

- I. Introduction: How do we know what we know? And what role – if any – should the bestselling book of all time play in that
- A. Good morning. Welcome.
- B. Last week we began this series by looking at the interaction between Jesus and Pilate in John 18. I noted that:
1. We are living in a knowledge crisis.
 - a) We do not see things the same way anymore. I said, it's not just that people are listening to different news stations, we are listening to different news stations because we have different worldviews.
 - b) And we have different world views because we are answering the Seven Life Questions differently.
 - c) And we are answering the first six question differently – What is of Ultimate Importance? Who am I? Where did I come from? What is expected of me? What went wrong? What happens when I die? – we are answering these questions differently because we are answering the seventh question differently, which is: where do I look for answers? How do I know what I know?
 - d) I then went on to note:
 - (1) That there are four different “sources of truth”: tradition, intuition, reason and revelation.
 - (2) That they all have value, but we need to know how to rightly order them – especially as we focus on the big questions.
 2. With that as a backdrop, we turned to John 18, and I noted Jesus's claim that there is such a thing as truth.
 - a) Capital T truth, universal Truth, objective reality that is defined by God – indeed, that is grounded in Him.¹
 - b) I argued that discussions about “your truth” and “my truth” are misguided because there is a meta narrative. There is a grand story to which we all must adapt.
 3. I suggested that there is an epistemic shift going on now – that things are getting worse
 - a) Reason is fading, and intuition is climbing;
 - b) This is leading to a world where all that matters is power – which is part of the reason that politics has become such a high stakes battleground.
 4. And my final point is, we need to figure out what is really real.
 - a) We need to decide how we know what you know.
 - b) We need to decide who or what we are going to trust.
 - c) And also how we are going to live with people with whom you did not agree.
- C. That was a lot – this series takes us into the deep end of the pool. And so we have been trying to supplement all of this with other resources:
1. We released the first chapter of the book – which was five reasons why you need to read the Bible;

2. And there were daily reflections on the four sources of truth;
3. There has been special attention to help your small groups work well.
4. On Friday I recorded a podcast interview Bonnie Kristian, the author of a soon to be released book: *Untrustworthy: The Knowledge Crisis Breaking our Brains, Polluting our Politics and Corrupting Christian Community*. And tonight we have Dr. D.A. Carson – a global scholar, with a PhD in the New Testament from Cambridge. Dr. Carson is the author of over fifty books.

II. So, back to our question: how do we know what we know? This week and next, I want us to look at Psalm 19 to better understand the concept of revelation.

- A. I want us to unpack the claim that God reveals information about himself and truth in order to help us live well – in order to help us answer the first six questions.
- B. To that end we turn to this wonderful, magisterial Psalm of David – Psalm 19
- C. You have likely heard it. It's the one that opens, **“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”**
- D. Today we are going to be focused on the first six verses, which develop the idea that we can learn things about the Creator by looking at Creation.

III. Let me read verses 1-6.

- A. **The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.**
- B. **Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.**
- C. **They have no speech; they use no words; no sound is heard from them.**
- D. **Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.**
- E. **It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.**
- F. **It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.**

IV. In this Psalm, David tells us that God reveals himself through the things he made – in this particular case, the heavens. The cosmos. We call this Natural Revelation or General Revelation.

- A. Next week we will focus on Supernatural Revelation, which is also called Special Revelation. David develops that idea in versus 7 to the end. But today we focus on Natural Revelation
- B. It is the idea that God *reveals* – the text here says “declares” and “proclaims” –
 1. Two Hebrew verbs are used here. the first *safar* suggests counting or listing. The second – *nagad* – is a bit more generic reporting. The implication is that the heavens are providing insights about God and we need to pay attention.
- C. I am quite confident that you have had this experience. That there have been times when nature has taken your breath away.
 1. Moments when a sunset or the night sky or the ocean, or a newborn baby or the Grand Canyon - something moves you. It grips you. Unsettles you. Overwhelms you. You think “I can’t take this all in.” We are amazed.
 2. Why? Why does the sun – which is just a ball of burning gasses - move us?

3. Why does it move us like art? Because it is art! *Because nature is singing. It is celebrating its creator. It is declaring that we are the product of artistic vision and design and imagination.*

4. We're not an accident. We were made for a reason. Life is not tail told by an idiot signifying nothing. Life is meaningful. There is a God. The beauty, the power, the vastness, the wonder suggests that there is more going on here.

D. I believe that if we paid more attention, we would be more amazed. Because, **“Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.”**

E. The big idea here is that one of the ways God reveals himself is by what he made. The heavens declare the glory of God. I want to unpack some of the implications of this. Four in particular:

V. The first thing I want to be sure you realize is that **Creation is amazing in order to reflect an amazing God.**

A. I want to be sure you connect the glory of creation with the majesty of God. That when the stars take your breath away, you realize they do that because they are reflecting God's glory.

B. I am excited about the pictures being sent back by the James Webb telescope. You have likely seen a few of them in the last couple weeks. This is all very new. For some time now we have been getting pictures from the Hubble telescope. Now we are getting them from the James Webb telescope, which is more powerful. (SHOW PICTURES)

1. The one getting the most press seems to be the cartwheel galaxy, which is located 500 million lightyears away.

2. A lightyear is the distance light travels in a year, which is just shy of 6 trillion miles. The crazy thing is not just that this galaxy is 500 million light years away – which is 500 million times 6 trillion, but that they then say - this is practically our next door neighbor, because the known universe is 46.5 billion light years across.

3. We then hear that there are 2 trillion galaxies out there, each with billions of stars.

4. The numbers are so big – and the sizes so vast - that those who study confess to occasionally suffering from Cosmic Vertigo

5. Men and women, equate this with God. Be impressed by creation, but don't stop there. Marvel at its beauty and scope – but don't stop there. Be even more amazed by the one who spoke it into existence.

C. And by the way, in addition to being stunned by the massive size of space, go the other way and marvel at things at the molecular level. While you are being amazed at what you see through the telescope, don't forget to be amazed at what we are seeing through the microscope.

D. Or how fine-tuned this massive universe is.

1. Some of the most interesting work going on in apologetics lately is being done in support of the Teleological argument. This is the argument from design, which is also called the Watchmaker argument or the argument from fine tuning.

a) It is not new. But the more we learn about the universe – and how life depends on so many variables being so minutely fine-tuned - the more amazing it becomes.

b) It is the argument from design that persuaded Antony Flew – the prominent atheist – to become a theist before he died. And it is this argument that both Dawkins the late Christopher Hitchens have said is the most troubling.

2. The current thinking of astrophysicists is that there are around 122 variables that need to be lined up with perfect precision in order for our universe to have come into existence. If any of these variables was off by even a million-millionth, matter would not have been able to unite and hold together. There would have been nothing—no stars, no world, no people.

3. It often gets described by pointing to our planet and saying, if the earth, which is 94 million miles from the sun, was just a few miles closer to the sun, we would burn up. If it was a few miles farther away we would freeze to death.

4. If our moon did not exist, neither would we. But if it were ten percent bigger we wouldn't survive the tides. The list of things that have to be exactly so goes on and on.

5. I can't do justice to this argument in this talk. Let me simply note you can read about Intelligent Design.² And restate – there are four things I would like you to understand about Natural Revelation: 1) it gave rise to science; 2) it speaks to God's power and majesty.

VI. The second thing I want to be sure you see is that **Natural Revelation launched science.**

A. Last week I gave a quick overview of the ways Western Civilization prioritized the four different epistemological categories – reason, revelation, tradition and intuition – over the last three thousand years.

1. Starting with the Greeks and Romans and their advocacy of reason being wed to the Hebrews and Christians with their advocacy of revelation, I quickly traced the way people answered question seven as we move through the Roman Empire, then the Middle Ages, leading up to the Renaissance and Reformation and into Enlightenment, which is when we get to the scientific revolution.

B. I want to turn back to that to note, science emerged out of a Judeo-Christian worldview. Out of one that understood Creation to be good but not God, and something that could be studied in order to learn about God.

C. In his book, *How the West Won*, Rodney Stark, a professor from University of Washington wrote about – among other things - the scientific revolution. He was exploring why the West – Europe, the United States and Canada – became dominant in the 17th century and moving forward.

1. He argues that several ancient civilizations - Mesopotamia, India, China, Egypt, Greece – were ahead, or had been, but were stalling.

2. He notes that several things allowed the West to pass them: the rise of capitalism and liberal democracy were two, science was the third. And then he explores why the Scientific Revolution happened where it did, and he says: because of Christians.

3. He explains that science starts where it does because: 1) Christians were motivated to study the world because they believed that by studying Creation they would learn about their creator (Natural Revelation); and also because they thought Creation was good but not God.

4. He notes that this worldview was quite different from those of other cultures.

a) The Greeks thought the natural world was worthless;

b) Those living in the East who thought the natural world was an illusion;³

c) The Romans thought crazy things happened because the gods were irrational - the reason there was a tornado was because the god of wind was mad at the god of the crops.

a) And the pantheists,⁴ who taught that all the world was god and needed to be treated as sacred.⁵ Or if it wasn't god, it was inhabited by spirits that did not want simple mortals to study them.⁶

5. In his book he notes that: 1) the early scientists didn't call themselves scientists, they called themselves "natural theologians;" 2) that most of the funding for scientific research came from the church;⁷ and 3) he documents the faith of the 52 people who made the most significant contributions during the Scientific Revolution.⁸

a) After identifying the key people in physics, astronomy, biology and math, he divides them up into three categories: 1) devout; 2) conventionally Christian; and 3) skeptical – noting that of the 52, 60% were devout, 38% were conventionally religious and only one was a skeptic

b) You can read up on the faith of these early scientists if you want to: Johannes Kepler was very pious Lutheran who spent a lot of his time on Bible study; Isaac Newton wrote more theology than he did physics; Robert Boyle - the father of chemistry – spent a lot of his money translating the Bible into non-Western languages for mission work.

D. The first thing I want you to see is that the universe is amazing to reflect that God is amazing. The second is that Natural Revelation (Psalm 19) gave rise to science.

VII. Number three: **General Revelation is general.** The third thing to note about Natural Revelation – and this will come into sharper focus next week when we are looking at what is said about Special Revelation - is that it is limited. General Revelation provides general information about God to a general audience.

A. The things we can learn about God from looking through a microscope or a telescope are limited. There is enough written in the skies and written on our hearts for us to know that there a god, but it is limited.

B. As verse 3 notes – **They have no speech; they use no words; no sound is heard from them** - this is nonverbal communication. And while you can learn a lot nonverbally, there is a lot you can't learn. So, how limited?

1. Well, that is not clear. There was a famous debate among European theologians in the 1930s between Emil Brunner and Karl Barth in which Brunner said, "we can learn a lot, and Barth wrote back in a forceful article titled, "Nein!"

- a) Barth argued that the Germans – this was in the run up to World War II – that the Germans were wildly off base in their thinking (and had fallen into Anti-Semitic thinking – because of Natural Theology.
- 2. There is also long-standing discussion about Natural Law, which is based on natural revelation. As a rule, Roman Catholics put more weight on this than Protestants do. They argue that we can figure more out using reason
- C. Suffice it to say, natural revelation – or general revelation - is limited.⁹ It provides general information to a general audience. But it is not enough. We need the Book!

VIII. And, Number four: **Natural Revelation can be suppressed**

- A. Natural Revelation: 1) testifies to God's grandeur; 2) launched science; 3) it is general in nature; and 4) it can be suppressed.
- B. The argument here is that while there are some things we cannot not know – they are buried in our heart - we can suppress them. For this argument we move from Psalm 19 to Romans 1
- C. As you may know, Paul's letter to the Romans - Paul is the former Jewish Pharisee turned apostle to the Gentiles. His letter to the Romans is the longest letter he writes and in some ways the most significant.
 - 1. It is written to a church that is divided. It had been a church that was made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Jews were forced out of Rome for five years. When they come back, the church of Rome is much less Jewish. This causes problems. Paul's letter is arguing – ultimately – for unity in Christ.
 - 2. It opens – much of chapter one – is an overview of Genesis 3-11, which is noting how broken we are. Sinful. Fallen. In contrast to God – who is perfectly holy and righteous
- D. I am reading – Romans 1:18f.
 - 1. **¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.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.**
 - 2. **²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.**
- E. So, the claim is, God makes himself known to us, but we can deny the truth. Suppress it. Hold it down.¹⁰ All of which makes me think of Freud. This was his argument, right. He wrote a lot about repression – although he took the opposite side of the argument from Paul.
 - 1. In Romans 1, Paul argues that we are repressing our awareness of God because we are wicked and do not want there to be a god.
 - 2. In his writings, Freud argues that we repress the truth that there is no god because we want to think that someone is taking care of us.

F. Who is right? Well, obviously I think Paul is. If you read those who reflect on this, it becomes obvious that many people do not want there to be a god. Why, because if there is a god, then I am not free to make up my own truth or live by my own rules. I am not accountable to anyone. I do not have to submit. I get to define reality.

1. In *Ends and Means*, Aldous Huxley – the famous British writer and philosopher (who wrote *Brave New World*) wrote: I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; and consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption... For myself, as no doubt for most of my friends, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom. Most ignorance is vincibile ignorance. We don't know because we don't want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence. Those who detect no meaning in the world generally do so because, for one reason or another, it suits them.

2. Thomas Nagel, emeritus professor of Philosophy at New York University says the same thing: "I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God... I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."

G. This is what Paul is saying in Romans 1. The heavens declare the glory of God. He has written certain things on our heart. There are things we cannot not know – but we can work to repress them.

1. Is that what you have been doing.

2. Let me suggest that if you believe there is no truth – if you disbelieve the Bible, do not believe Jesus - you might want to check your motives. You need to be skeptical of your skepticism – to doubt your doubts, because we are compromised. You need to have read the Bible once at least. This was a big part of my argument in chapter one. The Bible is THE Book. Many who dismiss it, do so without ever having thoughtfully read it.

IX. There are other arguments I might make if I thought I could hold your attention. After all, the Bears don't play at noon today. I am fascinated but confused by the appeal to human rights and justice.

A. It is worth noting that a lot of people appeal to justice and human rights today, even though such things do not make sense if there is no god. There is a lot of moral rage about rights – which is not a bad thing. I am glad that most people think that humans have more rights than dogs and goldfish. But if there is no Truth, there is no basis of moral rage.

B. Imagine you say to me that there is no universal truth and I hit you. You will likely say, "you can't do that.? That is wrong."

C. You cannot say that. You can hit me back or kill me, but you can't say I was wrong to do it. Why? What are you appealing to?

D. Wrong implies a moral standard outside of us.

1. Where does the moral rage come from if there is no truth? You may say, I have decided that humans have value.
 - a) Well, you can say that you have formed a worldview based on humans having more value. “I have no basis for it but I have decided it.”
2. No. Moral rage hits you b/c truth is possessing you. The truth has got you. It has you in its possession.
 - a) Even if you say you have constructed it. Your rage proves it.
 - b) We feel that a human life is worth more than a rock. That the death of a young person by a killer is wrong.
 - c) No. Look at nature – red in “tooth and claw.” This is what happens. The strong eat the weak. That is all it is.
 - d) No, you say. Human life is worth more than that. A person is worth more than a rock.

X. OK – Enough. Let me pivot back to Psalm 19.

A. The first few verses of that chapter in this book tell us that God is not silent. He has revealed himself.

1. And part of the way he has done that is through the skies – the heavens.
 - a) **The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.**
 - b) **Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.**
2. We will see next week that God has written more in this book than he has in the skies.
3. This week our assignment is to learn to open our eyes a bit wider to the ways God is testifying to His presence.

XI. I hope you will talk about all of this in your small groups. And read chapter two and come back tonight for the first Lakelight lecture.

¹ The argument is that truth is defined by God and that it corresponds with what is – i.e., with God’s nature and with reality. Keller said, “Christians believe that truth and error are not just compliments or criticisms that we throw at ideas, but rather that the truth is true precisely because it truly corresponds with an objective external reality or an eternal truth. And the false is inherently false because it fails to be true or it contradicts the truth. And that’s an objective statement, not just a statement of aesthetics or a statement of politics or a statement of personal judgment. So to be clear, Christians do believe that there’s a distinction between information and disinformation. Furthermore, we believe that disinformation is dangerous, but we also believe it is incredibly dangerous, even more dangerous, to give the government, or for that matter, say, one corporation or a handful of oligarchs the power to determine for all the rest of us what is information and what is disinformation.”

² Fred Hoyle was an atheist and a bit of a maverick in the world of science. He was quite shaken when he first examined the evidence of how delicately fine-tuned the universe is and famous said: “A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature.”

³ Hinduism, especially the more philosophical branches of it, teaches that the physical world is an illusion and that a person's senses are bombarded with false knowledge. This same type of thinking is found in Greek thought. Plato suggested that the physical world – the world of appearances – is less real and far less important than the conceptual world, the world of the ideal essence or archetype.

⁴ Pantheism argues that God is in everything.

⁵ Animism holds that the mountains and volcanoes and winds and waves were all animated by spirits.

⁶ When you view the world as a mysterious and sacred object of worship you really couldn't submit it to the kind of independent, objective analysis that is at the foundation of science.

⁷ Stark, *How the West Won*, p. 306-309.

⁸ He started the Scientific Revolution with Copernicus's publication of *De Revolutionibus* in 1543, and went up to 1680

⁹ The last thing I will note here is that the Gospel is called Good News, not good insight. And news is something that has to be spoken. It is common to hear people credit Francis of Assisi for the line, "Preach the Gospel at all times. And if necessary, use words." We do not think Francis said this. And it does not make any sense. This is like telling a news reporter, it's time to give the news. If necessary, use words.

¹⁰ The Greek word for suppress is *κατεχόντων* - *katachonton*