

## Thinking About God

Psalm 139:1-16

### *It can be a terribly dangerous thing to get things backwards.*

Have you ever seen a video of someone putting their car in reverse when they thought it was in forward?

That usually doesn't go well.

Have you ever had to walk backwards carrying something heavy?

A missed stair, an unseen curb, or a pothole can be disastrous.

In my time as an electrician I've seen what happens when someone who doesn't know what they are doing makes backwards electrical connections.

When we get things backwards it can be dangerous.

### *That is absolutely true when it comes to our spiritual condition.*

One of my seminary professors Dr. David Barker made this point in more than one class I took with him.

He illustrated our relationship with God like two objects one orbiting the other.

One way to view our relationship with God he said is like this first slide you see on the screen.

The worshipper views himself/herself in the center and god is in orbit around the worshipper (notice I made that a small 'g' god because this mentality is idolatrous).

### *This can take a few different forms, I will mention two that I believe are most prevalent in our time.*

One form is treating god like a cosmic butler.

The purpose of said god is to accommodate the will of the worshipper.

You see a great deal of this in the prosperity gospel.

Believe in god and he will give you most if not all of what you want in this world.

The devil loves that and many people fall into the trap of pedlars who call themselves preachers and pastors.

### *Another form is somewhat less obvious, but equally if not more dangerous to your spiritual condition.*

It is when the nature, character, and purposes of God are used for the celebration of the so called worshipper.

I believe this is actually more dangerous because on the surface there is more truth than the cosmic butler mentality.

In this way of thinking people will say things like, "God sent Jesus to earth to redeem you because God couldn't have heaven without you."

Or, how about, “You are just so special. You are like a snowflake because there is no one else quite like you. You are just amazing the way you are.”

Another one that comes up in popular music these days is that when Jesus was dying on the cross you were the most important thing on His mind.

*There is some truth woven into all of that thinking.*

God in His unsearchable wisdom resolved in all eternity past to save people to Himself to the praise of His name forever. He planned to have you in heaven if you know Jesus as your saviour.

It is true every person is a unique creation of the LORD.

It is true in His divinity, Jesus knows all who will be redeemed.

The problem is when these glorious truths get twisted to be made about people rather than God.

When we do that our lives end up looking like the picture on the screen, putting ourselves in spiritual danger because we end up turning much of the Bible upside down.

[That has certainly been true of the somewhat familiar passage of Scripture we’ll be looking at this morning as well as next Sunday. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 139. This morning we will turn our attention to the more familiar verses 1-16 and next week we’ll look at the less familiar verses 17-24. If we read this psalm from the perspective of the picture on the screen we’ll get it backwards. Psalm 139 is pointing us to this second picture. As Dr. Barker puts it, God is not in orbit around us, we are in orbit around Him. Now, it is true that the psalmist here says a fair bit about himself, but if we read it properly we will see that his consideration of himself is always turning his attention towards the glory of God. That is the focus of the psalm and it is to our great and eternal benefit to see that. There are three amazing realities about the LORD that are given to us in verses 1-16. Here is the first....]

**Point #1 – God knows us completely. (Verses 1-6)**

It is highly unlikely that any of us could fully catalogue every aspect of our life in its entirety, but God can.

*On occasion I’ve asked for a show of hands in the service asking how many people believe that God knows everything.*

I’m happy to say that when I ask that question most people put up their hands.

It is good to affirm what is true about the LORD, but if that is all we do then we are missing an essential aspect of the truth that we say we affirm.

If we simply offer affirmation without taking any time to reflect and consider, then the truth will have little effect upon our lives.

This Psalm gives us an example of someone deeply considering the implications of what he knows to be true about God.

He begins with a true statement about God's knowledge and that is followed by a brief consideration of what that means for his life.

Listen to the statement in **verse 1**.

You will likely notice in your Bibles that LORD is all capital letters. That is important to notice because that indicates that God's proper name Yahweh is present in the original language.

There is no doubt Who is being addressed here. This is the only true God. The God Who is. The God Who has existed and will exist for all eternity in and of Himself.

This is the One of whom we can say, of whom we must say, "He is God and there is no other." (Isaiah 46:9)

To the LORD, he says, "you have searched me" that word can mean looking for something or examining something.

The meaning here is almost certainly to examine. This word like most of the verbs used throughout this psalm is in the perfect tense.

This is an action of God that has happened in the past, which raises a question. How far back does this action go?

If we say that God knows everything, and we should/must say that, then this "searching" or "examining" goes back into all eternity past.

The immediate implication of that fact, he says to the LORD, is that "you know me."

That word is referring to the present, it is an ongoing action that is happening all the time.

It means more than a general awareness, it is talking about a thorough knowledge.

He then takes that mind boggling truth and considers what that means for his life. **(Verse 2-4).**

In a few sentences he summarizes the whole of his life.

He thinks about things that he does, his sitting and rising as well as his going out and resting.

God knows it all. That word "discern" in verse three is most literally translated as "winnowing".

[Before the days of combines, farmers would take harvested grain and separate the grain from the stalk but that process would leave bits of the stalk with the grain called chaff. Winnowing is when the harvester would toss the grain into the air and the wind would blow away the chaff leaving just the grain.]

The bible uses that picture many times to depict God's judgment between good and evil.

He is saying here that God knows everything He does and has sifted through it separating everything according to His perfect judgement.

God's knowledge is so extensive he knows the psalmists "thoughts", He knows every word that he will ever say before he says it.

This brief reflection on God's knowledge leads him to write this in **Verse 5**.

The word 'hem' is a picture of a city surrounded by a military force.

It is a picture of no escape. He is saying there is absolutely nothing in his life hidden from the knowledge of God.

This is not at all a matter of him thinking, "I'm so special God has taken the time to know everything about me."

Not at all, look at **verse 6**.

Even this short reflection on how much God knows is enough to leave this writer in absolute awe of the LORD.

We are not special because God knows everything about us, He knows everything about everyone because He knows everything about everything.

[If I ask you, "Do you believe God knows everything?" I bet most if not all of you would say yes." Let me ask you, "Do you spend any time reflecting on this amazing truth?" Are you happy and amazed with God's knowledge of your life or are you indifferent, or fearful, or even perhaps hostile towards Him because of it? For the follower of Christ it is good to be reminded that God knows us completely. Here is a second amazing reality about the LORD...]

## **Point #2 – God's presence is inescapable. (Verses 7-10)**

While it is possible for a person to remain foolishly ignorant of God because He makes His presence known in varying degrees, it is impossible to find a place where the LORD is absent.

This next section begins with two questions both asking the same thing (Verse 7).

Is there anywhere I can go to get away from God?

He first considers the vertical possibilities in **verse 8**.

By heavens he is probably thinking about sky above his head.

There were no airplanes when this was written, so he is contemplating what would not be possible for him by the ordinary means of the time.

His thought is if it were possible for me to get to impossible heights, God would be there.

The word for "depths" here is the Hebrew word "sheol" which can refer to a grave, pit, or even hell itself.

No matter which meaning is intended here the answer is the same. God is there.

What about the horizontal possibilities? (Verse 9-10).

That is both beautiful and deep language concerning this attribute of the LORD.

What does it mean to rise on the wings of the dawn? At the very least it means going to the place where the sun rises in the sky.

Again another impossible place to get to.

How many people have watched a sunrise? That is a great experience right? Especially when you watch it come up over the water or on a mountain top because you can see right to the horizon.

Think about that for a moment. If we stand on an ocean beach and watch the sunrise together and then travel to the other side of that ocean to watch it again does it appear any closer than before?

Nope and that is the point. The writer cannot get there, no one can.

But if the impossible were possible, if he could start where the sun rises and cover all the distance across the face of the earth that the rays of light from the sun cover even to the far side of the sea which for him is again beyond the limits of what he knows, God is there.

[You know today we have a much better sense of the vastness of creation. A quick google search revealed a few different opinions for how big the universe is, but even the smallest guess is several billions of light years in diameter. It is completely impossible for us to go very far let alone to the reaches of the universe, but if we could. If we could see every star and travel to every galaxy, God would be there. Amazing.]

Now look again at verse ten because there is more here than simply God's presence.

What does he say? The hand of God will guide him, the right hand of God will hold him fast.

The hand of God is the bible's way of saying the power of God.

That brothers and sisters that is our only hope in this life and into eternity.

Our only hope is that come what may God is always with us and He will keep those that belong to Him until the end.

[Have you considered recently that God is everywhere you go? That takes more than just a simple, "Yes, I believe that is true." It takes some stretching of your mind to consider the application of that truth to your life. That brings us to a third amazing reality about the LORD, which is that...]

### **Point #3 – God's vision is never obscured. (Verses 11-16)**

In addition to the LORD being present everywhere, He is also able to clearly see everything everywhere He is.

Look with me at what is said in verses 11-12.

This adds another layer to God's presence.

[Imagine being in a giant room that is absolutely pitch black. So dark that you can't even see your hand in front of your face. We could be in that room together and not even know it. You could easily hide from me and I could easily hide from you. Even in those conditions the LORD can see absolutely everything with perfect clarity.]

Now how does he know that there is no amount of darkness that can hide him from God?  
He gives the answer in **verses 13-16**.

When the ultrasound machine was invented it was a game changer in the field of medicine.

I remember seeing that for the first time and being completely amazed at being able to see my daughter in her mother's womb.

Today they have something called 4D ultrasound which gives a three dimensional picture that is continuously updated which produces an incredible picture.

God's been doing that since He first created mankind and the image He sees is far clearer and more detailed than anything a machine can produce.

He can peer into the structure of the atoms of a human being. He can see every strand of DNA.

As incredible as that thought is it goes even deeper here.

At first we might read verse 15 and think, "What in the world is he talking about this "secret place" and being "woven together in the depths of the earth."

Some read this and think, "He doesn't know anything about how babies are conceived."

It would be utterly foolish to come to that conclusion. He knows how babies are conceived, he is saying something profoundly theological here.

He is going back to Genesis when God forms Adam out of what? Out of the "dust of the earth."

That is impossible for us to do, but God did it.

Now when God made Adam in one sense it was not just Adam that was being made, it was everyone who has ever lived.

Talk about seeing? God saw the psalmist in the lump of dirt that He turned into a living man.

How true it is that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, but don't turn that upside down and put the focus upon us. That is not where it is. It is on the One Who has done such things.

Now this portion of God's word brings us face to face with a very contentious issue in our culture. The issue of abortion.

I'm going to say something right now that might make some people angry. Before I say it I want you to know that I'm saying this out of great love for you and for all people.

Once I say it, I'm then going to defend it from this text and then apply the gospel to what I have said and I want to urge you to open your ears and consider carefully what is said.

Here is the statement, "You cannot be a Christian and support abortion because it is murder, which God hates, and it is impossible to continue to affirm what God hates and be born again." (1Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:3-7; Rev 21:8).

Why call abortion murder? Some might think that is unnecessarily offensive, but that fact is that there is simply no other term that can be used once we acknowledge the humanity of an unborn child.

The psalmist does that here. He says, "You created **my** inmost being", "You knit **me** together", "**I** am fearfully and wonderfully made", "**My** frame was not hidden from you", "**I** was woven together."

It did not become "me" and "I". He is claiming personhood right from the very beginning.

The conception of a baby is not just genetic material coming together in various stages of development. It is the result of Almighty God creating a person in His image.

Abortion destroys that work and that is how the bible defines murder. (Gen 9:6).

Notice again what He says here in verse 16. He says, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

In other words God is the One Who has the right to bring us into the world and it is to be left up to Him when we go out.

Abortion is saying that God's rights as our creator are irrelevant. It is a most serious act of rebellion against the LORD.

In a culture and time that has an incomprehensible amount of blood on its hands, followers of Jesus Christ must oppose rather than support the murder of human beings in every circumstance including in the womb.

That being the case let us also apply the gospel to this issue.

While it is impossible to continually practice or support murder and belong to God through Christ it is not impossible to have committed murder and then be forgiven by the grace of God through the work of Jesus.

What does it take to be saved from God's wrath upon such sins and any other sin? It takes repentance and faith.

Repentance does not try to whitewash evil. That is why I unapologetically call abortion murder. Not because I am trying to be offensive, but because I want you to know and be confronted by the truth which is the only path to true forgiveness.

It is only when we acknowledge the truth of our wrongdoing before God that the precious blood of Jesus which was shed for you and for me on the cross can be applied to our sin and wash it away.

In this way you can be forgiven.

There is grace for you if you repent.

That is the doorway to grace.

That is true for all of us and we all desperately need it.

*Listen, there is no hiding from the LORD.*

He knows you far better than you even know yourself. He knows you completely.

He is present everywhere you go. Don't run from Him because you can't. Turn to Him and He will hold you fast.

No matter how dark things may seem, He still sees you and is willing to give you grace beyond measure if you come to Him through the person and work of His Son Jesus.

Oh that we would learn to marvel at our amazing God.