

What About Birdwatching?

It is no secret that some of us enjoy observing birds. Now before you think of us as simply eccentrics, let us ask ourselves a few questions, and seek to give them good answers. Can we be edified spiritually from the study of birds and the world around us? Are we able to learn more of the Lord, and to be drawn closer to His side, and our lives enriched in the enjoyment of God, from such interests? Or is it worldly and unspiritual, and a distraction from being a fully committed Christian, to have an interest, not only in ornithology, but in any aspect of the creation around us?

We understand that the Lord, as He speaks to us in the Bible, teaches us that it is perfectly consistent with being an earnest and spiritual Christian to have an interest in, and to study, such things as birds. In fact, the Bible teaches all of God's children should have an interest in the world around us, and to study and learn from it. In this way we may glorify God, and find enrichment and enjoyment in and of Him and in our daily life.

In Psalms 19 we are told of two places where the Lord teaches us about Himself. They are two books as it were. There is the Book of Creation and there is the Book of Scripture or the Bible. Both books are given to us by God to learn of Him. In verses 1-3 we are told that the creation has a voice, and something to say to us of the Lord. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament (earth) shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no speech no language, where their voice is not heard." The sun, moon and stars, the clouds and winds and rain and the rainbow, the seas and mountains, the storms and earthquakes and volcanoes, the trees and grass and flowers, the myriad beasts and birds, all show us the Lord. They give us a knowledge of Him. They say to us, as it were, there is a Creator. God is real, He is there. They show us, not only that He exists, but also that He is almighty, good and wise. Our Westminster Confession Ch. 1:1 also speaks of this wonderful truth. Although the thrust of the chapter is to show us the supreme importance of the written word of God, the Bible, it acknowledges, "... the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God ..." Our Larger Catechism No. 2 adds, "The very light of nature in man, and the works of God, declare plainly that there is a God; ..."

Of course, we must clearly understand that because of what sin has done to us, (naturally made us blind, Ephesians 4:17-19), we cannot properly read the book of creation as Adam and Eve could in the garden of Eden, and as we will one day in a new heaven and earth. Nor does the creation show us such vital truths as the person and work of Jesus Christ, the way of conversion, faith and repentance, salvation, a clear understanding of the way to go in life, of the things that really make for God's glory, our peace and of what is to come. That knowledge is special and extraordinary, and is found in the Bible, as Psalm 19:7ff goes on to teach us. Notice the various synonyms, or other names, used for the Bible, such as law, testimony, statutes, commandment and judgments. In this section we read: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." Yet in spite of the limitations of the Book of Creation, it is spiritual and of a good and important use, not only for the Christian, but all men! It does show us the Lord, and is capable of further building up believers in the faith, hope and love of the Lord. It leaves unbelievers without excuse for not believing there is a true and great God, and seeking Him for life. All believers - all men - should read this book as well as the Bible!

The creation, including birds, is often referred to in the Bible. It is one of the main themes of the Scriptures. The great Triune God is our Creator. That He, who made the starry heavens and the earth, and all that they contain, is our Creator and Saviour, is a source of great comfort and encouragement to the children of God in all ages. Notice how the Book of Psalms is particularly rich in this theme. Consider Psalm 124:8 for example: "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth." As we consider the awesome wonder of the world around us we, who trust in Christ Jesus, are meant to draw out the invigorating consequence that the great One who made all this, is our daily, present helper - the One who cares for us, and in whom we may repose all in our life and death.

We must remember that the earth and creation are not the devil's or man's possession. They belong to the Lord, and He looks after them. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein". Read Psalm 104 and meditate upon it, and see how it is a superb example of a believer looking at, and thinking about the creation around us, and growing as a consequence into a deeper appreciation, love and awe of the Lord.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ as our King, has all authority and rule over not only heaven but also the earth. Remember His words just before He ascended to glory? Matthew 28:18, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." We are also told in Colossians 1:16-17, that the Lord Jesus is not only our Creator, but that the creation is His, and that He holds all the created world together moment by moment, such is His profound and deep involvement with it. "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist."

Wonderfully, we read in Romans 8:19-23, that the actual world of creation, including the birds and animals,

shared in the redemptive work of Christ when He died on the Cross. He not only died for man's soul and life, but for their physical body and life also, and as part of the full-orbed redemption He purchased for His people, He gives us not only heaven, but also a new earth. (CF 2 Peter 3:13) In Romans we read: "For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. ... Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ... And ... they ... wait for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body." This surely points to how the physical being of believers is precious in the Lord's sight, and that He will keep the bodies and souls of believers through death, and will at the last day, at the resurrection, turn their mortal bodies into immortal ones. Likewise, this earth is now precious in His sight as part of the eternal dwelling place of His children in glory, and it shall also be turned from corruption into a perfect and eternal earth in glory. It will be Eden restored, as a comparison of Genesis 2 and Revelation 21 and 22 points out to us.

From the fact that the Lord in His Word often referred to birds, we can deduce that He is interested in them and all of His creation. Birds are referred to throughout the Bible over 300 times, often in detail, and with insight and interest. It is important to also note, that spiritual lessons are drawn from the life and habits of birds to teach us spiritual lessons, and to edify us. The Lord speaks quite a lot about the nesting habits of birds. He speaks of where they nest and how they care for their young ones. (See for example, Deut 31:11; Psalm 84:3; 104:16-17; Proverbs 27:8; Job 39:27; Isa 16:2; and Matt 23:37). The Lord draws our attention to birds' habits and appearances. Note how the Lord led His servants the prophets to observe and record how some species of birds live in waste and desolate places (Isa 13:21; 34:11ff & Jer 50:39). Some raptors such as eagles, were observed to gather in numbers when prey is spotted (Isa 34:15; and Matt 24:28). The way some birds fly and their calls are noted and known (Prov 26:2; Deut 28:49; Jer 4:13; Eccles 12:4). The physical characteristics of birds are described, such as the appearance of their feathers and claws, their eyes and their wings. All this shows us that believers of old, even under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as they wrote Scripture, were keen observers of birds and the world around them. See also Job 30:13; Ezek 17:3; Dan 4:33; Song of Solomon 1:15; Job 28:7; Ex 19:4; Job 39:13; Psalm 55:6; 68:13; Jer 48:40 and Zech 5:9.

Significantly, we should also note how the Lord, in progressively revealing to us the wonders of His Covenant with His people, links the creation and specifically mentions birds as involved with this great and beautiful expression of His grace and life with His people in Christ Jesus. For example, in Genesis 9:8-10 we read: "And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you of the bird, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth." This establishing of God's Covenant with Noah was not simply some other covenant, apart from His everlasting Covenant of Redemption and Grace. We see that the later prophets, as they looked to the days of the Messiah Jesus, were inspired of God to show how the creatures, including birds were included in the everlasting Covenant of God with His people. Look at Hosea 2:18, "And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the birds of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgement, and in loving kindness, and in mercies."

Is it not something to encourage our warm interest in birds, (and all aspects of the world around us), to contemplate that the believers we know about in the Bible, including our blessed Saviour, observed and knew and delighted in the birds; the fauna and flora of the world around them?

We believe, in the light of God's word, that to have an interest in birds is right and proper. It is right for us all to have an interest in the creation around us. Certainly, above all we are to know the true and the Living God, and His redemption in Jesus Christ, and to learn and follow the ways and doctrines of His word the Bible. Yet such interests in God's creation as birdwatching is not eccentric behaviour. Such things are able to further edify us in our faith, hope and love. So do not only daily read the Word of God, and grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus that way. Also take time regularly to stop and read the book of creation. To be still and know that He is God. To hear the voice in the complexity, wonder and beauty in the world all around us telling us that God, our Father in Christ, is real and great and wonderful, and that this is indeed our Father's world.

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