

Sunday, August 11, 2024

The Bread That Came Down From Heaven – The presence of God in our daily lives

I say thank you to Gilly for opening the series on the bread of life. Gilly referenced the Manna the Israelites ate in the wilderness and says, “Just like the manna in the wanderings of the Israelites, we come up short, and end up with, “What is it?”

From that question to another question, “Can God be known?” I requested for Psalm 19 as our Old Testament reading because it works with our gospel reading from John 6:41-51.

C.S. Lewis called Psalm 19 “the greatest poem in the Bible and the greatest song ever written.” David grew up in the pastureland of Palestine accustomed to having the most magnificent view of God’s celestial handiwork. There were no city lights, no pollution, or buildings to block his view. He would lean back, prop his head up on a rock, and watch the stars, moon, constellations, and planets do their nightly dance. Probably on one of those evenings, he took out his lyre and began to sing a song of praise to the Creator of the universe. Luckily, we have that song recorded in the Bible as Psalm 19.

Read Psalm 19 in any Bible version and you will find the language is both graphic and stunning. But can God be known? How can a finite mind understand an infinite God? My answer is that only God can reveal God. God can only be known as he makes himself known.

In Psalm 19, David speaks of three types of revelations.

In verses 1-6, God makes himself known through “natural revelation.” Erwin Lutzer writes, “In creation, God went public.” Natural revelation is so clear, so obvious, and understandable that we have no excuse if we deny God. If someone is standing near you and yells, if you don’t hear him, you are either deaf or ignoring him. If we had just natural revelation, we would be aware that there is a powerful, mighty creator.

But, as John Calvin wrote, this might lead to us worshipping creation instead of the Creator. Another problem is the consistency of natural revelation. Day after day and night after night this revelation provides a backdrop for our lives. It is like those who live close to the airport. Every 15 minutes a plane flies over their house, shaking the floorboards. They don’t even notice. Natural revelation is not sufficient to bring us to God.

In verses 7-11, God makes himself known through the Word. Francis Bacon said there are two volumes to life: “The book of nature and the book of Scripture.” To begin to understand God, we must read both. As we read the Bible, we see the greatness of God! Here, David uses Yahweh, the personal name for God. Natural revelation cannot tell us God’s name. Nor can nature “convert the soul”

Verses 11-13, make us look inside our heart. The clearer the Scripture becomes to us, the more we become aware of our sinfulness before a holy and righteous God. The result of David’s prayer is a desire for purity in speech, “May the words of my mouth...” and purity in thought, “...and the meditations of my heart be pleasing unto you.” (Psalm 19:14).

We see the third way God has revealed himself in the final words of the psalm, “My rock and my redeemer.” The last verse has a Messianic hint of God’s ultimate revelation – the Incarnation. God became a human to redeem us. “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

The gospel reading today revolves around the profound statement, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” The people of Jesus’ time awaited a Messiah who would descend from heaven in a blaze of glory. They saw Jesus as the son of Joseph and Mary, familiar and ordinary. They questioned, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, I have come down from heaven?”

This conflict between expectation and reality extends to our understanding of God’s presence today. We often look for God in grandiose moments, missing the divine in the simple and everyday occurrences of life. Recognizing God’s presence in our lives requires us to look beyond the surface and see the divine in the ordinary. This is not always easy, especially when we are caught up in the busyness and challenges of daily life.

The gospel’s message, “I am the bread that came down from heaven” challenges us to recognize God’s presence in our daily lives. By opening our hearts and minds to the possibility of the divine in the ordinary, we can live more meaningful Christian lives, embodying the love and grace of God in all that we do. As we go about our daily routines, let us continually strive to:

1. See God’s presence in ordinary lives and never discountenance somebody as being ordinary. The most unremarkable person we meet may indeed be the messenger that God has sent to guide us on our journey towards eternal life.
2. Another way is through intentional relationships, taking the time to truly get to know the people who come into our daily lives. This requires us to be present and attentive, to listen without judgment, to offer compassion and understanding.
3. A 3rd way is to recognize God’s presence in the simple, familiar, everyday experiences and activities around us, even those we often overlook or take for granted. This demands that we open our hearts and minds to the possibility that God is at work in ways we may not expect.
4. Finally, we must cultivate a spirit of gratitude, recognizing the blessings in our own lives and expressing gratitude for them. This gratitude will inspire us to share our blessings with others, further spreading the love of God.

To close, let us say in prayer together:

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to you in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in everything I do and say.

Amen

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