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Signs and Seasons – The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

August 20, 2017

Sermon Text: Psalm 19

Scripture Reading: Psalm 19

Of course tomorrow is the big event – the total eclipse of the sun that we have been hearing about for quite some time now. Here is part of an article from the bbc.com page-

By David Cox
14 August 2017

On 21 August, more than seven million people from across the globe are predicted to converge on various cities across the US, as the first total solar eclipse since 1918 to cross the North American continent from ocean to ocean, takes place. Millions are

expected to travel far and wide to witness the once-in-a-life-time event.

The fear and the fascination of doomsday

To coincide with the US solar eclipse on 21 August, BBC Future is running a special series about the end of the world.

But for others, the celestial phenomenon signals something far more sinister than a simple road trip – for some, the total solar eclipse means the end of the world as we know it.

Various evangelist groups across the US, for example, have already heralded the eclipse as a sign of impending apocalypse. A Christian prophecy website called Unsealed claims that it will spark the beginning of the so-called Tribulation, a seven-year period in which 75% of the world's population will be destroyed.

Meanwhile, for many, this eclipse is the highly anticipated event of the summer. With 12 million more living in the path of totality, a 70-mile (112 km) long [wide?] stretch between Oregon and South Carolina where the Moon will completely cover the Sun, 'eclipse tourism' is expected to generate vast amounts of revenue, a tradition which began in 18th Century Europe as eclipses passed over the major capitals.

So why does a major, exceedingly rare spectacle in the sky draw both wonder and fear alike? The link between an eclipse and beliefs of impending doom actually harks back to a time where our relationship with the sky was one of considerably greater unease.

In the 7th Century BC, the passing of a total solar eclipse over the Greek island of Paros prompted the poet Archilocus to write: "Nothing in the world can surprise me now. For Zeus, the father of the Olympian, has turned midday into black night by shielding light from the blossoming Sun, and now dark terror hangs over mankind. Anything may happen."

"The majority of people didn't really understand what eclipses or shooting stars were until at least the 17th Century," says Edwin Krupp, director of the Griffith Observatory in California. The ancient Greeks weren't

alone, either. While a handful of astronomical scholars, from the 8th Century BC onwards, successfully understood the celestial mechanisms behind an eclipse, for another 2,000 years most of the world's population clung steadfastly to the ancient belief that astronomical events, and particularly solar and lunar eclipses, were the work of the gods.

"This has to do with communication and education," says Krupp. "It was harder for information to spread, and so myths and superstitions from older traditions perpetuated. In antiquity, people regularised their lives by the order of the world around them, half of which was the sky. And events like an eclipse were an intrusion of chaos into that order. Today there are still parts of the world, such as India, where [some] pregnant women won't go outside during the eclipse as they believe they are vulnerable, which stems from these ancient fears."

To cope with such an event, many ancient cultures typically undertook ritualistic activity, as a way of attempting to interact with the forces or demons they perceived to be at work. One of the most pervasive ideas was a dangerous predator assaulting the Sun or Moon in the sky. In western Asia, people spoke of a solar eclipse as a dragon devouring the Sun. Huge drums would be beaten to scare away

the beast, while in China a heavenly dog was thought to be biting the Sun. In Peru, the demon was described as a giant puma while the Vikings saw a pair of sky wolves. It's perhaps unsurprising that the earliest known word for eclipse in China was shih, which means "to eat".

In our rationalistic, scientific world of today, it is easy to entirely dismiss any significance of astronomical phenomenon as pure "nature." And while we certainly reject the notions of the typical "prophetic" types who claim this event is the end of the world for sure or who tell us some specific revelation supposedly from God that is to be seen in this eclipse, I want to show you this morning that the Bible does indeed inform us that events like tomorrow's eclipse do have a message in them which all mankind is responsible to see and hear and heed.

Signs and Seasons

As always, it is best to begin at the beginning:

Genesis 1:14-19 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, (15) and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. (16)

And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. (17) And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, (18) to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. (19) And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

We have several purposes listed here for the sun, moon, and stars. Day and night. The ordered seasons and so on.

But what about this business of "signs"? Have you ever wondered about it? A "sign" is something that conveys information – a message. Road signs do that. We say "it's a sign of" something. The signs of the times. So Scripture, it seems, is telling us here that one of the purposes for the sun, the moon, the stars – "lights in the heavens" – is to tell us something. To convey a message or messages.

General Revelation

Scripture is quite plain in telling us that God's creation conveys a message to all mankind. We call this message "general revelation" because it is given to all men generally AND because it is general in its nature (as opposed to more specific "special" revelation that we will look at in a moment).

What, then, do the “lights in the heavens” signify to us? Here it is:

Psalms 19:1-6 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. (2) Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. (3) There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. (4) Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, (5) which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. (6) Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

The heavens declare the glory of God. Daily. Every night. Every moment. These signs in the heavens are preaching to us about God, about His existence, about His glory, about His being and character. It is a message preached without words, but it is exceedingly plain. *Every human being “hears” this sermon daily, moment by moment.*

Listen as the Psalmist reflects on this sermon from the heavens:

Psalms 8:3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set

in place,

David was a shepherd. I suspect that during the many nights he guarded his flock, he looked up into the night sky blazing with lights. He acknowledged that these bodies did not just “happen,” but that they were created and put in place by God. He knew that God *is*.

How many people down through history have first come to think about God, about their own souls and about their eternity, about how this whole universe got here, by glancing up at the stars? Listen to Isaiah:

Isaiah 40:22-26 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; (23) who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. (24) Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. (25) To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. (26) **Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is**

strong in power not one is missing.

See it? Just look at that 26th verse again. We are told that if we will look up at the sun, the moon, the stars, we will be forced to:

- Ask “who created these?”
- Who is able to count them and give each one a name?
- Who holds them in place moment by moment, century after century, with such power that not a single star is moved out of its place?

The answer? God. The God of the Bible. Our Creator and the Creator of the universe.

Have YOU heard the sermon? These “signs” are constantly in place preaching to you of the existence and glory of God, showing you that God created the universe, and that He created YOU. And therefore, as His creatures, we are obligated to acknowledge Him and worship Him.

But what does man do in his sin, in his rebellion against God? The first chapter of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans gives the answer:

Romans 1:18-23 For the wrath of God

is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness **suppress the truth.** (19) For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) 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. So they are without excuse. (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. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

God, through His creation, preaches His existence and power to all mankind. Clearly. So that all are without excuse. Why don’t people hear this speechless voice? They do, but *they suppress it.* Man, in his sin, goes through his days with his eyes and ears closed to the glory of God announced from the sky. They refuse to acknowledge that God exists, that God created them and all things, and that they owe Him their thanks and worship. Instead, they do an exchange – they reject God and worship a snake or an insect or some animal or tree or

even themselves.

Out west here we see nature worshippers. We conservative types talk about “tree huggers” who deify a tree and other things in nature as if they were somehow divine. But the fact is that every human being, whether they be conservative or liberal, red-neck or vegan, *is guilty of refusing to hear and heed the sermon constantly being declared to them from the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars.* Listen again:

Psalms 19:1-2 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. (2) Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

So if anyone is a person who is simply going about their life, doing their own thing, doing what they want, without giving God’s existence and His power any thanks or acknowledgement, living in other words *as if God did not exist and really as if THEY were God,* then that person has no excuse and is under the wrath of God, headed for hell. And rightly so.

So tomorrow’s eclipse does have a message to us all from the Lord. Generally, the eclipse tells us God exists, that He created and upholds the

entire universe, that He is infinitely powerful and glorious and that we owe Him our thanksgiving. How is this so? Well, just consider what the eclipse is. Think about it. I am no astronomer, but I do know that those who are can tell us exactly when an eclipse is going to occur. I don’t know when the next one will be after this one, but astronomers do. How is that possible? How can they even go BACK in history and discern when eclipses occurred?

The answer has to do with the ordered nature of the solar system (and probably of the whole universe). Think about it. Just as we read in Genesis one, the sun and the moon and stars (planets) play a role in the *seasons.* So consider:

- The length of our 24 hour day (one rotation)
- The timing of our months and calendar
- Fall, winter, spring, summer
- The length of our year (one revolution)
- Our time zones
- The tide schedules

In other words, our solar system and really the whole universe, *is one big clock and calendar.* And what the constant message is that this clock is declaring to all mankind is *there is a*

Clockmaker and we are all accountable to Him. That is the general message of this eclipse.

But What About a Specific Message?

The end of the world apocalypse groups claim that they know the specific, special, detailed message that the eclipse is conveying to us. We of course absolutely reject any such claims. God Himself must confirm to us the meaning of any special revelation from Him to us. People who claim to be His spokesman must prove it – and there simply are no prophets or apostles today. We have God's revelation to us in the Bible.

However, the Bible itself does in fact record events in which the sun and moon and stars *were signs conveying specific things from God to us*. Let me give you some examples:

1. The most obvious of course, The Star of Bethlehem

Matthew 2:1-12 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, (2) saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to

worship him." (3) When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; (4) and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. (5) They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: (6) "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" (7) Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. (8) And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." (9) After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. (10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. (11) And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. (12) And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

I have no certain idea how these wise

men (ancient astronomers?) recognized the star as being the sign of the birth of the promised King (Jesus). But they did and they knew. I suspect that they had discerned from the Old Testament Scriptures that the Messiah would be born and that a star would announce His birth.

2. The heavenly sign at the death of Christ on the cross.

Matthew 27:45-54 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

(46) And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (47) And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." (48) And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. (49) But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." (50) And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. (51) And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. (52) The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, (53) and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went

into the holy city and appeared to many. (54) When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Here again is a sign written in the sky. How was this darkness effected? Three hours! The eclipse tomorrow is going to be what, a couple of minutes? The centurion got the message – *"Truly this was the Son of God."*

The Jews were very familiar with verses in their own Scripture that spoke of God darkening the heavens:

Isaiah 50:3 I clothe the heavens with blackness and make sackcloth their covering."

Amos 8:9 "And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

3. In Connection with the Return of Christ and the Day of the Lord

When Christ comes again to judge the world in righteousness, to destroy all who have rejected Him and persisted in their evil, and to raise up His people

and bring in His new creation, the Bible tells us that there will once again be signs in the sky.

Joel 2:30-31 "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Revelation 8:12-13 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night. (13) Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

I find it interesting that in the occasions in the Bible when the day was turned to darkness, it was not the result of a natural eclipse. The darkness lasted too long. It was a darkness, a sign, effected by God Himself through His own supernatural working. In addition, we are told that when Christ comes there will be no mistaking it:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (13) But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. (14) For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (15) For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The eclipse tomorrow then has a general message to all the world – God is God, God is our Creator, acknowledge Him and worship Him, turn from your sin and believe in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved from the coming day of God's judgment.