

Does God communicate?

Growing up one of my favourite bible stories was the one with Elijah at Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18. You may remember it, Elijah has a showdown with the 450 prophets of Baal. Elijah calls on God who lights a fire and burns up not only the offering but also the wood and even the stones. In contrast the prophets of Baal call on their god but don't get an answer. They do everything they can but they still get no answer from their god. The bit I really find amusing is when Elijah starts taunting them saying, "Shout louder, surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." It was clear that Elijah's God was real because he answered him and communicated with him. Today I wonder whether we feel more like Elijah or the prophets of Baal? God doesn't often send fire from heaven anymore, so how do we hear God, how do we know Him and how do we know what he wants us to do?.

Or maybe the real problem is something else. Maybe it's our listening and understanding that's the problem and not the fact that God doesn't speak. Emily and I enjoy watching a TV show called Masterchef. If you don't know it, it is a cooking show where contestants who are amateur cooks come in and have to prepare different dishes each show to impress the judges. While the cooking is going on

the judges walk around and chat to the contestants. And it always amuses me how the contestants repeatedly do not listen or know how to answer the judges. The contestant will be making something like a dough and the judges will sometimes make a comment like “Do you think that looks a little dry?” Almost always there is a look of uncertainty on the contestants face. They don’t know how to respond. And more often than not the contestant will just keep on going with what they were doing assuming they are fine. The judges are speaking but the contestants often either don’t know what to answer or are not really listening.

I think it’s the same with a lot of people today and God. God is speaking but I don’t think a lot of people are listening or if they are they don't know how to respond.

Today’s Psalm helps us with both these issues. It first of all shows us 2 different ways in which God does communicate with us. The first in verses 1-6, where David, the author of the psalm, shows how God reveals himself through creation and then in the second half in 7-11 through his word. Then in the final few verses, the Psalm shows us how to respond to God’s communication as David gives his response to what God has revealed.

1-6 God revealing himself in creation

The first way the Psalm says that God communicates is similar to Psalm 8 that we looked at last week. It looks at the wonder of creation. Very poetically the Psalm describes how the skies, the heavens and the Sun tell us about God. On one hand we may wonder how the skies can tell us anything other than what the weather will be, but if you have been watching the news the last few weeks even the most indoor type can get a sense of the wonder of the skies. In the last few weeks we've had a spectacular blood moon, and an amazing meteor in our skies.

So the question is what are the heavens telling us about God, what knowledge are the skies revealing to us?

I think the key thing this Psalm says that nature tells us about God is that he is powerful. It says in verse 1 that they declare the glory of God. Verse 4 to 6 talks about the Sun and says that God is even bigger than it because he pitched a tent for it. When we see the amazing creation around us, whether it be a stunning landscape view here on earth or the spectacular size of the solar system or even minute detail under a microscope, it points to an amazing creator. They all show a creative, precise and powerful creator at work. We are right to be awed when

we see something amazing in nature as it reflects what an amazing God we have.

For the ancient world this part of the Psalm would have been both familiar and different. It was familiar as they were used to looking at amazing creation. But they often concluded that it was creation that was worth worshipping and so the fact that here in this Psalm creation merely points to God was very different. Today most of us don't look at nature and worship it, but we can have a tendency to worship ourselves as we use science to further understand nature. As scientists gain a better understanding of how the universe works unfortunately sometimes the result is not us being inspired by the glory of God instead it's us being inspired by our own knowledge.

And the information that we do get from nature is available to be seen by all. Verse 6 says that nothing is deprived of the Sun's warmth. This means that everyone can be aware of God's glory. No one has any excuse to say that there is no God. Paul says this clearly in Romans 1:20 "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." Everyone has the

opportunity to see God's creation, it is just what they decide to do with that knowledge that is important.

We then come to verse 7, which at first seems to be quite a change of direction. Some Bible scholars go so far to say that it's actually a different Psalm and it has been stuck together with the first half. However it clearly follows on from the first 6 verses with the same theme but a different answer to the question, how does god speak? The first part of Psalm 19 has spoken about God revealing himself through creation, often called "general revelation". The second part of the Psalm now talks about God revealing himself in a special way — through his Laws. Verses 7-11 focus on this special form of revelation. You may see other words here like statutes, precepts, commands, decrees - these words all describe God's Law.

7-11 God revealing himself through his word

When you look at me... what are some things that you could guess about me? You could say, I don't have the best eyesight, I'm pretty tall maybe I like basketball. But you can only know special things about me, if I tell you. For example, some things about me that you may not know, I really do not like coffee, or my favourite Ice cream flavour is cookies and cream.

So when we look at this second section of the psalm we see God revealing himself through his word. God is telling us more than we can see on our own.

That is why we call the Law special Revelation. Because God's Law reveals to us more about who he is. As God speaks through creation we get a strong idea of his power but not about God personally.

One of the things that I found interesting is the different ways the Psalm refers to God in the two sections. You see, In the first 6 verses the word used is Elohim which is basically the general Hebrew word for God. This corresponds to what you can learn from creation. That there is a God, but we don't get much more information about Him. However, in the verses from verse 7 David starts using the Hebrew word Yahweh which as David Loke pointed out last week is the special covenant name of God. It is shown in our bibles by the all capital LORD. The Psalm uses Yahweh here because in this next section we can learn more about God relationally.

God's word tells us about him. In Gods word we see the love that he has for his people, his words show us that he hates evil, we see that God is a Holy God, that he is a creative God. Even when we read God's laws it tells us about who He is, For example the Ten commandments weren't just laws to tell the Israelites how to live, they tell

us about God. The commandments reflect characteristics of God. Do not commit adultery because God is a faithful God. Do not steal because God is a trustworthy God. Do not bear false witness because God is a truthful God.

God's word also reveals to us His life giving Power. You see, The reason that God's word is so amazing, that it is sweeter than honey, that it is more precious than gold, is explained to us in verse 11, which says By them your servant is warned, in keeping them there is great reward. God's laws both warns and guides those who follow Jesus, his words help us to keep on the path to eternal LIFE rather than towards death. That is why Gods word is so valuable. So having God revealed to us in greater detail through his words, what is our response?

12-14 A response

Well, in The final section of the Psalm we see David's response to God communicating through creation and the law. He humbles himself before God and responds in prayer and meditation. And the first thing that happens in his response is that David is made aware of his sinful nature. And he falls onto his knees and asks for forgiveness. He mentions both wilful sins and hidden or unintended faults. Is this not our response as well? When we read God's word doesn't it challenge and convict us as well? God's word cuts to our heart and we realise we

have not loved God with all our heart, soul and mind. And as we think about how we have lived out our lives in the past week, we know we have failed to love our neighbours as ourselves. When we say the confession in our services, it's often paired with God's word because as we read God's word we are reminded that we do sin and that we too are to ask for forgiveness. And David continues on to ask that he may be kept away from sins, and that sin may not rule over him. This is something that we can respond with too, as we are given eternal life, our prayer is that we are to no longer sin, that we may live a life that pleases God.

One thing that I love about reading the psalms and in particular this psalm is that I am encouraged from David's example that the almighty God who created the universe wants us to talk to him. This is not like royalty or a celebrity with bodyguards so you can't get to them. The creator God wants us to talk to him. And if you want ideas of what to say to God, you can look at the prayer points each week in our bulletin, you can read through other Psalms, which are often other expressions of prayer or of course as David does in this Psalm, you can just speak from your heart.

David finishes by addressing God as my Rock and my redeemer. This is my favourite bit of this Psalm. As we have gone through the Psalm we have seen God as

almighty creator and as potentially a judge of his law, but David finishes by describing God as his redeemer. This is truly the amazing message of Christianity. That the God who is all powerful and has every right to judge us for our sins is also there as our redeemer. Through Jesus death and resurrection the almighty God has saved us. And although David does not mention Jesus by name, Jesus is yet another way of how God communicates to us. Through Jesus word directly in the gospels and through Jesus word via the people that met him through the rest of the New Testament. Just as Verse 7 to 11 focuses on the Law for the Jews, it can include the New Testament as well as the Old for us. All of God's word is more precious than gold, than much pure gold, it is sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

Just to finish, do you think about the bible that way? Do you wake thinking, wow, I get to read God's word this morning? Is the Bible to you more valuable than money and better to read than it is to eat your favourite food. To be honest I know I don't always think about it that way. Which is strange as almost every time I do read the bible I do find it helpful, I do find it refreshing, it helps make me wise, it does give me Joy. The bible tells us of the life giving news found in Jesus Christ. So I would like to finish this sermon by encouraging you to get into your bibles. That is the best way to listen to what God has to say.

Maybe you are not someone who is comfortable just reading the bible without guidance. You feel that you dont understand it well enough or you don't know where to start and how much to read, well I would encourage you to use a devotional. I find that a short devotional provides me with real structure to reading and helps me think through what I have read. Whether you get one from Koorong or use free online devotionals like Our Daily Bread or Daily Walk Devotions they can really help in bible reading. Or maybe you are not a reader, thats ok too, you can listen to Gods word. Bible Gateway provides a free audio copy of the bible.

However you do it, its worth treating Gods word as more precious than gold and sweeter than honey, His word gives you eternal life. Then like Elijah we will hear our God and be confident in him and as we read we will also learn how to better listen and respond.

Let me pray.