

Revealed in Creation

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[0:00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church.

And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

This week we're continuing our series in the book of Romans, and you'll remember that the book of Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD. And it is called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it is written to the churches in the city of Rome.

Romans is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And Paul's hope as he's writing it is that this church would be established in the gospel.

[1:08] Remember, we looked at that just a couple weeks ago in verse 11 of chapter 1. And I've been telling you that there are many applications in the book of Romans. Paul is especially concerned with the mission and the unity of God's church.

And there are many spokes, many different topics we're going to explore. Those spokes are always constantly coming back to the hub of the gospel.

Last week, Andy Perch finished up for us Paul's introductory remarks. Really, we could see verses 1 all the way through verse 17 as Paul telling us, hey, this is my greeting and this is what this letter is going to be about.

Verses 16 and 17 were, in a sense, Paul's thesis statement for the book of Romans. And so now we are really going to get into the meat of Paul's first argument.

And now if you're like me, sometimes it's tempting when you show up to church, especially when I was growing up, to think, well, here's another random passage and some points that are going to be made. And I hope that's not true for us.

[2:12] What I hope you see is the overarching arguments that Paul is making as we go through week by week. And so as we get into the meat of Paul's first argument, this is going to continue all the way through chapter 3.

From verse 18 of chapter 1 to essentially the end of chapter 3, Paul is making one point. And that one point he's going to summarize in chapter 3, verse 23, when he says, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

So Paul's making, we're going to spend multiple weeks in this argument, but he's making essentially one argument, both Jews and Gentiles, and by Gentiles he means everyone who's not a Jew, both Jews and Gentiles deserve God's wrath and punishment.

So I want you to see that there's a larger argument that's happening here. This morning we're focusing on the Gentile part of the argument. So Paul's going to wait till later to talk about the Jews. First he's going to talk about the Gentiles. And we'll see in this passage, Paul is pressing to us the witness that the created world gives to God and his glory.

[3:21] The ways in which we look around and we see the world that God has made, and it teaches us that God is the great creator and sustainer.

It's with that that I invite you to turn with me now to the book of Romans. We're going to start at verse 18. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible.

No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now Romans 1, starting at verse 18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

[4 : 32] So they are without excuse. Verse 21. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you this morning that you have spoken to us.

We thank you that you've spoken to us in creation and the world around us that we can see and touch and taste and smell. And we thank you even more that you've spoken to us, especially in your word.

We thank you for that in the book of Romans, and we ask that you would help us this morning, that you would send your spirit to do what you've promised to do, which is to open our minds, that you would give us the spirit so that we can understand spiritual things.

[5 : 39] You'd give us clarity, and you'd speak to us directly. We ask most of all that you would show us Jesus, that we would see him in all his glory and beauty and majesty and power and holiness and mercy and grace and love.

Use Romans chapter 1 to grow our love and affection for Christ. We ask that you'd use it to grow our reverence and our awe for Christ. We ask that you'd use it to grow our obedience to him.

And we thank you that we don't worry this morning about whether we've earned or deserved those things. We know that we haven't, and so we simply ask for them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. Some of you know that I moved to Colorado Springs in June of 2017, and when I was first at Cheyenne Mountain, I was actually only part-time here at the church, and then I worked part-time at the Vanguard School, which is a local public charter school, just a stone's throw away from our church off Southgate, if you go north, on 115, and the first or second week I was teaching in August of 2017.

Some of you may remember this. It was Monday, August the 21st. We had here in Colorado Springs and across much of North America a total solar eclipse.

[7 : 00] Of course, we also had a solar eclipse this year. As teachers, though, this was, of course, a historic event. A solar eclipse of this type had not happened for 99 years. And so, of course, we had all the glasses that you use for these things.

We handed them out to the kids. There was a break in class when we knew that it would appear, and everyone went outside. We're out on the sidewalk with kids and teachers getting to see this glorious event.

USA Today that summer published two articles about what an emotionally overwhelming experience the eclipse was for many people across our nation.

David Wya of Beaverton, Oregon said this, Short of the birth of my kids, it was the most beautiful thing I've seen in my life.

Carrie White from Santa Cruz, California, we're told she choked up and wiped away tears after a group hug with family and friends. In the midst of it, I teared up, White said.

[8 : 04] It was just a glorious feeling. And then we learned that this man, actually a woman, Kev Brock in Oregon said, One of the most incredible things I've ever seen.

It made me cry, and my children cheered. Now, that same summer, I had learned from a couple of folks in this congregation about a podcast called The Briefing where Al Mohler breaks down world events from a Christian worldview.

And in his podcast that week, he said, Look, of course, this sort of overwhelming emotional response makes sense. Why is it that people are weeping at the sight of a solar eclipse? Well, it's what we've already read, what John read for us in Psalm 19, that the heavens declare the glory of God.

That there is something incredibly powerful that we experience and learn as we look at God's creation. Of course, we don't have to think merely of a, or simply, or only of a solar eclipse.

[9 : 09] You can think about the same thing that happens every time you're in Colorado Springs and you drive west. What do you see? The glory of Pikes Peak, right?

And there's something overwhelming about that. There's something majestic about it. When we had our generosity initiative last year, we had a man named Joe Brand who was helping us with that, and he would come out and visit Colorado Springs, and he was overwhelmed by the sight of Pikes Peak.

And so at one point, he said to me, You know, I wonder if I lived here if I would get used to that, if it would ever become boring to me. And then he said, If it did, that would say something about me and my heart.

That wouldn't be a problem with the mountains. That would show that I had lost this sense of God's greatness and his glory. As we've looked at the book of Romans, we've seen that already there's this connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and we've seen that in our worship service this morning.

Psalm 19 and Romans 1, verses 19 and 20 are saying the same thing. And so look with me now at verses 19 and 20.

[10 : 23] What can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

And so Paul and the psalmist are making a very simple point for us. God reveals himself in nature. God reveals himself in nature.

I joke sometimes that it's great that we have this setup in our sanctuary that you can look out and you can see the mountains. You can see Cheyenne Mountains specifically. It's especially helpful if you get to a point where the sermon's very boring for you.

You can pretend that you're so wrapped in attention, right? As you slowly look over the preacher's shoulder. What Paul is telling us, though, is if you do that, you are still learning something about God.

You can't help but learn something about God. In his book, Nature's Case for God, John Frame lays out nine different ways.

[11 : 42] There's nine chapters, all the different ways that creation teaches us about God. Now, one of the tensions of the book of Romans that we've already discussed a little bit is how slow or fast do we go through the book?

There's a sense in which we could unpack just verses 19 and 20 in one entire sermon. I say that to say, I'm not going to give you all nine reasons this morning. I'm going to give you a quick sampler. Not all of them, but two of them. And that's, again, that's the challenge, right? How fast do we move? Because there's reasons that people spend years working through the book of Romans because it's so rich and deep when it comes to theology.

One of the first reasons, in fact, the first reason he gives us is the greatness of creation. Frame reminds us that there is the great size of it all that should teach us something about God.

I've told you all before about the time in 2016 when I visited the Grand Canyon, and my main response was simply to feel extremely small. If you are struggling with pride and ego, and if you think you're all that, I recommend a trip to the Grand Canyon for you.

[12 : 51] A helpful, right, could solve it. It also might not solve it. Paul tells us that we suppress the truth. There are some people who go to the Grand Canyon, and they see the greatness of it.

They're reminded of God's glory and his power. And there are other people who show up and only take a selfie. I'm not saying selfies are bad.

I'm saying they only do that, right? They're saying, look at me. Look at this experience that I had. And of course, they missed the point, right? Look at God.

Look at this great thing that he has made. It's sad that we are disconnected in many ways from the stars when we live in big cities like Colorado Springs because of light pollution.

What does Psalm 19 say? The heavens declare the glory of God. There is something overwhelming about being in the great sand dunes and being able to look and see actually how great and majestic our solar system is.

[13 : 55] I've told you before that there is a irony when it comes to climbing 14ers. And don't hear what I'm not saying. Climbing 14ers is great. But it doesn't make you great.

Which is greater, to climb a 14er or to create a 14er? The greatness of the mountains is not in those who climb them.

The greatness is in the God who made them. The size of creation teaches us something about God. Frame also mentions for us the goodness of creation.

Remember, Paul is the author of the letter to the churches in Rome. We meet Paul also in the book of Acts, which tells us about the early church. And in Acts chapter 14, Paul is talking to these men at Lystra and talking about God.

He says, look, you knew about God even though you didn't have his special revelation. He says this, yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

[15 : 14] We learn something about God because nature is good and nurturing and life-giving. Why are you here this morning?

There are many reasons you're here this morning. One of them is this, God has provided food for you and each of your ancestors. God has created the world to be a good and nurturing and beautiful place.

In fact, he provides the glory of the mountains, the beauty of the Grand Canyon, whether you believe in him or not. Remember, our Lord Jesus teaches the same thing.

Matthew chapter five, verses 44 and 45, he says, look, the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous. God's goodness, it's all around us.

It's everywhere to be seen and known. This hints at a third reason that Frame gives that I'll mention briefly, which he calls the oneness of God, which is to say there must be one God to hold together the complexity of the universe.

[16 : 26] For something as complex and detailed as this world, it would not make sense for nothing to hold it together, and it wouldn't make sense for many different gods to be competing to hold it together.

No, this universe is so complicated and beautiful and detailed, it must be one God and one God only. Now, Paul tells us here, not that creation or nature reveals everything about God, but that it reveals specific things about God.

Look with me in verse 20. It shows his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature. So we know two things.

We know that God is a God. We know that he's a really powerful God. We still need, this is called general revelation, what we learn about God from creation. We still need special revelation, right? We do not learn from the mountains and the trees and the rivers that Jesus Christ is God's only son who's come to die for sinners. And so that might raise a question for us. In what sense can God condemn people for not knowing him if creation is the only witness that they have?

[17 : 45] Well, verse 21 gives us the answer. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. In other words, even if we didn't know about Jesus, we know enough to know there's a God that we should be praising.

We know enough to know he's one God. And so you'll look with me on page seven of your worship guide and says this, the truth is, it takes a concerted act of the will to deny that a vastly powerful God made and sustains the creation.

If one is not at least searching after God, he or she is suppressing the truth. And so you might say, oh, I didn't know about Jesus.

This passage raises a question though. Well, okay, you didn't know about Jesus. Who were you praising? Were you praising the creator or were you praising the creation?

That leads us to Paul's next point. The very beginning, this is verse 18. He tells us, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[19 : 21] In other words, these truths about God should be incredibly obvious. We should receive them with burning clarity.

He goes even further, verse 20, for although they knew God. He's not just saying it's clear and it's suppressed. No, he's saying everyone in this world ultimately knows God.

And if they're not worshiping him, they're stiff-arming him. They're pushing him away. It's a bit of a shocking statement. Paul says it's true.

The creation gives us everything we need to know that there's a God, that he's good, that he's great, that we should thank him, we should honor him. I've mentioned before, in 2022, I herniated one of my discs, so I had a very painful journey going to see a physical therapist and a chiropractor. And both my chiropractor and my physical therapist, when they found out I was a pastor, wanted to talk about spiritual things, which I thought was great. And so I've talked to my physical therapist a lot about these things, and she would tell me that she was unsure of what exactly it was that she believed about the world and who was in charge.

[20 : 41] And so I pointed out to her one day, I said, you know, you use creator language a lot. You say things like, your body was made to, your body was designed to, right?

Your body is set up to function in such a way, and that's language that implies there's someone who created the body, right? There's a designer. And she said, yeah, that's interesting.

I do use that kind of language. Verse 18, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

My physical therapist knew God. And despite what she might say she believed, her stated beliefs, she couldn't escape the fact that the witness of the human body was that it had a designer and a creator, right?

There's a suppression of the truth. In fact, people use this sort of language all the time. It's hard to escape. Even when you're talking to people who say they don't believe in a God, they'll talk about what something was designed to do, how things are created, right?

[21 : 54] Because it's hard to escape that. As you look at the world around us, we could say, verse 19, what can be known about God is plain to us because God has shown it to us.

For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world. Paul's making a challenging statement here.

No matter where you are in your spiritual journey, no matter what you claim to believe, you deep down know God created the world.

He deserves to be worshipped and praised. And at the end of the day, you will have no excuse. God, as creator and sustainer of this earth, is clear for anyone who's willing to see.

The problem, of course, is that often we don't. And that's the point Paul goes on to make in verse 23. There's this tragic exchange that's happening.

[23 : 14] Verse 22, we'll start there. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

There's a tragic exchange. There's a trade. Paul's saying what we've talked about before, what Bob Dylan says, you have to serve somebody. Humans are worshipping creatures.

We will worship someone or something. We will either worship the true God or we will worship something created.

There's a variety of ways this plays out in our world. Some people actually, in a very explicit way, worship nature and the earth. You'll see bumper stickers around Colorado Springs that say, love your mother.

And they have a little sign of the earth, right? Which is to say, our source and our origin, it's not from God, it's from the earth, it's from the created things. Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. We are stewards of God's earth.

[24 : 22] We should be taking care of the creation he's given us. We want to be good stewards. C.S. Lewis writes this essay, though, where he says, we don't have a mother earth, we have a sister earth.

And it's a sister earth because the earth is created, you are created. Worship the creator, not the created things. Some people worship the creation when they put all their hope into a political figure. It is not uncommon for a politician, especially a presidential candidate, to show up on the scene. And suddenly, the language that surrounds this man is messianic language.

The imagery that's used to depict him depicts him as the savior of the world or the earth. And this is not something that's true of only Republicans or only Democrats. We can pick figures throughout

the 20 and the 21st century who have been treated in this way both sides of the aisle. Why? Because there's this desire right within the human heart for someone to come and save us. And if it's not going to be God, we'll find a man.

[25 : 38] There's many other things we can worship that God has created. We can worship experiences in nature. We can worship sex. We can worship money. We can worship power.

But as we've already talked about in the book of Romans, it is in God's glory that we discover our good. It is worshiping God that actually leads us to life and flourishing. And so that's why I say it's a tragic exchange. It's changing the glory of God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

we're jumping around in this passage a little bit, but that helps us understand now the very first verse, verse 18, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

In other words, since we have refused to worship God, since mankind has worshipped the creation rather than the creator, God's justice and wrath is being poured out on the earth.

[26 : 57] Now this is a challenging doctrine for many people. They say, why is God a God of wrath? Shouldn't he be a God of goodness and love, right? I want to serve a good and loving God.

I can't believe in a wrathful God. The problem with all of that is this, a loving God must be a wrathful God because if he is a loving God, he wants all evil cast out of his universe.

Sometimes people will say, why has God not solved this problem or that problem? Why has he not dealt with evil once and for all? And the problem with that question is this, you are part of the problem.

The problem is that you're part of the problem. Remember, Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, the line between good and evil cuts through every human heart. Yes, God could deal with evil once and for all right now.

If he did, what would happen to you? That's what we talked about many years ago now when we were in 2 Peter 3.

[28 : 11] Peter, the apostle Peter addresses this question, why is God delaying? Why has he not purged the world? And Peter gives this very simple answer. God has delayed his judgment so that you would have time to repent.

Imagine that God had fully and finally purged the world in 1950. What would that mean for you? Some of you would be fine.

Many of us would not have been born, right? God's forbearance, his patience is holding back his judgment. God is so good that he will eliminate all evil from his world.

The problem is, Paul's going to go on to say this, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Everyone deserves God's wrath and his judgment.

You'll see this on page 8 of your worship guide. God is planning a perfect world in which there will be only good and no evil and there will be no place in that perfect world for people who are unwilling to repent.

[29 : 24] Yes, God is going to deal with all evil, and have a perfect world. Will you be there? Paul goes on to provide a clear answer for us about who will be there and who won't.

What are we supposed to do with the fact that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God? In other words, everyone is part of the problem of evil that needs to be solved. Well, that's why we have Paul's discussion.

Remember, at the very beginning, he says he's a servant of Jesus Christ, that the hope for us to be part of God's good and perfect world is not in our behavior or our performance because we fall so short.

No, our hope and our only hope is in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. our hope and our only hope is that Jesus came and took God's wrath, the wrath of God that's revealed from heaven.

That as he died on the cross, he took the punishment that we deserve and as he lived his life on this earth, he lived the perfect life that we should have lived.

[30 : 35] And so, for everyone who has faith and trust and follows after Jesus Christ, your hope is that you will be in God's perfect world when he comes and makes all things right.

If you do not have faith and trust and follow after Jesus, verse 18 is a sober warning. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Yes, God is patient for a time. He will not be patient forever. And so, the time to have faith in Christ is now.

The time to stop exchanging the glory of the immortal God for created things is now. Mary Oliver is a famous American poet, Pulitzer Prize winner who died in 2019 and it's widely known that Oliver survived a very challenging and difficult childhood and one of the ways that she survived that childhood is by spending an enormous amount of time in nature.

In fact, that went on to become one of the major themes of her poetry. It's not clear whether or not Oliver ended up coming to explicit assured faith in Jesus Christ.

[32 : 06] There are reasons to believe that she didn't although ultimately that's probably not something that we're going to know. It is clear from her poems that she was very familiar with scripture. She was familiar with stories about Jesus, about the reality of the world and I would go on to say she was probably familiar with Psalm 19 and Romans chapter 1.

And she, regardless of what she believed ultimately about Jesus, knew that the created world reveals God. She writes clearly about this in her poem.

This is on the back of your worship guide called I Wake Close to Morning. Why do people keep asking to see God's identity papers when the darkness opening into morning is more than enough? Certainly, any God might turn away in disgust. In other words, God's not interested in you asking him to prove himself to you.

He already has. Think of Sheba approaching the kingdom of Solomon. Do you think she had to ask, is this the place?

[33 : 17] for what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you and praise you that you uphold this world by the word of your power, that in all its complexity, all its detail, all its beauty, you, one God, hold it together.

We ask that you would show us your glory more and more. You'd lead us to trust you that we would choose the glory of the immortal God and we would turn away from the images of men and animals and creeping things.

We thank you for the grace and mercy of your Son and our Savior, our Lord Jesus. We ask that you would lead us to trust him more and more and we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.