

Guardians of the Holy House

Readings

Exodus 20

Psalm 19

Romans 7

John 2

Opening

“Ok I’ll send you a link about how to read blueprints. This will be helpful to you over the next year.” It’s one thing to look at a basic floor plan and elevation plan of the new home you’re planning to build. But you enter an entirely different world when you turn past the first few pages of blueprints and see structural plans, lighting plans, HVAC and electrical plans. So having never built a house before; unfamiliar with terminology among architects, contractors, and subcontractors, our ever-talented and ever-patient architect, Jim Pomy, along with our contractor help me understand how all these parts and systems become the home of our hearts’ desire.

I depend on their experience, their skill, their knowledge of building codes. They have the technical knowledge and skill in every facet of the design and building phases. I’ve come to them because I desire something more than a safe and functional space. I’ve come to them because there’s artistry in their work. I want our home to be beautiful. I want it to be a place of peace. I want rooms, porch, and patio to invite intimacy with God and one another. This is the home I want to inhabit with my family but I don’t know how to build it.

The Joy of Creation

The psalmist, David, is awestruck at the glory of God's creation and he sees an artisan at work. David looks with wonder at the skies and says, "The heavens set out in detail the glory of God. And the firmament (the sky) reports the creation of his hands." That's how the Septuagint, the Greek translation, of Psalm 19 reads.

Creation has a structure, an arrangement of heavenly bodies, moving in rhythm, moving in harmony. From the rising of the sun to its setting, there is a daily drama of God's beauty appearing over every nation on earth. Magnificent is the sight we behold with our eyes, but there's a glory behind the visible glory. That's the language of the skies. Just as we cannot look directly at the sun, so our eyes cannot behold the fullness of God's beauty. The sun alone is our source of light and life. It speaks that there is one source of life in the spiritual realm: there is one source of eternal goodness, justice, and righteousness.

David hears the heavens singing with joy. The heavens have a language; they are a book to read. He's reading the signs of the skies and it's a feast for his eye and his soul. And then he compares the heavens with a house. "In (the heavens) God has set a tent for the sun." That's house language for Hebrews who lived in tents in the Sinai wilderness after leaving Egypt.

The universe is the house that God made with his own hands. And it's obvious from the book of the skies that the Creator made this world so that we would live in this house enjoying the wonder at his handiwork. The sun is like a bridegroom sprinting out of his room to begin the day; like an athlete at peak fitness every morning running his strongest race. The sun gives light in God's house—his created world—and it's clear the purpose of that light—to bring joy to the whole house. That joy would literally shine over all nations.

Creation and Exodus

Well, that's not the whole picture David sees looking upon the world. We come to verse 7 of Psalm 19 and it looks like a hard pivot, a *non sequiter*, what we call in my family the 'illegal segue.' For years I couldn't wrap my mind around how these parts fit together.

I want David to continue singing about creation. Let's ponder the oceans, mountains, and rivers. But, no, David turns his meditation to the Law. Yet his joy doesn't decelerate in the least. He uses the same images and emotions about the Law that he did about the heavens. There's joy: "the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." There's light: "the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." There's harmony and wholeness: "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul."

We don't speak this way about the Law of the Lord, the commandments we find in Exodus and Deuteronomy. We would speak this way about the whole of Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament, but it's rare among western Christians to speak this way about the Law of Moses. Who *rejoices* in commandments in our time?

Our culture celebrates any form of individual expression, no matter how vain, crass, or profane it may be. David says 'the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.' Ours is an achievement culture, a consumer culture. David says the Law of God is 'More to be desired than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.' (Psalm 19:10–11, ESV). He celebrates words that warn him. He's seeking a reward that only comes by keeping commandments.

This is a different world. I don't think in these ways. I don't make these connections. But I'm called to conform my thinking and my living to the Word of God, not conform the Scriptures to my thinking.

And over time, I discover how Creation and Law fit together; how it couldn't be *any other way*. The clue is in the narrator: Moses, and the place, he received. We believe Moses to be the author of Exodus *and* Genesis.

God not only revealed the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, he spoke to Moses face to face, mouth to mouth. Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days in God's awesome presence. Church fathers like St Basil and St Gregory Nazianus who gave us the doctrine of the Trinity also teach that God revealed to Moses the vision of creation when he was on Mount Sinai. How God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh.

Moses sees the blueprints of creation so to speak. He has already seen and lived through the most terrible ways this wonderful creation has been corrupted through sin and oppression. Now Moses sees the Law in light of Creation. And so should we.

Here's an exercise I encourage this week. Read Genesis 1-2, then read Exodus 20 immediately, all in one sitting. Compare the images, the characters, and figures in Genesis with the Ten Commandments. You'll find interesting connections between the creation story and these ten commands. Where God creates the heavens and the seas in Genesis, in Exodus he says don't worship things in the heavens or in the ocean. In Eden, God provided for Adam and Eve's every need, all the trees of the garden, save one, which were both pleasant to the eye and good for food; in Exodus he gives the command, "Do not covet." On the seventh day of creation, God rested from his work and made the entire day holy throughout his world. On Mount Sinai, God commanded Israel to rest every week on the seventh day. They were not only to rest themselves; they were commanded to *bring* rest, to *give* rest to all in their care—sons, daughters, servants, livestock, strangers. Each family had its own little world, its own universe. Every seventh day God said you must establish rest for everyone in your house, just as I established rest for my house, which of course, is where he set his tent—all that dwells under the sun.

We look at these commands as prohibitions and restrictions. We don't see the commands are meant to lead us back to the beauty and glory of God, glory as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. When sin corrupted God's temple cosmos, his handiwork, from the heavens down to the dark corners of our souls, God didn't abandon us. He revealed his wisdom, his Word, so we would not be cut off from his beauty forever.

And the Lord gave us his wisdom so we would be keepers of his glory, guardians of holiness. When God made Adam, he made him to be the guardian and keeper of holiness in God's world. That's priesthood imagery there. Adam was God's high priest in Eden, the holy of holies in God's universe. Genesis 2 says "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep." The words work and keep in Hebrew also mean 'serve' and 'guard.'

And we know that Adam *did not* guard the holiness of Eden. He defiled his glory as a son of God seeking to *be* God. Then he had to leave the garden. When Adam left, we read this little detail that God stationed cherubim at Eden's gates with flaming swords, guarding the

garden. Greg Beale notes that angels became the guardians of the tree of life. But that was Adam's task. That's what a priest ought to do: keep the Temple from unclean things. A priest orders the Temple cosmos so the Lord is worshiped in the beauty of holiness.¹

That's why we need the Law. That's why we need Scripture, not just the beauty of creation. In the splendor of creation only, we'll become idolaters. But in the splendor of creation *and* Scripture, we can live in the beauty of holiness as God intended. We can become priests of creation again.

Now we might see a bit more clearly why our Lord Jesus made a whip and threw over tables. Jesus is the new Adam, the great High Priest. He is the Architect, He is the Wisdom of God *and* the Word of God. He sees how all things are meant to fit together in harmony for the worship of God. But worship had become a commercial transaction in the house of God, one of the grossest forms of spiritual corruption. Jesus came to set the house in order; not only a sanctuary in Jerusalem, but the holy house of God that is the universe. He is serious about his Father's holiness and he is also serious about *our* holiness. Jesus came to fulfill the Law we couldn't fulfill, so that we could become a holy priesthood again. Because that is who we are made to be: keepers of holy worship, beauty, and joy in God's world.

Guarding Contentment

Lent is a season when we rededicate ourselves as keepers of God's beauty. We get serious about being priests of our households. Whether you live alone with your family, your home is your little universe. Your home is meant to be a domestic church. You have a priestly role in your home to make and keep your house a house of worship.

Consider the commandment on coveting. Coveting is a temptation that increases in times such as these. When you're restless (and have been for a while); when there is little you can control, you want something to change. So you look at other people's lives, other people's

¹Beale, Gregory. "The Final Vision of the Apocalypse and Its Implications for a Biblical Theology of the Temple." Heaven on Earth. Edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole. Carlisle England: Paternoster Press, 2004.

jobs, other people's friendships or marriages. Instead of taking our suffering or loneliness to God, we turn to Instagram and Facebook feeds. When we're weak we don't remember how posed, how curated, how edited and filtered these images are.

Covetousness is like lust; the first look isn't usually where the offense lies. Sin gets a foot in the door with the second, third, fourth, fifth look. "I want her job." "I want their life." "I want a marriage like that."

Covetousness can never give you joy. The beauty of God comes with contentment, not covetousness. Contentment *is* good, but it's more of a decision than an emotion. It is not easily acquired. It takes effort and persistence, most of all prayer.

Pray for contentment even if you don't have it. And if you cannot embrace contentment, then pray for patience. If you cannot pray for patience, then pray for trust. Pray that you will trust the Lord in trials, even if you do not understand why hardship continues. And if you cannot pray at all, then ask your brother or sister to *be* your prayer that you may not fall into sin. Whether you are weak or strong, you are always a keeper of God's beauty and holiness. When your path leads you to the Garden of Gethsemane, you want your friends nearby. Seek the friends you know will stay awake and will help you keep awake, trusting the Lord even when your way is sorrowful.

David said of the commandments, "in keeping them there is great reward." We can hear that reward in another psalm. It is *not* God saying, "thanks for being a good boy." No, it's something that surpasses our comprehension, full of glory: "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple."² Yes, to live in God's world as he made it to be—a house of worship, a house of beauty, a house of joy—that is why God gave us the Law and why Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law for us, so that we might dwell in this holy house forever. Amen.

²Psalm 27.4