

Psalm 139

God omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent and omni-righteous

Introduction

Already seen many psalms centred in our relationship with God. And in this psalm, details of that relationship reach its climax. Yet at the same time we learn some amazing truths about God. People might reject a textbook about theology, yet this psalm, which tells us some great truths, we will always be grateful for. It does not use academic language, but very vivid pictures. “One of the sublimest compositions in the world. This is the psalm I should wish to have before me on my death-bed” (Thomas Erskine, great Scottish theologian).

We see that God is omniscient, all knowing, in v.1-6; He is omnipresent, everywhere, in v.7-12; He is omnipotent, all-powerful, in 13-18; and He is omni-righteous, all righteous or perfect, in v.19-24. Yet this is not dry-as-dust theology, because these marvellous truths about God are applied to us, and we see the bearing they have on our lives.

The omniscience of God (1-6)

God knows everything, and so He knows everything about me. **You have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise.... You discern my going out and my lying down... Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely... You hem me in, behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.** We cannot escape Him, for He is all around us. Then the psalmist concludes these thoughts with an exclamation that this is all **too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.** God is completely beyond us.

These things are true of every man, but especially true of those who belong to God and who call Him Father, through Christ. He knows us in a special way. He encounters us, calls us, or as Paul puts it, **Christ Jesus took hold of me** (Philippians 3:12). He invaded our lives and transformed us. He is at work in us, causing us **to will and to act according to His good purpose** (Philippians 2:13).

He knows every detail about us, and yet, despite that, He is patient and never gives up on us. He has “searched”, dug deep, pried into the secret corners of our lives. There are depths in all of us that we do not want others to know, we are almost afraid to confront them ourselves. So in varying degrees we cloak our real selves. But we will never succeed with God. He has dug deep, and He knows every detail of the “real me”. Not only our social life, but also our secret life. Not only our public, but also our private affairs. From the moment I arise to the moment I go to bed, there is no escape; I am wholly under His gaze.

God’s perfect knowledge is disturbing, yet reassuring. **Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him** (Matthew 6:8). **Whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything** (1 John 3:20) – He knows our secret longings and our desires to please Him, even in the times when we fail. **Lord,**

you know all things. You know that I love you (John 21:17). God's knowledge of us is also reassuring when we suffer at the hands of others or are misunderstood or falsely accused. It is comforting to be able to say in these circumstances that no matter what the world thinks, the Lord knows the truth.

The omnipresence of God (7-12)

God is everywhere and in all places. He not only knows me, but I can never escape from Him. **Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?** Not the heavens, nor the depths, neither North, South, East nor West, for He is in all these places. **Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.** Darkness is no escape for it is clear as day to God.

There are times when we would all like to run from God. Many eminent servants have tried it, e.g. Adam in the Garden of Eden, Jonah from God's call. Some have tried to escape by pleasure and excessive toil. But when they least expect it, His shadow falls across their path. They know God is there. The long arm, not of the law, but of God reaches everywhere. Augustine sought to flee from God for years in a far country, like the prodigal son. God caught up with him in Milan. Romans 13:13 spoke to him – and his mother's prayers were answered at last.

Wherever we go, at the end of the day we have to say with Jacob, **The Lord is in this place** (Genesis 28:16). God, who has made us for Himself and has set eternity in our hearts, finds us out. We need to **Be still, and know that I am God** (Psalm 46:10).

What does it mean to know that wherever we go, God is there, and we cannot escape Him? If we submit to Him, and let Him have His way with us, life becomes a much bigger thing. Life is invaded by more than human power. Life has meaning and direction. As Shakespeare wrote, "There is a divinity which shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." When we submit to God, our little lives matter to Him and death is not the end but the gateway to the Father's house on high. He will be there to guide us and hold us tight to the end.

And at the same time, His presence is a restraint against wrong action, foolish steps and thoughtless words.

The omnipotence of God (13-18)

God is a God of power and might. For proof, the psalmist points us to God's creative work fashioning the human body. He goes to the mystery of conception and the body before birth. **You knit me together in my mother's womb.** The psalmist probably did not know much about human anatomy, certainly not as much as we know. But he was fascinated by the human body. The human body – veins sinews, muscles, nervous system, brains, bone structure... So many parts, dovetailing, functioning together, capable of fantastic achievements. A wonderful machine that goes night and day, the heart beating at 100,000 strokes every 24 hours, going for many years without disorder or weariness. **I am fearfully and wonderfully made!**

How this underlines the importance of human life and its sacredness. Abortion advocates that the embryo is a piece of tissue, which is part of human body, to be

disposed of at will if socially or economically incorrect. So many are outraged at the death penalty for a murderer, but are totally unmoved by the thousands of abortions each year. God is the creator of the unborn child. He fashioned it. The embryo is His work. He is interested in it; He loves it and cares for it. He sees the future potential and value in the first beginnings of human life. No one taking this psalm seriously could dream of countenancing abortion – unless extreme crisis of mother's life in danger.

The whole process of human conception and birth is wonderful display of God's wisdom and love. **I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.**

He is not only creator of our lives, but He is also the one who plans our lives and directs them. **All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.** He planned life before we were born, with its experiences and vicissitudes. He shadows us with His care and providence in all that happens to us, and He knows the length of our days and every experience we will go through. No wonders God's thoughts are precious to the psalmist, more than he can contemplate, outnumbering the grains of sand.

How dear we are to Him, and how safe we are when we commit ourselves to His care. **When I awake I am still with you.** Every morning He is there.

*“Sovereign ruler of the skies
Ever gracious, ever wise!
All my times are in Thy hand.
All events at Thy command.
His decree who formed the earth,
Fixed my first and second birth.
Parents, native place and time
All appointed were by Him.
He that formed me in the womb
He shall guide me to the tomb.
All my times shall ever be
Ordered by His wise decree.”*

The omni-righteousness of God (19-24)

God is perfectly righteous and holy. This final section begins with a denunciation of the wicked. The psalmist wants God to slay them, or at very least, make them go away. **They speak of you with evil intent, your adversaries misuse your name.** He hates them because they hate God and therefore rise against God, so he regards them as his own enemies.

Some people say this wonderful and beautiful psalm is spoilt by this hymn of hate at the end. Others say we should see this in the context of progressive revelation. In the Sermon on the Mount we read **Love your enemies** – which is God's perfect will for men, not spoken yet. But perhaps best to see these words are expression of psalmist's zeal for God. He is indignant of men who are contemptuous of God, the wonderful

creator, with His love and care, with purposes of blessing for men. He is not concerned with personal attack, but is jealous for God's honour and place.

Then He suddenly remembers *all* men are sinners who deserve judgement, and considers himself. In shock and horror at what he has just said about others, he remembers he also is a sinner and therefore under God's judgement. So he asks God, **Search me, O 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.** He wants God to dig deep into him, into his dirty, egotistical, subconscious mind. Search every nook and cranny of my living, he asks. I have been indignant about others, but I also need your grace and forgiveness.

In contrast to the wicked, he longs to be led in the way everlasting, God's way. **The path of the just, which shines more and more unto the perfect day** (Proverbs 4:18). A life of fellowship with God is the way that will never perish. **The world and its desires pass away but the man who does the will of God lives for ever** (1 John 2:17).

Conclusion

Here is the God of the Bible. All knowing, all present, all-powerful and all holy. And through Christ we are in everlasting covenant forever. This God is our God and we are His people. We worship and adore. We gladly give ourselves back to Him, and by faith, claim and enjoy all the blessings He bestows on His people.