

# Theater for God's Glory

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Open your Bibles this evening to Psalm 19. As we prepare for a time of prayer together, I want to spend a few moments in this psalm.

In Sunday School we have recently begun a study of worldviews. One of the goals of that study is to encourage us to be more alert and thoughtful about the world around us, and to be more intentional in engaging our culture and community with the gospel.

## **But why concern ourselves with the world?**

Isn't the world at enmity with God? Aren't we to distance ourselves from the world? Didn't James teach us in James 4:4 that friendship with the world aligns us *against* God?

The Bible of course uses the word *world* in different ways, and certainly there is a sense in which we must separate from the world. Paul said in Galatians 4:16 that the world had been crucified to him and he to the world.

So how are we to understand and relate to the world around us?

### **The World as a system and a philosophy—is set against God.**

God is at work bringing all His enemies under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:25).  
And so we are called to stand against the world—

2 Cor. 10:3–5      For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to **destroy strongholds**. We **destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God**, and **take every thought captive** to obey Christ

### **But the World as God's creation—formed by His Word—is made for His glory.**

God is at work in the world rescuing, redeeming and restoring (Psalm 80:3,7; John 3:17).  
And we become testimonies of that work as we receive His grace and mercy in Christ.

God has revealed Himself to us that we might know Him. He is intent on making Himself known. It is His purpose to manifest His glory. The world He has created serves Him to do just that.

Psalm 19 gives us a grid of God's design to display His glory.

## I. God displays His glory in creation (19:1–6)

Psalm 19:1        The heavens declare the glory of God,  
                         and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

2                    Day to day pours out speech,  
                         and night to night reveals knowledge.

3                    There is no speech, nor are there words,  
                         whose voice is not heard.

4                    Their voice goes out through all the earth,  
                         and their words to the end of the world.

                         In them he has set a tent for the sun,  
5                    which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,  
                         and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

6                    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.

God intended the whole world to be a display of His power and glory. Theologians call this natural revelation. Calvin said in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that the world is a **theater for God's glory**. [1.5.8 and 1.14.20] God has so designed the world that it speaks of its Creator. Everything in creation, including us—every person—exists for Him. We are made for God—to know Him, to enjoy Him forever. But creation cannot tell us all we need to know—all God would have us know—and so David continues in the psalm:

## II. God displays His glory in His Word (19:7–11)

Psalm 19:7        The law of the LORD is perfect,  
                         reviving the soul;  
                         the testimony of the LORD is sure,  
                         making wise the simple;

8                    the precepts of the LORD are right,  
                         rejoicing the heart;  
                         the commandment of the LORD is pure,  
                         enlightening the eyes;

9                    the fear of the LORD is clean,  
                         enduring forever;  
                         the rules of the LORD are true,  
                         and righteous altogether.

10                   More to be desired are they than gold,  
                         even much fine gold;  
                         sweeter also than honey  
                         and drippings of the honeycomb.

11                   Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
                         in keeping them there is great reward.

God also gave us His Word to display His glory.

The world can tell us much about God, but not everything, and not the most important things. In itself the world is insufficient to declare its Creator, and not only is it insufficient, it is fallen. It is stained and shattered by sin. The world in itself has no answer, no solution, no salvation.

If we are to know hope and peace and salvation in this world—God must bring special revelation. This He has done in His Word. The Bible makes plain His plan to rescue and redeem us.

And where does Scripture point us? Where is hope and peace and salvation? Here is where we come to a crucial intersection of God's Word and God's world. What did God do with His Word on the stage of creation? **He sent His Son!**

### III. God displays His glory in His Son

Both natural and special revelation meet and find their perfection in Jesus. He is God's Word made flesh.

There is a crucial intersection of Word and world—that intersection is the gospel—it is Jesus. God sent His Son into the world—the Word made flesh—and He intends that His world be saturated with His Word and filled with glory.

In the beginning it was the Word that brought the world into existence:

John 1:1-5            In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And John makes clear that this is the Word that came to display God's glory in shining forth God's truth and grace—

John 1:14            And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John understands the scope of God's purposes. Jesus did not come just to save a nation. He came on the world stage to be the Savior of the world—to call a people from every tribe and tongue and nation. Notice in verse 29 the words of John the Baptist when he first sees Jesus—

John 1:29            The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Listen to Jesus' own words—

John 3:16            For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

John 6:33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

It is interesting that Jesus compares Himself and the good news of the gospel to light. Light penetrates and overcomes darkness. You notice the description of light that David gives in Psalm 19:4–6 comparing the sun to a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. It's a wonderful picture of what God intends to do with His Word as the gospel goes forth and conquers, nothing hidden from its penetrating rays and heat.

John concludes in—

Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."

God is displaying His power and glory in this world, and we are part of this display. Jesus tells us in—

Matthew 5:14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

This brings us to the final portion of Psalm 19. God displays His glory in creation, and in His Word and in that Word made flesh—but He intends that Word to reach us—to change us and shape us. So David ends this psalm with a question and a prayer.

#### **IV. God displays His glory in us (19:12–14)**

Psalm 19:12 Who can discern his errors?  
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;  
let them not have dominion over me!  
Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in your sight,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

As we humbly live in submission to God's Word, turn away from sin and rest on Christ as our Rock and Redeemer, God is glorified.

God aims to display His glory to the world. And it is in the world we are called to live for Him, and to the world we are called to declare His Word. We want to see our world impacted with the gospel. We want to see the gospel go into the world and change lives. We want the good news of Jesus to fill our world—to the ends of the earth.

Calvin rightly called the world a “theater for the glory of God.” We are a part of this display. Our lives are to be a display and an offering for His glory. In *all things* we live to His praise. And that includes *all things*—what we do, what we say, and what we think. David prayed that he would be kept from sinning. He prayed that the words he spoke would be honoring to God. He prayed that the thoughts resounding in his heart would be pleasing to God. And not just his thoughts when he was in gathered worship with the people of God, or his words when he was singing praise, or his steps when he felt near to God, but all his thoughts and words and steps through life as he walked in the world.

### **We must learn to see the world this way, and live in the world this way.**

Our world is fallen and broken.

Romans 3:23            for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Our world is at enmity against God. But God does not intend that we hide away or abandon the world. He intends for us to be salt and light. He intends for us to live as Christians—a humble and grateful people who have been rescued from sin and death.

And He intends for us to live out in the world as trophies of His grace for His glory.

Sometimes we can get messed up in our thinking—if we start thinking of *church* as where we meet with God and serve God, and *the rest of life* as out in world—our jobs, our recreation, our families. We can mistakenly assume that God is only glorified when we do sacred things—things like coming to church, praying, reading our Bible, or witnessing. And God is pushed aside or drowned out when we do secular things—things like our jobs, chores around the house, school, and sports. He is pleased and draws close when we are endeavoring to do sacred things, but less pleased and distant when we turn to what is secular.

The word “secular” comes from a Latin word meaning “world.” It refers to the *here and now* in which we live—our immediate concerns as we live day to day.

But we must not separate the *here and now* from God. **All of life is sacred.** It all belongs to God. We cannot take a breath unless God gives it to us. He is there, with us in every situation, in every activity, in every circumstance. By His design “all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

There is no separate place for God and another for the world. It’s all His—the world is His and we are His. He is at work—in every trial, in every triumph—in every joy, in every sorrow—shaping us and fashioning us for His glory. Our lives are on display. He has made the world for Himself. And He has placed us on the stage of the world to be a vessel of His grace and mercy, to be a testimony to His presence and power.

We need to see our world this way—in the spheres in which God has placed us—in our vocations, responsibilities and roles. These are but platforms on which to magnify Him—arenas in which we are called to display His glory and make Him known.

A good example of someone who learned and lived this is **Johann Sebastian Bach**.

J.S. Bach (1685–1750), perhaps the greatest composer of the Baroque era in music, learned to think this way. He began his career as an unknown church organist. In 1717 he went to Cöthen to serve as music director (Kapellmeister) for a German prince. Prince Leopold was a Calvinist and in his employ Bach was compelled to compose for the glory of God—not just in the church, but in the world. All music—not just music composed for a worship service—could be used in God-honoring ways and for God’s good purposes. During the 6 years Bach was in Cöthen he composed the Brandenburg Concertos, the Well-Tempered Clavier, the Goldberg Variations, A Musical Offering, the Art of Fugue and many other great works. At the end of most of Bach’s scores, he wrote the initials SDG—*Soli Deo Gloria*—to the glory of God.

We need testimonies like this in the world. Businessmen honoring Christ in their business. Store owners and employees serving with excellence as unto the Lord. Artists, dancers, filmmakers, photographers, designers, musicians—out in the world reflecting God’s glory in their art. Dads and moms nurturing their children, day by day, sowing seeds of the gospel, pointing to Christ.

As I close tonight, let me encourage you to live for God’s glory. Not just when you come to church—or when you pray and read your Bibles—but when you get up in the morning—when you go to work—when you make decisions—when you interact with other people—when you face challenges—do all to the glory of God.

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Your life is on display — part of the glorious drama that is playing out on the stage we know as the world. May God give us grace to live in a way that magnifies our Savior and honors His Word.

Let’s go now to a time of prayer.

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