

Psalm 139
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We're spending a few weeks looking at some Psalms.
Psalms are the Bible's songbook.
Many of them, like the one we are looking at today,
were written by King David
which makes them about 3000 years old.
That's a remarkable thing to have songs written that long ago
that still feel fresh and relevant when you read them today.
All of the Psalms were written well before Jesus was born.
Like hundreds of years before Jesus was born.
So you won't find any songs reflecting on the life of Jesus.
And yet you will find plenty of psalms
pointing forward to the life of Jesus.
Often when you are reading the Psalms,
you will need to do a little bit of recalibration.
You'll need to ask yourself the question,
"How does the message of this psalm change in light of Jesus?"
And more particularly,
"How does the message of this psalm change
in the light of the cross of Jesus?"
But don't let that put you off.
The generations of Christians have found the psalms
tremendously helpful in expressing their hearts to God.

So we are starting with Psalm 139.
Why start here?
Because this is a psalm
about what it means to live as a person in the presence of God.
That's where we are at as Christians.
We are people living our lives in God's presence.

We're doing our best to serve him.
But life throws us some curve balls,
and we make some mistakes ourselves.
And it's not always clear how we can best live in the presence of God.
So Psalm 139 gives us something to reflect on
as we think about our lives before God.

Psalm 139 splits into four sections of six verses each.

1-6) God knows everything about us.

7-12) God is always there with us.

13-18) God knows us intimately as creator.

19-24) Please God, fix the world and me.

God knows everything about us.

The psalmist gives us a list of all the things God knows about us.

He knows what we are doing: "When we sit and rise".

He knows what I'm thinking: "perceives our thoughts from afar".

He knows when we are asleep and awake.

He knows everything about how we live our lives:

"familiar with all my ways".

He knows what we are going to say before we say it.

Which if you think about it is very impressive.

I often don't know what I'm going to say before I say it.

Not everything I say is well planned in advance.

Far from it.

But God knows what I'm going to say before I say it.

David says God hems him in.

We shouldn't take it from that that he feels constrained.

Rather God's knowledge of him is from all sides.

Nothing escapes God's gaze.

David says that God's knowledge of him is too wonderful for him.

Even David doesn't know himself the way God does.

And if you've ever thought to yourself,
"Why did I do that?"
Then there's something that God knows about you
that you don't.

Well how do you feel about God knowing everything about you?
I think most of us feel vaguely uncomfortable about it.
I doubt there is anyone here today
who doesn't have something they are ashamed of in their life,
that they don't tell anyone else about.
But God knows all of those things.

But the Psalmist is not uncomfortable at all.
He is rejoicing in God's knowledge of him.
And in fact we all like to be known.
What does it mean to have a relationship with someone?
It means for you to know them and them to know you.
Life would be really lonely
if we couldn't know others and be known by them.
We like to control what others know of us.
With our close friends,
we are prepared to be more vulnerable and real
than we are with people we don't know well.
But with God, we can actually be totally vulnerable and real.
Why?
Because there is no point pretending that we can hid anything from God.
He knows it all already.
Those things you don't tell anyone else about,
you can talk to God about them,
because he already knows about them.

The reason that we hide things about ourselves from other people

is that we are worried they will reject us if they found out.
What would my mum say
if she knew that I didn't vacuum the floor of my unit or clean the toilet
for the six months prior to getting married?
So I don't tell her.
But God knows these things and things far worse
and he loves and accepts me anyway.
We like being with our close friends
because we know that we can let our guard down and be ourselves
and they will love us anyway.
With God, your guard is totally down whether you like it or not.
And if you are trusting in Jesus
then God loves and accepts you anyway.
It's actually very freeing that God knows everything about us.

In the next part of the psalm,
David tell us that God is always there with us.
He sort of frames it as though he were trying to escape from God.
Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the sky you are there.
If I go down to the bottom of the sea you are there.
If I go to the sunrise you are there.
If I go and live in a far away country across the sea you are there.
Bear in mind that 3000 years ago,
they didn't have aeroplanes or submarines.
David is saying that if he goes impossibly far away.
If he goes so far away that no human could follow him,
even there God will be there.

We live in a world where stalking is a very real problem.
People try to intimidate other people by following them wherever they go.

And there are CCTV cameras everywhere
so that your every movement is observed.
And people have electronic tracking devices.
We have them in our family.
My phone has an app
so I can see where Cherida and the kids are at any time.
And they can see where I am.
Some people would be unnerved by that level of surveillance,
but for us it's helpful and improves safety.
But what about God being there wherever you go?
How do you feel about that?

Well again for David this is a very positive thing.
We know there is a story in the Bible
of someone who tried to flee from God's presence.
Jonah wasn't happy about a job God had given him to do.
So he hopped on a boat that was travelling to the other side of the world.
Well, for us in Australia it doesn't seem like the other side of the world
if you hop on a boat from Israel to Spain.
But the Jews were not a seagoing people.
And going to Spain was the other end of the world for them.
But was Jonah able to flee from God in Spain?
Hardly.
God gave him a return ticket in the belly of a big fish.
But David is not like that.
He is recognising that no matter where he goes
there is nowhere that puts him outside of the reach of God's loving care.
Our God is not a localised god, like the gods of the ancient world.
Even the Egyptians
didn't think that their gods had power outside of Egypt.
Because they were the gods of Egypt.
But our God is the creator of the universe.

His power knows no boundaries.

Now I guess that's not altogether surprising to us
who don't live in a world of localised gods.

We know that God is just as powerful in Australia as Israel.

But we are not like Jonah.

When we try to flee from God,
we don't hop on a boat to Spain.

What do we do?

We might feel that we are beyond God's care
because we have had a significant failure in our lives.

We've done something that we know has grieved God and hurt others.

139:10 "even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast."

Or we might feel that we are beyond God's care
because we work in such a godless environment.

When your workmates are swearing like troopers,

or maybe your workmates are troopers,

or maybe there is just no fear of God in your workplace.

And you wonder how you can be God's person here of all places.

139:10 "even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast."

Or your friends or family are very happy in your company
just so long as you don't mention the G word.

But if you do,

then you may well get frozen out.

And you worry that in order to fit in
you may actually compromise yourself.

139:10 "even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast."

1-6) God knows everything about us.

7-12) God is always there with us.

And thirdly
13-18) God knows us intimately as creator.
If the first six verses
are about how God knows every aspect of my daily life,
how he even knows things about me that I don't know about myself,
then these six verses are about how God knew us
even before we were born.
But not just God knew us,
God made you to be you.
He wove you together.
Like a great artist he made a masterpiece
more wonderful, more intricate
than any piece on display at the Hastings Art Show.
Let alone second rate exhibitions like the NGV.
You are God's Art Show.
When he wants to exhibit his work,
he shows you to the world.
Now you probably aren't used to thinking of yourself
as an artistic masterpiece.
We're used to looking in the mirror and seeing the wear and tear.
And we feel the aches and pains.
And we don't feel like a masterpiece.
We need to spend some more time reflecting on the wonder of human life.
How can it be that from a tiny egg and an even tinier sperm,
something that is as wonderfully complex as you could grow?
Something that lives and thinks and talks and loves.
Something that can worship God and have a relationship with God.
It's really quite amazing.
God thought it all up.
139:17 "How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!"

Now the psalmist is talking about how wonderfully he was created
because he is proud
and wants to claim superiority to other people.
He's not like some instagrammer
showing off my cosmetic surgery is better than your cosmetic surgery.
David thinks you are just as wonderfully made as he is.
He's recognising that he's wonderfully made
because it shows that his life has significance.
God wouldn't have bothered to make him so wonderfully
unless God had a purpose for him.
He matters to God.
He must otherwise God wouldn't have gone to the trouble of making him.

Humans do all kinds of things searching for significance.
Maybe if I climb Mt Everest or take a rocket to the moon,
then I will be significant.
Maybe if I get richer than my contemporaries and drive a Ferrari,
then I will be significant.
Maybe if I win an election and become Prime Minister,
then I will be significant.
Maybe if I spoil my grandchildren
then they at least will think I'm significant.
Until they forget about me when they are teenagers.

We need to stop searching for significance in endless striving.
Our significance lies in what God has done.
God wove you together in your mother's womb.
If the psalmist was writing on this side of the cross,
he would tell you that you are significant
because God thought you were worth sending his Son for.

The final section of the psalm is often left out.

19-24) Please God, fix the world and me.

Frankly Christians are often a bit embarrassed by David's words.

139:19 "If only you God would slay the wicked!

Away from me you who are bloodthirsty!"

They are very confronting words

and quite jarring after the lovely reflection

on the wonder of his own creation in his mother's womb.

But it's not the right response to cut the bits out you find confronting.

These are not just David's words,

they are also God's word to us.

We need to recognise a few things.

1. David is not talking about his own enemies.

He's talking about God's enemies.

"your adversaries misuse your name.

Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord?"

In David's time, when he was the anointed king over God's people,

then the people who fought against him were God's enemies.

When they fought David they were resisting God's kingdom on earth.

We are not in exactly the same position.

2. God has set a day when he will slay the wicked.

We might not enjoy thinking about judgement day.

But it's a necessary part of God's plans

for the new heavens and the new earth.

If you want heaven to be perfect,

then God has to wipe out evil.

3. God's chief enemies are the devil, sin and death.

Jesus fought against those enemies on the cross.

You could read this part of the psalm

and read it as David crying out to God

to send Jesus to defeat the devil on the cross.

In fact there are lots of times in the psalms where the psalmist is crying out to God against his enemies. Instead of skipping those bits, I think we could very helpfully read them as pleading to God for an end to the devil, sin, evil and death.

What's the connection between David's reflection on his own creation and his pleading to God against God's enemies?

When David recognises his significance, that God made him wonderfully.

He also recognises that God made him for a purpose.

That purpose was to live to God's glory.

Those who oppose God are an affront to God's glory.

So David asks God to do something about it.

But of course those who oppose God are not the only affront to God's glory.

We who seek to serve God can also be an affront to his glory.

That's an uncomfortable reality that David doesn't hide from.

None of us like having our own faults exposed.

It's not fun seeing the results of your own failure.

Especially when they are on public view.

But David finishes,

139:23-24 "Search me, God, and know my heart,

test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting."

When I sit at my desk typing a sermon,

uncomfortably often a little red wiggly line comes up under a word.

It's the spell checker.

And I right click on the word

and put the correct spelling in and keep typing.

I don't get all uncomfortable about having my faults exposed.
I just get them fixed and keep moving.
And that's how it should be with those parts of us that offend God.
We shouldn't get all defensive about it.
We should be grateful to have the offensive bits fixed up.
We should rejoice at God searching our lives
and getting rid of the bad bits.
Please God, fix the world and me.

Let's pray praising God and pleading with him.

1-6) God knows everything about us.

7-12) God is always there with us.

13-18) God knows us intimately as creator.

19-24) Please God, fix the world and me.