

Incomprehensible

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[0 : 00] We cannot truly and totally know any other person. We cannot truly and totally know anyone. I don't know if you enjoy watching TV shows or movies where there are superheroes.

And part of the story of superheroes that I particularly enjoy is that idea of how do they keep their identity secret? How does nobody ever find out that Batman is actually Bruce Wayne?

And I find it really interesting because I guess sometimes we're all a little bit like that, aren't we? We all like to have our kind of secret lives, our private lives, so that it makes it very difficult for us to know another person truly.

We are built, God says, for relationships. We are built to know and to be known. And of course, we can know others sometimes very well. You think about your family or close friends.

You feel like you know them really, really well. And we are, as people, capable of gathering complex information, not just socially, but also, I guess, biologically and genetically about people.

[1 : 08] So I remember in primary school, up in Skye, being given a DNA test to find out who among the Scottish population were from Viking blood.

Maybe some of my vague contemporaries would be remembering that as well. So we're capable of gathering all kinds of information, genealogical information, stuff to do with our DNA.

And then you think about characters like Poirot and Sherlock. I love those guys. They can look at the way somebody digs into a dish of butter and discover, well, you must have five children and you must work in the mines.

And, you know, they can do all these wonderful things. Because as people, we're capable of observation. And also as people, we share certain traits. Our behaviors, once you get to know a person, generally tend to follow predictable patterns.

We take personality tests. And we are, on the one hand, really impressed that they're able to get us really closely. And then you feel quite, huh, because they can get us really closely. And we don't seem that interesting, perhaps.

[2 : 11] So we can know a lot about other people. We can know a lot about ourselves. But we cannot fully know another person. We will never have absolute and accurate knowledge of others or, indeed, of ourselves.

So why is that? What limits our abilities? We can perhaps think about limited capacity. There is only so much information we can gather and retain.

And even if our capacity was unlimited, we only have so much time to spend with another person to ask all the relevant questions. So we're limited by capacity, but also we're limited by our tendency towards deception.

There are parts of ourselves that we hide from others. That all of us, in different ways, wear masks and lead double lives.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned, their first response was to hide from one another and then to try and hide from God.

[3 : 19] And we've been doing the same ever since. So we're trying to deceive others, presenting the best version of us that we possibly can, making it difficult for them to know us.

But we also, the Bible says this, we also deceive ourselves about who we are. So in Psalm 19, in verse 12, for example, we read, Who can discern his errors?

Forgive my hidden faults. So there is stuff that is wrong about us that we don't even recognize because we can't plumb the depths. Or in Jeremiah 17, verse 9, The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.

Who can understand it? So there's our starting point. That we are limited in our ability to know anyone truly and totally.

And that should make us humble. That should make us careful about the judgments that we make on another person. We were spending time with friends a few nights ago and talking about how we were finding out how they met each other and eventually got married.

[4 : 32] And then we were talking about how we met each other. And it turns out Vicki thought I was really arrogant and fooling myself when she first met me because I didn't talk.

Okay, so just say I'm quiet and I am shy. But that can be misinterpreted as arrogant. So we need to be really careful because we can all very quickly make those snap judgments and forget that we cannot truly and totally know anyone.

So that's the first statement. The second statement is that God truly and totally knows us. Each one of us, whoever we are.

If you were here last week, you remember that we were considering the idea that God has no limits. He has absolute, exhaustive, true and total knowledge of all his creation, which includes us as his creatures.

Or as our book puts it, Jen Wilkin puts it, God is the true expert on us. And that's why we sang at the beginning from Psalm 139. Maybe you want to flick back a couple of pages in your Bible to Psalm 139.

[5 : 50] That's one classic expression of this truth. So just as you scan that Psalm in verses 1 to 3, you discover a God who knows all of our movements, who knows all of our thoughts, who knows all of our words in verse 4, even before we speak them.

In verses 7 to 12, we see the reality that it's impossible for us to escape the presence of the gaze of the absolute knowledge of God.

In verse 13 to 16, we are introduced to a God who knew us before we were born. The God who formed us, the God who designed us, the God who, in verse 16, knows all the days of our lives from beginning to end.

And so when we consider the realities of Psalm 139, we're dealing with a God who knows our movements, our actions, our words, our thoughts, our motives, our personality, our temperaments, our life story, our secret sins, and our temptations.

So we've already recognized, as we've been thinking, that we like to put on masks, we like to hide sometimes what we truly feel, what we truly think. And then we read Psalm 139 and we realize we cannot do this with God.

[7 : 22] We cannot conceal anything from this God. We find ourselves exposed under God's microscope. Here is the God who sees more deeply and more clearly than any x-ray, than any MRI scan, than any examination we can have from a doctor or a psychologist.

How does that make us feel as we consider the God who truly and totally knows us? Does it make us feel a little bit uncomfortable? Perhaps a little bit guilty.

Perhaps it causes us to feel a sense of wonder and amazement or a recognition that here is someone to trust and we feel a sense of security.

For David, who wrote the Psalm, knowing that God knew him truly and totally, led him to worship. And how we respond to who God is and how God knows us, I guess, comes down to our view of God.

Will we trust that God is the true expert on us? So that when we read the Bible, will we humbly receive his word as it seeks to diagnose us, as it looks to explain us?

[8 : 39] That we're not thinking, ah, here is good truth for someone else. Here's how the Bible describes that person over there. Do we hear how it speaks to us, to our sin and our failure and to our need?

Do we hear it speak to us of our one hope? Our one hope of salvation to discover Jesus as Lord? Sometimes as people, we can find ourselves afraid when we're in relationship.

If that person, if they knew the truth about me, they would want nothing to do with me. We can pull away from people because we're afraid to be too honest and open, how they will respond to that. Perhaps you've experienced hurt or loss, relationships that have broken down because of that. One of the most beautiful things of the gospel, one of the most beautiful things as we think about Psalm 139, is that we are in the presence of a God who does know everything about us.

He knows our hopes and our fears. He knows our joys and our sorrows. He also knows our darkest sins. He also knows those skeletons in our closet that we'd love to keep hidden.

[9 : 57] But here's the thing. In love, in Jesus, God moves towards us. In Jesus, when our faith is in Jesus, we're not rejected by this God.

He doesn't pull away from us, but in love, he draws near. And in fact, what we see on the cross is that Jesus, the perfect son of God, is rejected so that we can be accepted by this loving God. And all of that, as we've been thinking about in Galatians, all of that is because of grace. God's free, loving kindness towards us. So we have a God who truly and totally knows us.

And that takes us to where we want to spend the rest of our time. Our third statement is that God can be truly, but not totally, known.

So we're going to be back in Psalm 145. So we can flick back over there. So the word, the big fancy word that our book uses is that God is incomprehensible.

[11 : 00] We are dealing with a God who cannot be fully understood. We are approaching a God where there will always be a sense of mystery.

We'll never reach a point now or in eternity even where we come to have the measure of God. And that makes sense logically. God is infinite.

God is infinite. Therefore, he has no limit. We are finite. We are limited. Therefore, our minds will never and can never fully grasp the extent of God.

Now, it's important for us to say that that does not mean that we cannot know God. So some people give up the pursuit of God. God's up there. We're down here. He's big.

We're small. Therefore, there is no point in seeking to know God. To help us think about why that's inaccurate. Let me give you a picture.

[11 : 55] Think about a baby or a toddler. Now, that child knows and loves his or her parents absolutely completely.

Does that baby, does that toddler know everything about the parent? No. But there is still a real living relationship of love there. There is still true knowledge that's the basis for that relationship of love.

John Calvin, the reformer, he said that when God reveals himself, when God speaks to us, when he speaks to us through the world that he created, so we look at nature and we see the order and the beauty and the complexity, or when we read the Bible and we discover God in there, we discover his plan of salvation, we discover Jesus in there, John Calvin says this is God's way of speaking to us in baby talk.

He knows that we cannot grasp the fullness of who God is, but in love, he speaks to us so we can truly, although not totally, know him.

So, when we think about God being incomprehensible here, it means we can know God absolutely. We can be a relationship with God, and there will always be new things to discover about him.

[13 : 19] Again, Jen Wilkin gives us the picture. It's like it's Christmas every day. There's new and wonderful things about God to discover, to fill our hearts with joy and worship.

And so what I want us to do is to use Psalm 145 to help us think about this, to hear David as a reliable guide. David who'd walked with God for many years as a shepherd boy and as king of Israel.

Somebody with mature faith. Somebody described as a man after God's own heart. And our key verse, as we consider this Psalm, is verse number three, where we read, So the big idea, God is great.

And the greatness of God, verses one and two, it is reason enough to worship and enjoy him for now and for all eternity. But the greatness of God is like a vast ocean we will never get to the bottom of.

Or it's like trying to reach to the bottom of the Grand Canyon times by a billion. It's just too big and too great. But what we see in this Psalm is that the greatness of God doesn't push David away from God.

[14 : 47] Rather, he responds in worship. So in verse one, I will exalt you, my God the King. I will praise your name forever and ever.

And in fact, he calls all people to worship and praise God for his greatness forever. Even though he doesn't know everything about God's greatness, what he knows is reason to worship.

So as we look at this Psalm, we recognize that on the one hand, God is the only true expert on God.

So only God knows himself completely. But we hear David, this man of faith, scratching the surface of God's greatness, bringing us wonderful truths that cause us to worship.

So what does he draw our attention to in this Psalm? First of all, in verses four to seven, there's a focus on God as Savior. Great is the Lord, verse three, and most worthy of praise.

[15 : 51] His greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another. They will tell of your mighty acts. And the focus here is on God's saving acts.

And the idea is that families were to pass on the stories of the great things that God had done. So we can perhaps think of a Jewish family around the table for their Passover meal.

And the father would be telling the story to the children of God, their king, who acted in power to redeem and rescue them. To the God who worked mighty miracles in order to set them free from slavery.

The God who worked miracles to show his generous goodness to them while they were in the wilderness, giving them food to eat and water to drink.

The God who saved them ultimately to meet with them at Mount Sinai, because they were rescued to enter into relationship. They were saved to know and enjoy God.

[16 : 56] And so David says, this is reason for worship. This is an aspect of God's greatness worthy of exploring. And you know, we get to know God in his saving work even more clearly than we see at the Exodus, because we look back from the perspective of over here and we can look back on the cross.

We can look back at the cross and see Jesus as the Passover lamb. The one who gave his life, whose blood was shed so that the judgment of God would pass over us.

Jesus who came to be our true rescuer. And so we celebrate that. For example, when we share the Lord's Supper, we recognize God's greatness in saving us and bringing us into God's great story of salvation.

So David explores the greatness of God as Savior, but of course, mystery remains. When you think about the story of salvation, there is mystery.

The incarnation, how is it that God, the Son, takes on human form? How can he be truly human and truly God at the same time?

[18 : 16] There is mystery to explore there. The great exchange where Jesus becomes sin for us and gifts us his perfect righteousness. Our minds will never come to a full realization of the extent of the cost to Jesus.

For our salvation. Or we can think about the goal of our salvation and there's mystery there.

Because ultimately we too are saved for relationship. We too are saved to be with God forever.

But what will that be like? We don't know. We get pictures in Revelation, but there is mystery about salvation. But still we have cause for worship.

The next thing that David explores with us is that God is compassionate. In verses 8 and 9, James Montgomery Boyce describes this as God's unexpected quality.

The Lord is gracious and compassionate. Slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all. He has compassion on all he has made.

[19 : 27] Here is a restatement of Exodus chapter 34 verse 6. When Moses asked God, show me your glory. And God revealed his name in those terms.

And it's wonderful because here we recognize that God doesn't give us what we deserve. Instead, in mercy gives us what we don't deserve.

That while because of our law breaking we deserve judgment and anger, God in mercy delights to show love and grace to his people.

He loves to show kindness to his creation, even those parts of the creation that want nothing to do with God. As Jesus said, he sends rain on the righteous and on the wicked.

And so here is David celebrating the gracious nature, the compassionate nature of God. And that's the basis for our salvation.

[20 : 29] As we've said time and time again, we're not saved because we are good enough for God. We're not saved because we've earned our place in God's kingdom. That we are saved only because God in mercy looks down and chooses to love us.

And so there is mystery that remains for the people of God. Why? Why us? Why has God chosen to be so kind and good to us?

We will never fully appreciate either the extent of our need or the extent of God's mercy towards us. But still we can praise God because we know that he has shown compassion and grace to us. The next thing David explores with us is that God is king. In verses 10 to 13. Verse 11, So you have creation which speaks of God's rule.

There's order, there's structure and control. And God's creatures should bear witness to the fact that he is king. That he is a God with unrivaled power.

[21 : 55] That he is Lord over us and we ought to willingly, gladly submit to him. We ought to praise him for the fact that his kingdom is an unbreakable one.

But again, mystery remains. When we think about our own experience, when we look around the world, sometimes it's hard to see.

You know, the Bible promises that God works all things together for good, for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. Sometimes that can be hard to see. There's mystery to God's purposes.

There's mystery to God's rule. Sometimes when we look back, when we reflect on our own lives, we can see, yes, there was suffering. Yes, there was hardship. But through that, God was shaping me. But not always. We don't always see the full extent of God's rule over all things. It's hard for us to get our minds around God ruling in heaven and on the earth and under the earth.

[22 : 55] So there is mystery about the kingship of God. But still, there is reason to worship along with David. And then he takes us to the fact that God is faithful.

God is faithful in providing. In that second part of verse 13 down to verse 20, the Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving towards all he has made.

A wonderful picture of the tender kindness and mercy of God in verse 14, the Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

He is faithful in keeping his promise. He is faithful in delivering help. He's faithful in recovering hope where hope is lost. Verses 15 and 16, He's faithful in generously providing food that we need to live. Verse 18 and 19, The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him. He hears their cry and saves them.

[24 : 10] Here is a God who is faithful in listening to the prayers of his people. Here is a God who is faithful in answering the prayers of his people. In his own way, in his own time and for his own glory.

Here we have a God who, as it were, sticks closer than any brother. We can talk to him at any time and he will listen. And we talk to the one who knows everything about us.

The one who knows our situation and how it will all be resolved. In verse 20, The Lord watches over all who love him. He protects his own.

He watches our steps. But all the wicked he will destroy, judging opposition in the end. So David has begun to know something of the greatness of God.

If we're Christians here today, we have begun to discover something of the greatness of God. And that is cause for us to worship, just as it was cause for David to worship.

[25 : 14] When we think about how David saw, we recognize that we have the privilege of a revelation even more clear, because we again look back to Jesus.

David could celebrate God as Savior. We celebrate that God sent Jesus to be our promised Savior. David celebrated God's grace. And we see in the person of Jesus, in his life and in his death, God's compassionate grace that he extends to us.

David celebrated that God was king. When we see Jesus come to the earth, we see that eternal kingdom begin to break in. David celebrated the faithfulness of God.

And in Jesus, we have that unbreakable word of promise from God. We have his eternal provision. We have Jesus saying, I am the bread of life. Whoever trusts in me will never grow hungry.

So we have in our God, a God of greatness that cannot be fathomed, but a God whose greatness causes us to worship him and to love him.

[26 : 24] Now, why does this matter? Let's just stop and think for a moment. Why does this matter? In the first instance, it's the fuel for our worship.

To quote from Jen Wilkin, it's the joyful duty, the delightful task of his children to spend their lives, both this one and the next, discovering who he is.

Every day there are new mercies from God to discover there are new aspects of his character to discover. And what we discover is always good and always true.

As we reflect on this recognition that God is unfathomably great, it establishes our position. It's a reminder to us that God is creator and we are creatures.

There is a really important distinction there that we recognize with humility our own limits, our limits to understand ourselves or others.

[27 : 32] It also gives us the prospect of joyful discovery. Sometimes, perhaps, reading our Bibles can seem like a duty, a task to perform.

But when we recognize that we read our Bibles in order to know God, not just know about God, but to know God more, and the fact that there is an infinite amount to know about God, then here's the incentive for a lifetime of Bible study, of reading the Bible, of meditating on it.

Why not spend a few minutes through this week thinking about what does it mean that God is a savior? What does it mean that God has compassion or that he is the one true king?

And let that meditation then cause us to move into prayerful worship. Knowing that God is infinitely great should change our attitudes to ourselves and others.

To remember God knows me and is willing to accept and love and welcome me, that means I should be slow to judge others. And I should be quick to extend grace to others.

[28 : 55] And it also encourages our mission because this truly is a God who everyone needs. A relationship that everybody longs for to be truly known, truly loved, truly accepted.

And it's a relationship anyone can have because it's available freely through God's great grace.■tNI