

A Heart For The LORD

Psalm 139:17-24

Usually when I am coming to the end of a book of the Bible and thinking about what I'll be preaching next, my mind will repeatedly come back to a particular book.

For the past few months I keep coming back to the book of 1 Samuel. For a few different reasons I've been resisting making a final decision about it, but my mind keeps tracking there so unless something unexpected happens that is where we will be going in the near future.

If you know the book then you will recognize some of its main characters.

Of course Samuel, who becomes a prophet of God, is central to the story.

Another important person is a man named Saul. He is the first king of the nation of Israel.

The most significant figure, in my opinion, is a young shepherd who God takes out of the pasture and puts on the throne.

His name is David.

He is easily one of the most famous characters in the Bible and plays a prominent role in God's plans to save a people to Himself.

We call our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ the Son of God and rightly so.

As one of the members of the Trinity He shares completely in the nature of God.

Everything that God the Father is, Jesus is.

In addition to being called the Son of God, the LORD is also called "the Son of David."

That title tells us of Jesus' humanity and of His right to an earthly throne which will one day rule over all of creation.

In the person of Christ there are two natures. His Divine Nature and also His human nature.

While that is impossible to comprehend it is both true and necessary to our salvation.

If Jesus is not both truly God and truly human, then His redeeming work on the cross can be of no value to us.

Thankfully God did the incomprehensible in our Saviour and so we can be saved from the wrath of God through repentance and faith in the Son of God.

God according to His eternal and glorious plans makes a young shepherd a significant part of our redemption in Christ.

Of course all of this happens by God's grace in the life of David, just as it does for all of us.

I believe one of the most significant pieces of evidence of God's saving grace at work in the life of this would be king is the affection that David has for the LORD.

If you know the book of 1 Samuel you probably know about when God sends Samuel to the house of David's father Jesse to anoint a new king over Israel.

Samuel looks at the oldest boy and thinks to himself, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."

But God says to him, "**Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**"

David would later be called, "A man after God's own heart."

That doesn't mean he was perfect, far from it. It means that he has some sense of Who God truly is and a deep delight in Him.

[I am fully convinced from the Bible that those who are born again by the power of the Holy Spirit are given, by God's grace, a consistently increasing sense of Who God is and with that comes and increasing affection for the LORD. In other words, just like David, all believers are given a heart for the LORD. What does that look like in our lives practically speaking? Our text this morning Psalm 139:17-24 shows us in part what that looks like. First we are told here that...

Point #1 – A heart for the LORD treasures the mind of God.

This psalm teaches and powerfully reflects on the knowledge of God and the presence of God, but doesn't stop there. It goes on to delight in the LORD.

It does not take very long to come to the end of ourselves when we begin to think about the attributes of God.

That is certainly true of the writer of this psalm.

As his mind turns to reflect deeply on the LORD he is quickly engulfed in amazement.

That is the clear impression of the statements he makes in **verse 17**.

As he stands in awe of the mind of God, he has done more than simply realize his own limits in such an endeavor, he has found something priceless in worth.

The way the sentence reads it seems like it could either be a question or a statement.

It is almost certainly a statement but phrased in this way because there is simply no language to quantify how much he values even barely scratching the service of understanding the LORD.

Notice he is saying this to God. We would do well to take that to heart.

This is not a statement made to impress or fool people into thinking he has a heart for God.

This is a statement that is coming from a heart that truly loves the knowledge of Almighty God.

One of the reasons he finds such delight in the mind of God is the quantity of the LORD's thoughts.

Again when he says, "How vast is the sum of them!" That is another statement.

It is a way of saying that the boundaries of God's thoughts are far beyond the limits of his capacity to appreciate.

He illustrates that with a picture in **verse 18**.

[Have you ever been to the beach before? Have you ever tried to count the grains of sand? I suppose you could come up with something to estimate it, but to count the grains individually even in a small bucket or even a teaspoon would be an enormous task. Now think about all the sand in the world! Some people have made estimates but no is ever going to actually count them, no one could even live long enough to do it.]

That is the point of the picture here. He is saying if he could count the uncountable God's thoughts would be more.

That is incredibly humbling and it is tremendously important for the enduring faith of a Christian.

It is humbling because it highlights the vast information gap between people and God.

Take a look at the screen. Let's say that the circle there represents everything that can possibly be known.

Using the colour blue I've filled in a generous estimate of how much I know of all that can be known.

Even if we combined the smartest people in all of history, most of the circle would remain empty.

Let's fill the circle in with how much God knows.

That is humbling and it is also important to enduring faith because if we are going to hold fast to the LORD we must at some point along the way accept the fact that God is God and we are not.

Believe me that is not to say we should be shallow in our thinking or that we should avoid wrestling with hard questions about why things happen.

God has given a tremendous amount of answers and evidence, but even so we are incredibly limited in terms of how far we can peer into the mind of the LORD.

That is no reason to despair, it is every reason to trust Him when we do not understand which is crucial to persevering faith.

That is where he lands at the end of verse 18.

Have you ever heard someone say to someone else, “You have your head in the clouds”?

We say that to people who have a habit of thinking in lofty or unrealistic terms.

It is usually said with the intention to get them to stop doing it.

Up to this point in Psalm 139 the psalmist has had his head in the clouds with regards to God.

These are lofty thoughts, thoughts that are beyond him and us.

That is a very good thing to do on a regular basis but we can't stay at that level all the time.

Even when that is the case he says to God, “I am still with you.”

In other words even though he can't have his mind focused on these lofty thoughts 24/7, God is always on his heart and mind at some level.

[That is simply the way it is for people who have their heart set on the LORD. They have a clear sense that God thoughts are far beyond their own. They both marvel at and rest in the fact that God knows better. Can we say that is true of us this morning? If we can then we will have a tremendous sense of what it means to have the peace of Christ in our lives. Here is a second quality to having a heart for the LORD...]

Point #2 – A heart for the LORD hates what is evil.

Right and wrong are determined by the nature of the LORD. Objective goodness is the result of Who God is; therefore, evil by its nature is hatred for God and so to love what is wicked is to hate God. Which means...

These next verses are probably the least familiar in the psalm.

These are verses that are easily skipped over or ignored, but to do that is to make a terrible mistake.

So let's look here together, let's listen carefully, and let's be willing to have our thinking challenged by what the Bible says.

Now keep in mind what he says in verses 19-22 is the result of treasuring God.

Let's listen together and then think through what is said here (**Verses 19-22**).

Wow! That really cuts against the grain of what we would normally think of as a Christian attitude.

How do we square this with John 3:16 (God's love for the world), Matthew 5:44 (Love your enemies), or Romans 5:8 (God's love for us while we were still sinners.)

Most church going people have likely heard and or repeated the phrase about Christians being called to "hate the sin, but love the sinner."

The psalmist here is praying for the death of the wicked and declaring his hatred for wicked as persons not just their actions.

What do we do with that?

One approach has been to say that statements like this in the psalms are wrong and have no place in the prayers or thinking of the Christian.

That is we should just cut these things out of the Bible because they don't belong.

That won't do. The only way we can do that is to turn our backs on the glories of the first part of the psalm as well.

Listen, it is all God's word. When we cut things out it is idolatry.

God wants His people to be listeners and doers of His Word not editors.

So how should we understand statements like this in the Bible, which by the way we find in the New Testament as well.

First, let's be careful to see what is prompting this prayer for the destruction of these people.

It is not personal offense. It is not, "I hate you because you did something against me." Yes he may have been personally wronged by the wicked but his focus here is not himself it is the offense against God that prompted this plea to the LORD to destroy the wicked.

All of us have prayed for that, but most of us simply have never realized it.

Do you remember how Jesus taught us to pray?

How does His model prayer begin?

"Our Father in heaven hallowed by your name."

That is most of Psalm 139. It is a declaration of unique majesty of God.

What is the next part? "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Have you ever read about the coming of God's kingdom in the Bible?

Do you know what happens? The wicked upon the earth are slain and God doles out His judgement on everyone who opposes Him.

Why? Because that is the only way for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven because there are those who will not turn from wickedness.

You see in this prayer and prayers like it there is no sense that there is any desire or consideration of repentance on the part of those who are speaking and acting against the LORD.

If there is such an absolute refusal to turn from evil, how then can evil be overcome upon the earth?

The only way is the destruction of the wicked.

[Just think of one small example. Let's say someone steals something from you and the judge lets them off and they steal something from someone else. The judge warns them not to steal and lets them go and he does it again. Finally, after a number of these situations the judge locks up the thief. Is it good that the thief got locked up? Yes because it was the only way to stop the stealing.]

Listen, God's offer of repentance and salvation in Christ is open to you. It is open to everyone who believes.

It is in that sense the Bible can say "For God so loved the world He gave His only Son."

But just a couple of verses later in John 3:18 it says that "whoever does not believe (repentance implied there) stands condemned already."

That is a continual refusal to turn from evil makes a person the object of God wrath rather than the object of His eternal love.

Of course we should first and foremost desire the repentance and salvation of people.

We are consistently commanded in the Bible to show kindness and mercy to our enemies.

But if we truly have a heart for the things of God, then we must realize that if the wicked persist in their evil ways then they must be destroyed in order to bring their rebellion and the harm that rebellion brings to God's creation to an end.

We ought not to delight in the destruction of the wicked.

God does not delight in it (Ezekiel 18:23).

But we must see the necessity of it if we are to have a heart for the LORD.

[That brings us to another aspect of having a heart for God. This is particularly important given what we have just said about hating wickedness. It is incredibly easy to want God to bring judgment against other people and have no concern for our own failings. If we do that then we are hypocrites and according to Jesus we remain in the category of the wicked that we see here. So we need this third lesson about having a heart for God. Which is that...]

Point #3 – A heart for the LORD desires God's work upon the heart.

If we limit our desire for what is good to our own assessment of how good we are, then we neither appreciate the magnitude of our problem with sin nor do we desire the

righteousness of God. Without those things we will have little to no affection for the LORD.

It is important to bring to mind what is written earlier in this psalm about God's knowledge.

Just go back for a moment to verse 1.

That is something that has already happened right.

Now look with me at **verse 23**.

Why would he ask God to search, know, and test him after he has so clearly said that has already happened?

Because it is one thing for God to search and know us and it is another thing for God to make these things know to us.

He does not want to live in ignorance, he wants to live in the knowledge of His creator.

Why? What does he want to know about himself?

He tells us at the beginning of **verse 24a**.

That is an amazing statement.

It is an amazing statement of humility.

It's humble because he is recognizing that he may not have the capacity to see all the offensive ways in himself.

I believe the Scriptures teach us that the default setting of our sinful condition is to be either blind or indifferent to our own evil.

The very fact that this writer is asking God to search him means he cares about, in fact I believe he is passionate about rooting out evil in his life.

He is not indifferent but he is humble enough to know that he may be blind.

Spiritual blindness is dangerous.

[Think of it like driving a car. Cars have side view mirrors and rear view mirrors to help the driver see what is happening around them. If you are driving on the multi-lane highway or road and you need to change lanes you look in the mirror to see if it is safe to move over. Most cars though have a blind spot. A spot where a car can be without being visible in the mirror. If a driver fails to check their blind spot it can cause an accident which has the potential for serious harm.]

That is good picture for what is being prayed for here.

He doesn't want to stay blind to it and for good reason. The word translated "offensive" here carries with it the meaning of pain or injury.

Certainly sin in our lives that we are blind to injures others but it also eventually injures us as well.

That is the nature of sin right. It is sorrow, pain, and eventually death all around.

He doesn't want that. Instead he writes **Verse 24**.

He wants more than to just be made aware of the evil that remains in him, he wants the LORD to lead him away from that and towards eternal life.

That is what a heart for the LORD does, it longs for eternity.

Ask yourself this morning. If the clouds were to part today, If the trumpet of the LORD were to sound, and Jesus returned for all to see to establish His visible and complete rule over all the earth, would we be happy?

I know we will all say yes for others to hear, but really in our hearts would we be happy or would we rather live it up here for a little bit longer?

You see a heart for the LORD is so anticipating the rule of the LORD that it wants to strive for getting away from the things that hinder our fellowship with God and with others right now.

A heart for the LORD is not satisfied with being a little better than the average person, it is not satisfied with a mask of Christian morality, it desires true righteousness in everything.

That only happens by the power of God at work in the heart in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Do we pray like that? We should, because there is nothing better for us than to live with a heart for the LORD.

May we be people who know the joy of that. People who treasure the mind of God, people who hate what is evil, and people who desire God's work upon our hearts.

Let's pray together towards that end.