

## INTRODUCTION

A while back I asked brothers and sisters to pray that my previous house would be sold in God's timing. Thanks for your prayer. I am excited to tell you that the transaction had been completed before the end of the year. My wife and I feel great that we no longer have to pay mortgage and utilities on an empty space. When spring comes we can start looking for a future house. My prayer is that God will use our next home to bless many people. My wife and I love to do "window shopping" for homes on the internet. When you look at the decoration from pictures you can get some ideas on the taste of the owner. I once saw a house that is painted green on the inside and the outside. The family must be nature-lovers. There is another house with a wide and two-story high foyer. The owner planted two trees on both sides of the entryway. I am not talking about potted plants, but trees inside a house. I wonder what the owner will do when the trees touch the ceiling. When you look inside a home you can know something about the personalities and interests of the people living there. But such guess based solely on observation may not be completely accurate. However, when you sit down and chat with the owner then you can gather more direct information about the person. If the house belongs to your long-time friend, then you do not even need to ask the get-to-know-each-other questions. Your conversation will be focused on deeper matters like future plans or personal struggles. The same is true for our relationship with God. God wants us to get to know Him. The Bible tells us that God is not a remote super-being who is hidden behind the clouds. After God made our universe He had never stopped revealing Himself to us. Psalm 19 tells us that God speaks to us in three diverse ways. He speaks to us in nature, He speaks through His Word, the Bible, and He also speaks to our hearts. By these three means, God reveals Himself to us in ways that we can comprehend.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. God Speaks in Nature 神在大自然說話

First, the psalmist told us that God speaks to us in nature. **Verse 1** reads: The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Our Creator left His finger-prints everywhere in nature. This verse is a good example of parallelism the Jews often use when they write a poem. The second half of a statement somewhat repeats what is said earlier. It is like couplets the Chinese put on both sides of a door. Both verbs "declare" and "proclaim" have to do with announcement of information. From verses 2 to 4 the psalmist used a few different words to describe the information God speaks to us in nature. I put those words on the screen. This information is broadcast all over the world so that everyone can see it. God's revelation in nature is not only universal, it is also continuous. Look at **verse 2**: Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. The sun, moon and stars, mountains and flowers are always there. Moreover, as we study God's creation we will notice some of His characters. God is a Creator of order, wisdom and purpose. He arranged everything according to His detail plans. Nothing happens by chance or without meaning. On December 21, 1968 Apollo 8 became the first spacecraft to carry humans to circulate the moon. While still in space the three crew

members took turn to read from sections of Genesis 1. Most of us should be familiar with **Genesis 1:1** - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Those space pioneers could not help but gave praise to the Creator when they gazed at the earth and moon, and the marvelous universe. You do not need to fly above the atmosphere to admire God's creation. Some of you have traveled to great wonders in the U.S. One summer my family went to the Niagara Falls. It is one thing to look at pictures or watch video about it. It is quite a unique experience to go there in-person. There is an observation deck where you can soak yourself in the downpouring water. My boys tried it, but I did not. Last year most of us had the opportunity to watch the solar eclipse. We had a cloudy day then, but at least we were able to see the progression on TV. Also, we had a few super hurricanes that caused much devastation in Texas, Florida and parts of the Caribbean last summer and fall. We witness God's mighty power in all these natural wonders and disasters. In our everyday life we are often too busy to pay attention to those things. It is not until we go on a vacation or when a catastrophe strikes before we begin to realize that we have a powerful God. We do not need to go very far before we can listen to how God speaks to us in nature. When was the last time you slowed down, smelled the outdoor fresh air, observed the flowers and listened to the birds? Tomorrow when you have your morning devotion you can sit by the window and just look outside. If time permits, you can pull over at a park and watch the sunset on your way home from work. When God speaks to us in nature we should respond in praise and thanks like the astronauts did. Praise Him for the beauty displayed in our world, praise Him for His wisdom and glory. Thank Him for sustaining the creation by His power. Thank Him for supplying all that we need. Thank Him for providing sunshine, air and rain. Thank Him for giving us breathe of life, eyes to see, ears to hear and nose to breath.

## 2. God Speaks through His Word 神藉著聖經說話

God reveals Himself to us in ways that we can comprehend. Not only does God speak to us in nature, He also speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. In **verses 7 to 9** the psalmist used six different words to describe God's Word. In verse 7 there is "law," which means rules; then also "statutes," which are testimonies. In verse 8 we see the word "precepts," which can be understood as principles; there is also "commands," which are orders. Finally, in verse 9 we find "fear," which means respect; then there are also "ordinances," which refer to standards for judgment. We can understand these words from the setting of a home. There are instructions to follow like teaching your child how to wash dishes. There are house rules to obey like light-out by 10 o'clock. There are models to observe like treating elderly family members with respect. Finally, there are standards to observe like table manners. Next, the author told us some blessings of God's Word. It gives us insight on true wisdom, it provides direction, comfort and strength. God's Word reflects wisdom from above. **Proverbs 2:6** says: For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. The world is looking for smart people. But God asks us to be wise. How should we treat God's Word if it can bring us so much benefit? The psalmist told us that we should pursue God's Word like treasures. He said in **verse 10**: They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. We should love God's Word the way we love our favorite things, whether it is diamond, chocolate or sports. The psalm continued in **verse 11** that we should obey God's Word: By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. That is the only way to receive God's blessings. The questions for you and I are: do we view God's Word as the only guidance in life or do we see it as a restraint to our freedom? Do we love God's Word so much that we

read it daily? Also, do we apply God's Word to our daily life after we read it? It is sad to say that there are many spiritually undernourished and illiterate Christians in every church. Someone said that nowadays people pay for expensive tickets to go to Christian music concerts, but they are not willing to attend free Bible studies at their own churches! Everything comes down to the basic: just read your Bible every day, and join others every Friday and Sunday to study God's Word. There are tons of free resource on the internet on Bible reading plans. If you do not have access to a computer, you can just read the Bible chapter by chapter. You can start tonight or tomorrow morning. It takes time to develop a good habit. I pray that God gives you love for His Word, a desire to read and to do so regularly. May I tag on one more personal suggestion? I would strongly encourage everyone to bring your own Bible to the church. By that I mean paper Bible. Say that I am a dinosaur, but there are just too many benefits to have a printed Bible at hand. I have been using my bilingual Bible for over twenty years now. It is like my personal study-Bible. It has many hand-written commentary notes, cross references and even pronunciation for some Chinese Biblical words. I also highlight important Bible verses. It is full of accumulated knowledge from all those years. I strongly encourage you to start using a paper Bible, and bring it along to church. If you do not have one I brought some Chinese Bibles with me. Feel free to come to me for a copy after the service. I am not a celebrity and so please don't ask me for an autograph. I only have Chinese ones, and so our English-speaking brothers and sisters have to get their own.

### 3. God Speaks to Our Hearts 神向人内心說話

God reveals Himself to us in ways that we can comprehend. God speaks to us in nature and God speaks to us through His Word. Thirdly, God also speaks to our hearts. Since God is holy and righteous, and His Word is true and powerful the psalmist immediately noticed his sins. Let us look at verses **12 and 13**: 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. The psalmist used four different words to describe wrongdoings. The word "errors" in verse 12 means mistakes. For example, you accidentally put salt instead of sugar in your coffee. Then there is the word "hidden faults," which refer to offences committed unintentionally out of ignorance. Perhaps we all have experience that we made fun at people, but the hearers felt being offended. As we move onto verse 13 we see the word "willful sins." For example, we know that God forbids us to lie and slander others; but out of our sinfulness we use our mouth to sin anyway. The last one on the list is "transgression," which means stepping over the boundary. If the road-sign says 40 mph, but you speed at 50 then you violate the law by transgression. How did the psalmist respond when God speaks to his heart about those four types of sins? He asked God to reveal any sin that he was unaware of. Next, he asked God for forgiveness and he also asked God for grace so that those sins would not become a bondage to him. A while back I read an article on confession. The author said that there is a difference between admitting one's sin and asking for forgiveness. It is easy to say, "I'm sorry" then walk away. Every now and then we hear about the so-called confession by some celebrities when they committed crime, lied or cheated on their spouses. A simple "I'm sorry" may only mean "I was in bad luck for being caught." There was no remorse and no desire to change. In comparison, the author of the article said that it takes much humility and courage when one asks: "Would you forgive me?" For the parents among us, the best way to practice confession and forgiveness is at home. I challenge you to humble yourself and ask your kids for forgiveness next time you offend

them. We have a house-rule at home that when a family member asks another person for forgiveness, then we must forgive without hesitation or holding on grudges. The psalmist asked God for forgiveness so that he can come clean before the Lord. He concludes the psalm in **verse 14** expressing his desire to become a person of upright character: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. The word “meditation” here is a musical term, which means echoing of sound. The Chinese Union Version renders the word correctly as “thought.” The psalmist prayed that both the audible words from his mouth and inaudible reflection in his heart be acceptable to God. It goes without saying that our Almighty God does not only see everything we do and hear every word we say, but He also knows every idea in our mind. God’s intelligence is way superior than the CIA or the Secret Services. It is as if He had a radar screen in front of Him 24-7. It beeps when we commit a sin. Even when we slander people behind their back or ponder some sinful things in our mind, God also receives the signals. However, on the flip-side God also knows it when you suffer for the sake of righteousness, when someone is plotting a wicked scheme against you or you are being falsely accused. We should always be aware that we live before an all-knowing God. Therefore, we should always examine our hearts if our deeds, speech and thoughts are up to God’s standard.

## CONCLUSION

God reveals Himself to us in ways that we can comprehend. God is never silent. He keeps speaking to us in nature, through His Word and to our hearts. God speaks to us because He wants us to know Him. Believing in God is not like a transaction at a vending machine. Some people think that as long as they put in things like money donation to the church, good works or prayer then they will get more money, good health or happiness in return. Believing in God is about building a relationship with Him. You may know some Christians who seem to have a sixth sense on spiritual things. They seem to be able to feel God’s presence under any circumstance. They always share special insight in Bible study or Sunday school. It was as if their ears were different than yours that they could hear God’s voice. I can tell you there is no special trick. Relationship with God is just like relationship with people. I may know your spouse, kids or good friends. But I will never know them as much as you do. Why? It is because you have a closer relationship with those people that I do not have. It is the same in the spiritual realm. The more time you spend with God the deeper the relationship you will have with Him. There is no short-cut. I would like to encourage everyone to make it your goal for this year to know God more. That is why I put this message at the beginning of the year. We will begin a new sermon series starting from next week. As we close let me give you three words that begin with an “L” – love, listen and like. I hope we will grow to love God more, to listen to Him more and to be more like our Lord.