know why there are no windows on adult bookstores? Or do you know why there are no windows on certain kinds of nightclubs in the city?

I suppose your answer would be, “Well, because they don’t want people looking in and getting a free sight.” That’s not the only reason. You know why? Because they don’t want people looking out at the sky. You know why? *The sky is the enemy of lust*. And I just ask you—you think back on your struggles. The sky is a great power against lust. Pure, lovely, wholesome, beautiful, powerful, large-hearted things cannot abide the soul of a sexual fantasy at the same time.

I remember as I struggled with these things in my teenaged years and in my college years—I knew how I could fight most effectively in those days. And I’ve developed other strategies over the years that have proved very effective. And one way of fighting was simply to get out of the dark places, get out of the lonely rooms, get out of the boxed-in places, get out of the places where it’s just small me and my mind and what I can do with it, and get out where I am just surrounded by color and beauty and bigness and loveliness.

There’s something about bigness, there’s something about beauty, that helps battle against the puny, small cruddy use of the mind to fantasize about sexual things.

Do you get what Pastor Piper is saying? Do you see where he’s coming from? God has infused his creation with sin-conquering power. Creation speaks of him; nature reveals him. The

more you look at it you will see him; and the more you see him the more you'll reject and conquer your sin and unbelief.

Kids, when your parents limit your screen time and tell you to "Go outside!" (and they should), don't curse them or curse God's creation. They are sending you out into the world that will help you enjoy God. They are trying to bless you. Be thankful to God for them and their care for you as parents. Also, be eager to enjoy God and his creation. And parents, set the example. Enjoy creation. I know after a long, tiring day of working at home or working on the line or working at the desk you're tempted to slip into a comatose state and nothing can turn your brain to mush like TV. I get it. But resist it and enjoy God's creation together as a family.

As glorious and helpful as creation is, there's one thing nature can not do. It can not lead you into a life-saving relationship with God. It doesn't convict you of your sin; it doesn't sufficiently show you God's saving grace. Only Jesus Christ can do that. And Jesus Christ shows us this picture of God through his work on the cross.

The central and defining moment of our Creator God is that he came to earth himself in the person of Jesus Christ and died on a cross for your sins and mine. Why would he do that? For many reasons, but let me highlight two of them. First, he died on the cross to prove his justice. "Justice?" you might think, "what do you mean?" Jesus died on the cross because you and I have sinned. We've broken God's law; we've disobeyed his commands. And just like a good judge just can't ignore a serial rapist's crimes, God in heaven can not ignore our sin against him. They must be punished. Our sin is serious and ugly and it requires punishment.

But Jesus died on the cross for another reason: he died to show his people mercy. Because he took the penalty of our sin, he will show mercy to all those who call on his name for salvation. For every person who gives up their life for Jesus is forgiven of their sins; Jesus paid that price. That's what Paul was getting at in Romans 3 when he says that God is just and the justifier. He's just in that he punishes sin and he justifies people, meaning, he pardons them, he forgives them. He shows people his mercy.

So, what will you do today about the glory of God in creation and the glory of God on the cross? If you're bored by it, start praying to the Lord. Start asking, "God, change my heart? Help me see what I don't see. Help me see your eternal power and divine nature in your creation. Help me see your saving grace in the death of Jesus on the cross." Once you pray this prayer, stop looking and indulging in things that pull you away from Jesus. Turn away from your selfishness and sin. And turn to Jesus. And as you do believing God will help you, you will experience the birth of faith in your life.