

“Look Around and Behold...”

A Sermon preached on Psalm 104 by Pastor Christian McShaffrey on July 3, 2011

I do think it is good for us to be spending the day together as God's people - and outdoors - for it is really only outdoors that we can receive the fullness of God's revelation.

O, I know that we are all very good about reading and studying God's written revelation - the Holy Bible - But I fear that many modern Christians have come to neglect God's other revelation: The creation.

So I rejoice that today we have the opportunity to consider both revelations of God - side by side as it were - For that is what this Psalm calls us to do. It calls us to go ahead and look around at God's creation... for there is much it can teach us about God himself.

Let us therefore look at this Psalm together... as we work through the verses... first main point:

1st Look Around and Behold God's Greatness

Verses 1-4, *Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire:*

God's greatness - As scripture says, truly is unsearchable. We (as finite creatures) will never even begin to comprehend his glorious greatness... but that doesn't mean we shouldn't even try to begin... we should...

For that is exactly what the Psalmist here does... he looks around God's creation... and being thoroughly impressed by what he sees... then tries to imagine how great then the Creator must be...

It seems then as if the Psalmist doesn't even know where to begin... so he simply starts borrowing from the images he sees and gets all poetic... I mean...

Does God need clothing? Of course not - But if he did, his angels would have to figure out a way to stitch together the invisible and abstract concepts of *honor and majesty*.

Does God need a royal robe? Of course not - But if he did, his angels would have to fly faster than the speed of light so they could then stitch together some light particles.

Does God need a royal court? Does he need some kind of royal tapestry to adorn his throne room? Of course not - But if he did, his angels would have to fly through heavens... collecting every star - every cluster - every nebula - every galaxy - every super nova remnant... so they could all be woven together into a great cosmic curtain...

Does God need a private upper chamber in which to retire? Of course not - But if he did, his angels would have to build it aloft the waters of the skies.

Does God need transportation? Of course not - But if he did, his angels would have to harness every tornado, hurricane, and supercel on earth... so he could ride upon the wings of the storm in worthy manner!

So behold first (at least to some degree) the greatness of our God! Unsearchable! Unimaginable! Unfathomable! Yet still declared daily by his creation! So let's consider that creation now:

2nd Look Around and Behold God's Creativity

Verses 5-9, *Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away. They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them. Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth.*

Let me say this first: As we look around God's creation, let us first of all remember to look at it as just that: As God's Creation!

Far too many people (even professing Christians) look at it as if it has just always been there... something that kind of just grew out of nothing... something that just kind of fits together and works... at least for now... until everything eventually unravels...

But no - Here we are reminded that it is God who *laid the foundations of the earth...* and because God is the Master Builder... there is no way those foundations will ever be moved (unless, of course he himself decides to move them)!

And what we also see is that having laid the foundations, God also then built the rest of this glorious structure... building up mountains as walls... carving out valleys as corridors... carving out his creation with waters as with a chisel!

And as for these waters... we need to remember that there is no more powerful and unpredictable element on earth... yet God wields the waters effortlessly - skillfully - with all authority.

Yes - He used the waters as tool to carve out his creation... and when he was finished... he *rebuked* them and *they fled...* quickly retreating into those places which he had appointed for them: The oceans - the lakes - the rivers - the streams - the storehouses and springs... these are there boundaries... and this is therefore where they will stay.

And this truly is remarkable... especially if you have ever seen the ocean. I mean, you watch those mighty waves constantly beating against the shore... coming in incessantly - with ever-increasing force - like an ever-advancing army - with their crests and caps - constantly cutting away at the shoreline...

But then God's voice silently thunders forth, saying, "Stop! This is your boundary! And do not even think of advancing another inch!"

And why? Because again, even the waters are just a tool... something God used to create... something he also then continued to use in order to care for his creatures. Next point:

3rd Look Around and Behold God's Provision

Verses 10-18, *He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches.*

He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.

The trees of the LORD are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; Where the birds make their nests: as for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies.

God's provision - It is here described in terms of how faithfully he distributes that element which not only destroys... but which also is most necessary for life on earth: Water.

And yes - This point does need to be made... especially in our modern day! I mean, we just take it for granted that water will come out of the faucet when we turn the handle... we see a lake and think, "O, that's a nice lake... maybe I should get canoe..." or it rains on the day we schedule an outdoor event and we say, "O, that's too bad..."

No - It's not too bad... and no - it's not just a nice lake. Because without these things... everything on earth would die! Including us... see here how it works according to the Psalmist: God sends water so the grass can grow - God makes sure the grass grows so the cattle have something to eat.

God makes sure the cattle have something to eat so that we can use them to be industrious. God makes sure that we can be industrious so we can then enjoy things like bread - wine - and oil...

God provides so faithfully for all his creatures... and what does all this provision presuppose? It presupposes this: God's power and authority to do so. Next point:

4th Look Around and Behold God's Authority

Verses 19-23, He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.

Just as we tend to take things like water for granted... so also do we simply take for granted that the sun is going to rise and set every day...

And why? Because we all know how it works: The moon orbits the earth - the earth orbits the sun - the sun orbits the galaxy... so naturally, it would appear that the sun and moon rise and set on a daily basis...

But that is not how we are to think of such things... for all these things like orbits and satellites things are nothing but secondary causes... for verse 19 asserts that it is God who *has appointed the moon for seasons; the sun for its going down...*

Listen - As much as you may appreciate and enjoy the cosmological observations and insights of men like Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, or Einstein... please don't let them ruin your religion... by reducing the mysteries of the cosmos - God's creative power and authority - to purely naturalistic mechanisms...

It is God who spins the earth on the axis of his finger... it is God who calls forth the sun each morning, saying, "Let there be light." And it is also God who then says, "Come forth moon, it is now your time."

And I know that many of you children don't really like when it gets dark outside... but think of it this way: That's when God turns his eyes and affections to all his nocturnal creatures. Yes - That's when he likes to feed the bats - lions - and the sharks... all according to the mystery of his providence... next point:

5th Look Around and Behold God's Providence

Verses 24-30, O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.

These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.

In these verses we have described the mystery of God's providence... that is, how wonderfully he takes care of all his creatures.

No matter where in God's creation you look... you will see God's sovereign hand at work... caring for all his creatures.

If you look at the oceans... you will see *innumerable teeming things* which depend upon its currents... mighty ships which rely upon its surface tension... even sea monsters which use it all as their playground...

If you look at the fields and the forests... you will see insects, animals, birds... all looking to God with open mouths... waiting patiently for their daily allotment of food.

You know (and as a brief aside), sometimes I think the insects and animals understand and appreciate the ministry of the Holy Spirit more than we do! I mean, when we think of the Spirit we think of silly things like speaking in tongues at a church service...

But when the rest of God's creatures think of the Spirit... they understand... if he doesn't get sent forth to *renew the face of the earth* each morning... everything dies. Everything.

So what should we do with all this information? Where do we go from here? Well, how about going to our knees? Allowing these thoughts to humble us before the awesome glory of God? Next point:

6th Look Around and Behold God's Glory

Verses 31-34, *The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works. He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth: he toucheth the hills, and they smoke. I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD.*

This, my friends, is the end of the whole matter! This is what it's all about! God's glory! And I know that every Christian will agree... because we throw that word around all the time... "Glory be God! Give God the Glory!"

But sometimes I wonder if we even know what that means anymore! Because (at least biblically speaking) the concepts of God - Glory - Fear - Awe - Trembling are all interconnected!

But whom do we modernists fear? What do we modernists fear? Which is also to ask this: To whom do we modernists give the glory?! Think about it!

I mean, if NASA told us that a meteor was on its way... on a direct collision course with earth... people would tremble - wouldn't they?

If the Geological Survey told us that the San Andreas Fault was going to swallow up California next week... people would tremble - wouldn't they?

If the same agency told us that all 5 volcanoes of Hawaii were going to erupt simultaneously... people would tremble - wouldn't they?

If the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration told us that a tropical storm was about to pound the Gulf Coast into an unrecognizable oblivion... people would tremble - wouldn't they?

Well... what about God?! What about trembling before him! What about acknowledging the glory of his power as it is revealed in his creation?

I mean, think about it... do you really believe that God's glory is so intense and intimidating that all he has to do is look at the earth... and the Richter scale immediately runs out of numbers?

Do you really believe that God's glory is so intense and intimidating that all he has to do is touch a mountain...and it immediately melts like wax!

O, I know these are not as comforting thoughts as my previous points about God's creativity and faithfulness to provide for his creatures... but this is God's glory... and we need to be glad about it!

But let me now close with one more unhappy point as we consider the last verse in this Psalm... final point:

7th Look Around and Behold God's Judgment

Verse 35, *Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the LORD, O my soul. Praise ye the LORD.*

O, I recognize that this final verse might strike you as somewhat strange... but it is the Spirit-inspired application of this Psalm: Sinners need to be consumed... and the thought of sinners being consumed should cause us to want to bless the Lord. Why?

Because again - God created all things - God created all things good - God takes care of all the good things he created - God enjoys all the good things he created. More than that - God's creation also in turn enjoys him - glorifies him - depends on him - serves him...

If the only things in the entire equation were God and his creation, I tell you that all of this would quickly blossom into that new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells...

But there is one more variable in that cosmic equation... isn't there? Sinners. Sinners that (as the Psalmist says) really need to be removed from the face of the earth.

And I know we don't see sinners as that big of a problem... but the creation does... as Paul explained in Romans 8... *it groans and travails* in pain because of our sin... it cannot wait for the the last elect person to be saved... so that it can be delivered from the bondage of corruption!

Or as Jonathan Edwards tried to illustrate: "Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it; the creation groans with you..."

The sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan... the earth does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts... nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon... the air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies.

The world would spew you out, were it not for the sovereign hand of him who hath subjected it in hope."

Therefore, the Psalmist says rightly: *Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more...* For it will only be then... when we... and all of God's creatures will be able to glorify God as we ought... and to enjoy him as we ought... fully and forevermore. Amen.