

When God Is Silent

Have you ever felt totally removed from God's awareness? You try to pray, you call out to Him, but it is as if your prayers bounce back from the ceiling.

You are not alone. Many struggle with the fact that at times, God seems to remove His clear voice and conscious blessings from our lives. Whether it is a mate who leaves after years of marriage, a lingering illness, financial setback and calamity or the hurts and emotional scars from relationships in the past, many cry out for God's help - His voice of direction - and yet there is silence.

Though there are times when God appears silent to us, we need to go back and remind ourselves of the times when God did speak and reveal Himself clearly. And in fact He still speaks to us today - through the created world of nature and the communicated word of Scripture.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant once wrote:

There are two things that fill my soul with holy reverence and ever-growing wonder - the spectacle of the starry sky that virtually annihilates us as physical beings, and the moral law which raises us to infinite dignity as intelligent agents. (Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 1781)

Both of those things that filled his soul with reverence and wonder are described in Psalm 19. Charles Swindoll offers the following outline of Psalm 19.

1. The Created World (vv. 1-6)

A. Overall Declaration (vv. 1-4a)

1. Consistent (vv.1,2)
2. Silent (v.3)
3. Universal (v.4)

B. Specific Illustration - The Sun (vv. 4b-6)

1. Appearance Described (vv. 4-5)
 - tent
 - bridegroom
 - strong man
2. Activity Described (v. 6)
 - rising
 - circuit
 - heat

2. The Communicated Word (vv. 7-14)

A. Its Presence among Us (vv. 7-9)

1. Six Titles
2. Seven Characteristics
3. Five Benefits

B. Its Value to Us (v. 10)

1. Gold . . . fine gold
2. Honey . . . honeycomb

C. Its Work within Us (vv. 11-13)

1. Warning
2. Rewarding
3. Discerning
4. Revealing

D. Closing Prayer (v. 14)

Let's take a look at this wonderful Psalm..

¹ *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*
² *Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.*
³ *There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.* ⁴ *Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,* ⁵ *which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.* ⁶ *It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.* ⁷ *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*
⁸ *The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.* ⁹ *The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.* ¹⁰ *They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.* ¹¹ *By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.* ¹² *Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.* ¹³ *Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.* ¹⁴ *May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. (NIV)*

I. The Created World (vv. 1-6)

God has given us two primary sources of revelation. The first is what theologians call *General Revelation*. General Revelation is that which is available to all men everywhere through the created world. Verses 1-6 describe the general revelation of God to man.

Read verse 1. List three ways in which the heavens tell of the glory of God.

What can you learn about God by viewing His creation?

Read Romans 1:18-20. What else does the creation tell us?

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 men are without excuse. (NIV)

Romans 1:19 and 2:15 also tell us that besides the creation around us, God reveals Himself to our conscience within us. According to these two verses, how do men know there is a God?

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. (NIV)

Since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. (NIV)

Now turn back to Psalm 19 and read verses 1-6 again. Some Christians think that because they have the Bible, the fuller revelation of God, general revelation has little to say to them. But the world God has created says much to believers also.

Take some time to observe the world of nature. Look around you. Take the time to go for a walk one starry evening. What does God say to you through His creation?

II. The Communicated Word (vv. 7-14)

The second part of God's revelation is called *special revelation*. Bible scholars usually refer to the two parts of special revelation being the Written Word (the Bible) and the Living Word (Jesus Christ).

Read verses 7-9 of Psalm 19. What are the six titles given to Scripture in these verses?

One Bible commentator described the difference in each of these concepts:

The Law is God's revealed will.

The testimony is His truth.

The precepts are His particular injunctions.

The commandments are His authoritative words.

The fear is the reverential trust which God's words foster in His people.

The judgments are God's decisions relating to human situations.

David goes on in verses 7-9 to describe various characteristics of the written Word of God. List the various characteristics mentioned.

Finally in verses 7-9, David describes the benefits of the word of God in our lives. Find as many as you can and write them down. How do they apply to you right now?

In verse 10, two analogies are used. The Word of God is said to be more desirable than gold, even precious, refined gold, and also that it is sweeter than honey right off the honeycomb.

How would you describe the sweetness of honey?

How would you describe the beauty of fine gold jewelry?

In what ways do you think those analogies are true of the Word of God?

Read verses 11-13. How does the Word of God penetrate our lives and convict us of these "errors," "hidden faults" and "presumptuous sins"? Look up Hebrews 4:12 for a good cross reference.

III. Closing Prayer (v. 14)

This verse, one of the most familiar in the entire Book of Psalms, sums up the psalmist's feelings in the form of a prayer. Spend a few minutes meditating on its words. Don't let its familiarity blind you to new insights. Write down any specific thoughts you have as you meditate on this verse.

God is described as our Rock and our Redeemer. What do each of those qualities mean to you today?

Finally, pray this prayer back to the Lord. Claim His blessings, ask for His direction and guidance, and ask Him to fulfill His promises to you.

Conclusion

How often we are tempted to think of God as being distant and silent! According to this ancient song, He is neither. Begin paying closer attention to the natural phenomena that surround you, all of which speak of God's presence. Meditate on the many ways He makes His presence known. Weave those thoughts into your moments of solitude and ask Him to comfort and guide you in tangible ways.

Suggested Reading

Disappointment with God, Philip Yancey (Zondervan Publishing House)

Where Is God When It Hurts, Philip Yancey (Zondervan Publishing House)