

Dallas Theological Seminary Chapel

Psalm 19

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@ Dan Bolin – Refueling in Flight Ministries

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you in chapel. As a student, I always enjoyed chapel – such a wide variety of topics – every speaker sharing their best sermon – and I wasn't going to be tested on the material! I could relax and enjoy the moment! I hope you relax and enjoy this moment as well!

It's nice to see a few familiar faces – and some significant foreheads!

So, today I have one goal – in the 29 minutes I have remaining, **I want to seduce you into falling in love with Christian camping**. Actually, I'll be very pleased if you come away **understanding** the essence of Christian camping and **appreciating** the powerful role camps and retreats can play in your ministry.

I realize that very few of you will work full-time in Christian camps – but most of you will be responsible to lead a camp or retreat sometime in your career. Whether as a pastor, youth pastor, missionary, teacher, chaplain, or Sunday School teacher – most people in ministry end up being in charge of a junior high summer camp, a women's retreat, or a couple's conference.

So, now I have about 28 minutes left – don't get out your church history note – hang with me for a few minutes. I'll try and make this worth your while.

Christian camping is not an invention of the 19th, 20th, and 21st Centuries. And it is certainly not a North American phenomenon. Camp has been around a long time and it didn't start here.

One way to look at the story of the Bible is like this --

- A boy went to camp
- He spent his time with the animals
- Met a pretty girl
- They spent time together tending the camp garden
- They had a wonderful time
- In the evenings they had devotions in direct conversation with God
- And then they broke the camp's only rule – and got kicked out.

The rest of the Bible is about

- How the camp director paid an excruciatingly painful price
- To provide full scholarships

- For anyone, who will accept the free gift, and come back to camp.
- Back to a place where there is
 - Deep communion with God
 - Healthy relationships with others
 - And meaning and purpose in life!

----- Looks a lot like camp to me!

SLIDE #2

So, let's look at what the Bible says about camping!

Three times in the Pentateuch God commands the Children of Israel to go to camp. And each time he tells them to go **three times a year!**

- **Passover**
- **Pentecost**
- And my personal favorite - the Festival of **Tabernacles**. That week they all stayed in tents! Sometimes it was called the festival of Ingathering because It was an autumn festival when they celebrated the harvest; a time of great national joy. It was a party!

SLIDE #3

The festivals of the Old Testament didn't look exactly like our camp experiences today, but they involved the core elements of a camp experience:

- **Time off** from the pressures and routines of life.
- A **change of location** to gain a new vantage point to look at life
- Immersion into **God's creation** – They hiked through fields and vineyards, forded streams, climbed mountains and slept under the stars.
- **Relational connection** – Parents with their children, extended families, reconnecting life-time friends, and meeting other pilgrims among the way
- **Spiritual intents** – The festivals were times of recommitment to God. They were times to renew their personal and national 'Pledge of Allegiance' to their God! Unashamedly, these events were designed to be **mountain-top experiences – emotional highs!**

Time off, getaway, in God's creation, building relationships, and meeting with God – Those were designed thousands of years ago and they are still important today!

Why did God commit five times as many verses in the Pentateuch to what should and should not be done at the festivals as he did to what should happen on the Sabbath?

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So, why was this such a big deal? Why did God determine that these experiences were so important that he wove them into the cultural fabric of His people?

Let's look for some clues, in our remaining minutes, in the **Christian Camping Psalm – Psalm 19**.

There are three portions to this psalm.

- Verses 1-6 - **CREATION**
- Verses 7-11 - **INFORMATION**
- And the final section is a prayer in verses 12-14 – **TRANSFORMATION**

SLIDE #4

To simplify, let's focus on three key phrases – ones that encapsulate each component of this psalm. Verses 1a, 7a and 14. Let me read them – a very brief, 25-word summary.

- V 1. The heavens declare the glory of God.
- V 7a. The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.
- V 14. May (my life) be acceptable in your sight, LORD.

SLIDE #5

The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

The psalm begins with this strong summary statement that is fundamental to David's argument.

Using the heavens to represent the whole of God's creation, David says that creation continually proclaims the powerful message -- **Our God is a Glorious God!**

If God had attended summer camp, I'm guessing he would have spent a lot of time in the **crafts building** – he loves to create. The Creator God enjoys making things. David said, ***the skies proclaim the work of his hands***. What a magnificent craft projects – the entire universe!

So, what does Psalm 19 tell us about creation's declaration?

- **First** - Creation's message – That God is a glorious God -- **is proclaimed continually** – It is a 24-7 announcement.
 - Verse 2 says – ***Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.***
 - All day -- Sun, clouds, bluebird skies, storm clouds, rainbows
 - All Night -- Stars, moon
 - In between – magnificent sunrises and dramatic sunsets
 - Creation continually proclaims the glory of God

- **Second** - Creation's message – That God is a glorious God -- **defies the curse of Babel**
 - As I travel the world – I'm often frustrated by my inability to speak other languages. The curse of Babel thwarts our attempts at clear communication.
 - But Verse 3 says – ***There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.***
 - Creation announces its message clearly in Russian, Chinese, Swahili, Cebuano, French, Spanish, German, Japanese, Arabic, Farsi, and even English
- **Third** - Creation's message – That God is a Glorious God – **is ubiquitous**
 - Verse 4 begins – ***Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.***
 - No geographical or topographical limits
 - No political, no economic, no cultural, or no educational boundaries
 - As far as creation's message is concerned – there are no unreached people

God's creation is the world's town-crier – clearly and continually proclaiming the glory of its Maker!

But the message is not always crystal clear – **Sometimes the message is muted!**

If you are Satan, and you want to **muffle creation's message**, there are a handful of strategies you might employ to **minimize the message**. Let's look at a few.

- **Urbanization**
 - During my lifetime the world has seen a phenomenal, demographic shift – from primarily **agrarian and rural** to overwhelmingly **urban and suburban** living.
 - In 1950, There were about 2.5 Billion people on earth and 44% of them lived in cities – urban and suburban settings. Today that number is well over 7.7 Billion people and the percentage has shifted radically to almost 82% of all people living in urban or suburban settings.
 - Once we lived on farms, but now we live in densely populated cities.
 - Yesterday, we mainly lived in proximity to hills and fields, streams and farmland. Today, we live surrounded by concrete, steel, glass and asphalt
 - We are separated from creation's voice.
 - **For most, the persistent message about God's glory has become a distant whisper.**

- **A second strategy is Pollution**

- Smog and haze block our view, but the main culprit is **Light Pollution**
- Until about 150 years ago, when the sun went down, the stars came out. Not so anymore. Not only are people moving away from God's creation – they are unable to see the majesty above them.
- In 1994 Los Angeles experienced a major earthquake that occurred in the middle of the night. This triggered a power outage, causing the lights to dim throughout the city – the whole region went dark. Let me read you one account of what happened

Some left their houses or peered outside to check on the neighborhood. It was eerily dark – no streetlights and few cars at that late hour.

They looked up at the sky. It was flush with cosmic bodies that had been invisible up to that point – twinkling stars, clustered galaxies, distant planets, even a satellite or two. Then some people became nervous. What was that large silvery cloud that trailed over the city? It looked so sinister they called 911.

That cloud was the Milky Way. They had never seen it before.

- Friends, this is not the Babylon Bee
 - If Satan cannot stop the message, he will do all he can to obscure and mute it through Urbanization and Light Pollution
- **Busy Schedules are also to blame**
 - There are lots of excuses as to why people won't leave the urban setting and take a break and go to camp in a rural setting – but the biggest is – **I'm too busy!**
 - Psalm 127 gives us a little perspective on time away
 - Psalm 127 is a Psalm of Ascents – sung as the Children of Israel worked their way to Jerusalem for these festivals, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. They sang --
 - ***Unless the Lord builds the house, the workman works in vain.***
 - ***Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stands guard in vain.***
 - These are not a couple of flowery images symbolizing God's love and care for His People. These are very real responses to very real threats. Every one of those pilgrims was leaving **projects undone** and leaving **assets unguarded**.
 - We still use these excuses to avoid getting away! Today, just like thousands of years ago, **we are all busy building and protecting**. Some of you, for the past 15-minute, have been building and protecting your Greek vocabulary – that's just what we do!

- Today, we can get so caught up building and protecting our business, our church, our reputation our bank account, our resume or any number of other things in life. **That we don't spend time in God's creation and miss the message – That God is glorious God.**
- **Satan's strategy is simple – yet highly effective**
 - Pull people away from creation
 - Hide what they might see of God's glory overhead
 - And keep them too busy to visit it
 - **He wants to insulate us from the message of creation— that God is a Glorious God.**

TRANSITION

The goal is never to get people into the woods or to take a vacation. The goal is life transformation.

The message of creation is only part of the story. Even if we take time to enjoy God's creation we may not be transformed. Anyone can enjoy a vacation in the mountain or by the seashore! Anyone can be inspired by a beautiful flower, the pounding surf, or rugged mountain.

The world is filled with people who value being out-of-doors.

- **John Muir** said - *Break clear away once in a while – climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean.*
- **Henry David Thoreau** said, *I believe that there is a subtle magnetism of Nature which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright.*
- **Albert Einstein** said, *Look deep into nature, and you will understand everything better.*

You see, the secular world understands the power of outdoor experiences – **it enjoys the creation – but misses the Creator!**

What the world calls **NATURE** – I prefer to describe as **CREATION**. What God has made is not an end in itself, with power and influence of its own. **The significance of creation is only fully understood when it directs us back to the Creator God.**

I try to discipline myself to never utter the word '**NATURE**' and always substitute '**CREATION**'. I do not want to allow myself to assume that the beauty of the out-of-doors is somehow "**NATURAL**". **It is the SUPERNatural gift of a loving and powerful CREATOR!**

Let's shift gears and look at the second portion of Psalm 19.

SLIDE #6

The Law of the Lord is perfect – reviving the soul.

David uses six names for scripture (at least five of the six speak directly about the Bible). He uses six words to describe God's Word, and six phrases to show the benefits and qualities associated with the Bible. Let's look at verses 7, 8 and 9 vertically instead of horizontally.

The Six Names

- Law of the Lord.
- Statutes of the Lord
- Precepts of the Lord
- Commands of the Lord
- Fear of the Lord
- Ordinances of the Lord
- Five of these six speak directly of the Word of God!

The Descriptions of God's Word

- Perfect
- Trustworthy
- Right
- Radiant
- Pure
- Sure
- That's a message you can bank your life on!

The Benefits and Qualities of God's Word

- Reviving the soul Has your soul ever needed reviving?
 - Bone weary/Running on empty
 - Exhausted heart and soul
- Making wise the simple Have you ever needed insight and wisdom?
 - Been Overwhelmed
 - Overmatched
- Giving joy to the heart Have you ever needed joy?
 - Grieving/In Pain
 - Discouraged/Disappointed
- Giving light to the eyes Have you ever needed vision and direction?
 - Need to know what to do?
 - What path to take?
- Enduring forever
- Righteous altogether

Verse 10 says - They are more precious than **gold** – than much pure gold.
They are sweeter than **honey** – than honey from the comb.

That's **rich** – worth more than a king's treasury filled of gold
That's **sweet** – sweeter than the sweetest honey a shepherd boy could discover.

Verse 11 says - *By them is your servant **warned** – and in keeping of them there is great **reward**.*

Two powerful benefits – rewards and warnings – the carrot and the stick.

I'd love to spend a lot more time here but what I want you to see is

- God has revealed himself through creation
- And God has also revealed himself through His Word.
- Camp is a place where we
 - Not only immerse people into the beauty of God's creation
 - But where we provide concentrated times of Bible study, reflection and biblical application
 - Every camp is different, but within a context filled with fun, adventure, relationships, and relaxation – there are also:
 - Morning devotions
 - Bible teaching
 - Small group studies and discussions
 - Prayer times
 - Campfire testimonies
 - Praise and worship
 - Uninterrupted private conversation
 - And personal reflection
- The glorious **message of creation**.
- Combined with the unchanging **truth of scripture**
- Creates the powerful context for **transformation**

TRANSITION

In its simplest and most profound form, Christian camping immerses people into the magnificent beauty of God's creation and provides a compressed time to study, reflect upon, and apply God's Word to their lives.

The extended time, the different location, and the loving relationships accelerate the development of trust. This allows people the security to reflect deeply and examine their lives in light of God's Word.

Not everyone who attends a camp or goes on a retreat has a significant encounter with God– but some (and probably many) do.

SLIDE #7

Within the camp setting they ask questions and pray prayers like David's in verses 12-14.

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

As people look at their lives they say, **Oh God – I'm a mess – I can't even figure out what's wrong with me!**

Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

They say, **God, I've done some horrible things—please forgive me. Don't let me become addicted to drugs, pornography, or controlled by bitterness, envy, or anger.** I want to be free from the power of sin.

When we spend time in creation, invest time in God's Word, and take time for reflection the frequent outcome is a **prayer of transformation**.

Like David they pray, *May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

When David says, *the words of my mouth*, he is referring to **all of our outward expressions**. Again – the 'part' represents a much bigger 'whole'. Our words, our actions, our obedience, our expressions, our service, our worship, all of our words and deeds are encapsulated in this little phrase.

Just the same - *the meditation of my heart* – refers to **what is going on inside us** – our attitudes, our motives, our desires, our hopes and longing – everything that is going on internally –

God, please transform me, outside and inside, make me into a person who is pleasing in your sight.

TRANSITION

And then he caps off the prayer with a little closing statement – *Oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer*. This appears to be a perfunctory, throw-away line to wrap up the psalm. But it is much more than that and actually ties a big bow around the entire psalm.

He uses two words to describe God – **Rock** and **Redeemer**.

SLIDE #8

Let's go back to the opening phrase of Part 1 – *The heavens declare the glory of God*. The name for deity here is Elohim. Often described as – The Might One. The emphasis is on the strength, power, and might of a sovereign God. **The Mighty One - The ROCK!**

When people go into creation, **they encounter the ROCK**. They hear the proclamation of creation about a glorious and powerful God – but they often stop there - standing in awe of his messenger – the creation!

SLIDE #9

Now let's go back to the opening phrase of the second section, *The law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul*. Here the word for deity is LORD or YHWH. The name for God used when speaking of His covenant relationship with His people.

The emphasis is upon the God who came to invite people back into a relationship with Him. **The Redeemer who offers all of us a full scholarship to come back to the camp we were evicted from many years ago!**

The message of **creation** coupled with the **information** of scripture is a powerful force for **transformation** through the power of the Rock and the love of the Redeemer!

SLIDE #10

Henrietta Mears, the founder of Forest Home – and an early leader in Christian Education often said, ***Camp is where people make up their minds.***

I want to be clear

- **Camp does not transform people's hearts – only God does that.**
- **Camp is not the only ministry methodology that God is using – we must bring the gospel to urban settings – that where the people are**
- But if you want to do ministry with a **home court advantage** – consider creating events where people --
 - Push the pause button on their lives and take time off
 - Temporarily migrate to a new location
 - Enjoy the beauty of God's Creation
 - Build and deepen relationships
 - And create mountain top moments to worship God, study his word, and recommit to following Him
- And if you want to be really biblical – do it three times a year!

Draw together the **powerful message of Creation** and the **authoritative truth of God's Word** and watch God do his **work of transformation** in the lives of your campers – and maybe yours as well.

SLIDE #11