

Psalm 139

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 December 2019

Preacher: Jim White

[0 : 0 0] Again, our scripture reading is found in the book of Psalms, chapter 139, the entire chapter found on page 579 through 580. If you are not already standing, please stand for the reading of God's word. Oh, Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know, when I sit down and when I rise up, you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path, my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, oh, Lord, you know it all together.

You hear me in behind and before and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there, your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely, the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night. Even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. For you form my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works. My soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written every one of them. The days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O Lord.

How vast is the sum of them. If I would count them, they are more than a sin. I awake and I am still with you. Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God. O men of blood, depart from me. They speak against you with malicious intent. Your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred. I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there'll be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way of everlasting. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Let's try that. Okay. Welcome. We're glad to have you here. A sparse crowd, but as somebody pointed out last week, if you're here this week, you're here because you want to be. So that's good. I'm glad you're here. Yeah, let me just open a word of prayer real quick. Our Heavenly Father, you are here with us as we speak. You are here as we worship you. You are here in spirit, and we pray that your spirit speaks to us, speaks to our hearts and minds even as we hear your word. May we know you better through this effort, this time spent in your word, that we might know you better and love you more just in this time. In Jesus' name, amen.

[3 : 4 7] It's always a great honor and pleasure to be here and to open the word for God's people when they gather together on a worship Sunday morning like this to worship him. It's always interesting, as we said, that we never know who's going to show up between Christmas and New Year's. It's always, people are on the move, but it's wonderful to have friends and family that have not been here in a while. It's always good to see them. And at the same time, people from our congregation are warming benches somewhere else in another church somewhere in the country. So we kind of trade options here.

So the other thing is you're in between series most of the time when you find yourself between Christmas and New Year's. So I got to pick whatever I wanted to preach on and I chose to do a psalm.

It's an interesting challenge. It's a change of pace. We haven't done one in quite a while that I remember. So it's fun to do that. Psalm 139 is a psalm that I return to over the years, over the decades at this point. As somebody pointed out, we're one of the older ones here. So we do, I do come back to this one. And so I wanted to share this psalm with you today. A psalm by nature is different.

There's something different about a psalm. It's poetry. It's a song. In many cases, you can put it to music. But the psalm is different than if you're reading or teaching an epistle. There's a lot of doctrine in there to work through. It's not apocalyptic writing. It's not the grand narratives of the Old Testament. But it's a psalm. It's poetry. And poetry by nature tries to get at your heart and mind where your intellect and your feelings intersect. So they use imagery to convey meaning.

And so we have to work through the imagery and try to understand what the writer is talking about in a slightly different way than we would from week to week as we're here looking at other texts.

[5 : 41] So our text, this Psalm 139, the theologians, the scholars, they basically look at it and say, this psalm is about the omniscience of God. And that's not untrue. But when I think about the omniscience of God, it's like God knows every knows that where he put placed every star and planet in the skies and the heavens. As we saw today, we sung today, he knows every grain of sand. He knows everything, his omniscience. So it's a little technical. It's also reminds me of a God who knows the answers to questions like, how do you thread a camel through the eye of a needle. But it's technical. It's theological. If you take a look at our text, though, you're going to have to rethink that, I think. Right at the beginning, it says, oh, Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. And it continues on. You see all these, the proliferation proliferation of pronouns here, it tells you that this is an intimate sort of discourse. There's something intensely intimate of our psalm here. So if we're going to consider that this is about

God's omniscience, we also have to consider the fact that we have an aspect of an intimate relationship with God that's portrayed here. And that's what we're going to learn today, I think.

Um, hopefully what we'll walk away with is that God's omniscience reaches all the way into your most personal being. May this fact fill you with wonder that you might rejoice and glorify God. Or may this fact fill you with terror that you might stop running and surrender to God. Let me say that again, since that's kind of the main point of our text today. God's omniscience reaches all the way into your most personal being. May this fact fill you with wonder that you might rejoice and glorify God.

Or may this fact fill you with terror that you might stop running and surrender to God. The breakdown of our text, um, in 139, uh, there's four stanzas, kind of like four verses to a song, so to speak. The first stanza starts in verse one through six, and it tells us that God knows you.

The second stanza says that God pursues you in verses seven through 12. The third one is God created you in verses 13 through 18. And God is unequalled in verses 19 through 24. So let's dive in. Uh, we have four point sermon today, so buckle up. It's going to be long. And I have that much less time to cover each point then, so we'll, we'll, we'll end on time. Uh, so the first stanza is pretty self-explanatory.

[8 : 29] It says that God knows you. And right off the bat, it says, Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me. So pretty clear. But he uses imagery. He uses, um, all kinds of language to explain exactly what that means and how God knows us. So let's take a look at that. In verse two, it says, when I sit down and when I rise up, you discern my thoughts from afar. So the sitting down and rising up are actions that we do.

And so in all of my actions, God knows what I'm doing and where I'm at and where I'm going. And, uh, in verse two B, it talks about his, his discerning my thoughts from afar. We talked about God who flung the stars in the cosmos. He's up there. And from afar, he actually knows what's going on in my, in my thoughts. In verse three, you search out my path and my lying down. So he's acquainted with all that I do, wherever I go in my travels and my day to day, going to work, wherever I go, uh, God is acquainted with what I am doing. But then the second part of it is, uh, it's when I'm, when I retire at the end of the day and I, and I pull back and I'm by myself in my bedroom, along with my thoughts, God is there as well. And he hears, he knows what my thoughts are.

Uh, verse four, it goes even further there. Even before word is on my, my tongue, God knows it. So God knows everything that I'm thinking. So from afar, he's aware of who I am and what I'm thinking at any given time. In verse five, he talks about how God knows us. He, he he hems us in when I, as I said, I've considered this Psalm for many years. And in the earlier days, I thought this hemming me in and my, his hand on my head was kind of a cozy, nice, nice warm hug, but that's not exactly what's going on here in the Hebrew. Um, it's has more to do with time and space restraints. So, um, in time before I existed, God was already there. And in time before I, my life is up, God will continue on. Um, in space, it's like wherever I've been, he's already been there. Wherever I'm, wherever I'm going, he's already been there. And so the hand on top also is kind of a, a hedge, a limit of where, how far away I can get.

In a sense, what he's doing in a poetic way, he's saying that God is all around me. I'm always within God's reach and he follows everything that I do and he knows me. So this first stanza talks about being known by God. It's nice to be known, isn't it? Um, it's always nice when somebody of stature or somebody of power, like at work, especially, um, or you're just somebody that you respect. They know you by name. It's always a nice feeling. Uh, just the other day we were, um, at a concert downtown and we came out and I saw our pastor from 20 some years ago. And it's a, you know, it was 20 some years ago and it's a large church that had 2000 members or so. And, um, so I saw him and I just kind of pat on my shoulder. He was talking to somebody and said, hi. And he said, hi, Jim. And Jeremy was with us.

And he's like, he actually knows your name. I'm like, yes, yes, he does. So somebody you respect knows you by name. It feels good. But just imagine how much better it is that God, the creator of the universe, he knows you by name and he loves you. Uh, and he cares about you. So the psalmist understood this and the psalmist in, in all in his wonder, um, in, in verse six, um, such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it. He just steps back from all this is, and is just in awe and wonder about God, God's reach of his knowledge, um, and his involvement in his, in the psalmist life. And it's, it's this, um, I am never out of the reach of God, but God's reach goes far beyond anything that I can imagine. He knows all things. This is a God I want to worship.

[12:30] Just think about it now. If, if he knows me and he knows what's going on in my head, um, and he knows you and he knows what's going on in your head for the entire lifespan and everybody in this congregation and, uh, almost 8 billion people on the face of this earth. And he knows every one of us in that detail. It is truly awe-inspiring and wonderful, too wonderful for us to really understand God's reach in his knowledge. Um, yeah, it is truly wonderful for us to consider. Yeah. So the psalmist considers God's knowledge of him. And in the next stanza, we're going to move to that, uh, where, God pursues us. Uh, in this next stanza, the psalmist kind of steps back and he starts to consider all that God knows about him. And it's no surprise that he introduces the word flee in verse seven.

Because if you think about it, um, if God is hemming you in, a lot of people don't like to be hemmed in. It's like, if you're trying to get away from God, his reach is never too far. You're trying to get away. You can't because he's already there wherever you're going to, to run from him. Um, so that might be too constricting for you. At the same time, um, yeah, if, if, um, if he knows my thoughts, it's like, you think about that, you're alone last night, the things you're thinking about, you're like, whew, that's kind of embarrassing. God knows all my thoughts, not just the good ones, but the bad ones.

He knows everything that I'm thinking. He knows what I was thinking on the way into church this morning when the guy cut me off in traffic earlier. Um, so he knows everything. So it's, it's a natural instinct to want to flee. And that's what the psalmist talks about here.

Where shall I go from your spirit or where shall I flee from your presence? The, this stanza tells us that God pursues us no matter where we go. So let's take a look at that.

The second stanza here. Verse eight, I can try to flee to the heavens or to the depths of the world. And God is there. I can try to travel the most far off, most exotic lands. And God is there.

[14 : 44] And verses 11 and 12, even the darkness is no match for God. His night vision is unequaled, is better than the grainy, green grainy images that the Navy SEALs see with their night vision goggles.

To God, the night is bright as day. There is no hiding from him. And we saw this even in the, the prophet Jonah who ran, no matter where he went, God was there when he was in the darkness in, in, in the bowels of the fish, he was there. And it was nice because God could see him bright as day and God continues to pursue us. Now I skipped over verse 10. Even in this fleeing from God in verse 10, we, we, we see that God is there. And we just read that ever, even there, your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me. In this case, I think this truly is. He's leading us and holding us even in the darkness, even as we're fleeing, even as we're not sure where we, where we're going, we're rebelling, we're turning away from God. We don't want anything to do with him. And we find ourselves in darkness and are lost. God's hand is still there. He's still guiding us. He's always nearby. So God pursues us out of his love. I had a professor who talked about this, this sort of pursuit of God over decades of his life. He didn't turn to Christ until midlife. He already had his PhD and he was teaching at a prestigious college in Colorado, but he also had an alcohol, a drinking problem. So he really struggled with that. He was shaking his fist at God. He was too intelligent for God. And so he was running from him and he, all along, he knew that the hound of heaven was after him as he describes it. This hound of heaven is somebody that is, you know, somebody that C.S. Lewis also refers to in his conversion experience. The hound of heaven was after him. It comes from a poem from

Francis Thompson in 1893. I'm going to, since we're doing poetry, I'm going to bring some poetry into the sermon. And so let me read a couple of lines of this hound of heaven who pursues you.

I fled him down the nights and down the days. I fled him down the arches of the years. I fled him down the labyrinthian ways of my own mind. And in the midst of tears, I hid from him. And under running laughter, up this day, hopes I sped and shot precipitated a down titanic glooms of chasmed fears. From those strong feet that followed, followed after, but with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic instancy, the beat and a voice beat, more instant than the feet. All things betray thee who betrayest me. You hear this, this, this steady pace, the hound of heaven is after, after my professor in this case. It says no matter how much you run from God, God is pursuing you, and it's a steady pace, and he will catch up with you sooner or later. And this is exactly the experience of my professor. Here he was in his 40s, I think, had his PhD. He woke up, he passed out, drunk the night before, in his car with a beer in his hand on a windy mountain road. And that's the day he knew that the hound of heaven caught up with him. Sometimes we're not running from God necessarily.

We don't know it. We're not shaking our fist at God. We're just, you know, in just lost, basically. We're, we're, we slip into patterns. We're frustrated. We don't know how to move forward.

[18 : 24] And we just kind of find ourselves wandering off the path. We slide into a crevice. We're stuck in the darkness. And we're just, we really just lost and need help. And in that case, this, the God pursuing us is a comforting thought. We are lost. We're looking for help. And aren't we glad that God has night vision that he can see us down in the, in the crevice and can reach out with his hand and pull us up and out of that. God pursues you in your lostness. He leaves the 99 sheep to pursue that one lost sheep because he loves that sheep. We no longer need to be terrified that God knows our thoughts. We don't have to worry about him hemming us in. It's not restricting anymore. He is there.

We don't have to worry about the fact that he's there before we get there. That the darkness cannot hide us from God's eyes. We want him to find us because we know that we are lost. God pursues us and he rejoices. And Luke 15 says, rejoice with me for I have found my sheep. And that was lost.

So God pursues us in stanza two that we learn. God pursues us out of his love. That brings us to stanza number three. And that starts in verse 13. God tells us that he created us.

So God, the creator of the universe, who flung the stars in the, in the skies, made his hands tiny so he could knit you together in your mother's womb. He took the perfect combination of the DNA from your mother and your father. You got your father's looks and your mother's feet. You got your mother's intelligence and your father's sense of humor. He wove you together to be the perfect person that you are today. And the psalmist lands on verse 14 where he takes, where he says, I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works. My soul knows it very well. How many of you can stand up today and say, I am fearfully and wonderfully made and stand there and say it loud and proud.

Lord. I'm not calling you to do that right now, but I'm happy if you're able to. And that's great. Some of you are going, it's like, I mean, well, yeah, I mean, look at me. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I'm the smartest person in this room, even amongst all these PhDs. You know, or God may have given you extreme intelligence. God may have gifted you in music. God may have given you unbelievably good looks according to the world's standards. And that's fine. You should still be able to stand up and say, I am fearfully and wonderfully made because I am God's creation. So give him the glory, even in those things that he's blessed you with. But I have a feeling that more of you are sitting here and you're stuck in loops in your, in loops of negative self-talk where you're basically saying, I'm nobody, or I'm just angry or I'm a pervert. I'm a failure. I have feelings I shouldn't have, or I have thoughts that are despicable to God, or I have habits that I just can't kick. I've been trying for years.

[21 : 40] So my prayer for you is that someday you will be able to stand up and say it out loud. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works. My soul knows it very well.

Now I'm fully aware that as wonderful, as we, as wonderfully, as God has created us in such a wonderful way that the ravages of the fall has taken a toll on us. It does have an impact. You might end up with chemical imbalances or addictions. You might have desires that are contrary to God's perfect design. Some of us will look at our, our contorted bodies even and say it's not functioning the way it was supposed to. And you start to question God's perfect design, but it's the ravages of the fall that have interfered with his perfect creation. So we, we need to acknowledge that. There was a story in the news about two weeks ago and a family posted their, a picture of their extremely handicapped son.

He was in a wheelchair and, and, and, and, you know, you could just tell all his, you know, muscles were locked up. He couldn't move. His head was thrown back. His eyes were bulging, looking in two different directions. His teeth were, you know, protruding and, and, and misshapened. And it was, it was actually difficult to look at him. But they posted this picture because somebody walked by him that day and acknowledged him as a human being and said, hello. And they were so surprised by this, and so pleased with this, that they thought this would be a good teaching moment to put out on the Twitter sphere. And so they did. And whenever you do that, you get some good comments and you get some bad comments to the point where somebody even said, you guys are selfish. You should have had that baby aborted. But this family, they knew their child. They loved their child. They could tell when he was smiling. They're just the, the finest nuance in his face, change of muscles. They could tell when he was happy, when he was sad. They knew that he was created by God, that he was, he was fearfully and wonderfully made by God, that he was created in God's image. Yeah. So no matter how broken or twisted or marred our bodies are, we are God's creation and we're fearfully and wonderfully made.

I do also want to acknowledge that, yes, this verse, these couple of verses here are often referenced when we're talking about abortion or youth, euthanasia. So, and I don't want to overlook that or just skip on over that. It is definitely a verse or series of verses that you want to come to and meditate when you're talking about this topic. But I'm not going to spend any more time than I have at this point or get any more direct with it because it's not the main point of this psalm. It's just one of the points of the psalm that comes out. But it's definitely a good time, good to spend time meditating on it and what this means to be created, to be knit together in your mother's womb.

Verse 15 and 16, again, again, kind of reiterate this idea of how God knows us because he was intimately involved in creating us. So God knows us because he created us. That was stanza number three.

[24 : 58] At this point, in verses 17 and 18, there's a shift in the psalm. The psalmist kind of moves from you create, you know me, you pursue me, and you know, you've created me, to really focusing, turning that around and focusing now on God and his mind and all that he knows and all that he's done.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. So he stands in awe and wonder of all that God knows and rejoices. And every day is a new opportunity to rejoice because he is still with God every morning he wakes up. So the final stanza teaches us that God is unequalled. And that starts in verses 19. Again, over the years as I study the psalms, I'm always struggled to understand how, especially David, a lot of his psalms, they're soaring in glorifying God and wonder and awe. And they're just, and David is just overwhelmed with how great God is. And then all of a sudden he shifts gears in the last couple of verses end with some phrase like, now kill my enemies. And it's always kind of jarring. And it's like, well, how do you get from there to there? And our text is no different. We have the same language here in verse 19, slay the wicked. My favorite one is verse 22, I hate them with complete hatred. In the Hebrew, you could also say, I hate them with perfect hatred. It's like, it doesn't get any better than that.

But it's really kind of terrible that you hate anything that horribly. But our text at least gives us a clue as to why this text takes such a shift. In verse 21 is our best clue, I think.

Do I not hate those who hate you? The hatred comes out of zeal, our zeal for God. So it shifts, this shift is, you know, the psalmist looks to God and is in awe and overwhelmed by his knowledge of him as an intimate involvement in his life. And then that shifts to a zeal for God. So he can't imagine that anybody else would hate God or despise God or go against God in any way, shape or form.

So it comes out of this zeal for God that he has this hate. So let's take a look at that real quick. Yeah, it's unfathomable. I shouldn't put this word in here. I can't pronounce unfathomable for him that anybody could go up against God. So verse 19, the psalmist wants nothing to do with them.

[27 : 44] As he shouts, depart from me, those of you who don't like God. Or verse 20, they speak against you with malicious intent. Or verse 21, he can't imagine that they would take his name in vain or rise up against God. God is unequalled. He stands above all others in his omniscience and all his other godly characteristics. There is no one else like him. In the last two verses, the psalmist pauses and asks God for help just in case his zealousness gets the better of him.

He doesn't want to slip into pride or he wants to root out any last vestiges of anything that goes against God. So take a look at it in verse 23. Search me. Actually, there's a shift. We started the psalm with, you have searched me and have known me. And now the psalmist is inviting God to take another look, basically. He's saying, search me, O God, and know my heart. Take another look. Try me and know my thoughts. Take another look. And see if there be any grievous way in me. Find anything that shouldn't be there and root it out and lead me in the way everlasting. So he's inviting God to be intrusive at this point. He's not afraid of God knowing his very thoughts and everything that goes on in his head.

God knows us so intimately and pursues us out of love because we are his precious creation. And he wants us to worship him as our Lord and Savior for all eternity. He so loved you that he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to become human and acceptable sacrifice so he could die on the cross and pay the price for your sin. When he rose from the dead on the third day, he conquered the power of death and sin so that you can be saved. If you believe, your relationship with God will be restored and you will enjoy him forever. Jesus overcame the power of death and overcame the power of sin and has reversed the ravages of sin. He promises to make all things new again. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. And when he returns, he will free our bodies and our minds from the ravages of the fall. My grandma, who is tied to a wheelchair for over 20 years, will dance again someday. Your desire for things that lead to emptiness will be satisfied in Jesus himself. The darkness of your mind will turn to joy as you worship the Lord at the foot of his throne. Rejoice for you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Rejoice that you are created by God in his very image. Rejoice because his all-encompassing knowledge reaches all the way down into your very personal being. He knows you. He pursues you out of his love and he will save you if you turn to him. You are his precious creation. If you're still running from God, stop running. Those footsteps you hear are God pursuing you. He knows all that you've done.

He knows all that you're struggling with. He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows that you can't fix your own problems. This is exactly why he is pursuing you. You are his precious creation.

You are fearfully and wonderfully made. God loves you and does not want you to be lost, so he pursues you to save you. Stop running and let him love you. Let his hand lead you into the way everlasting. Let me go ahead and close in prayer. Oh Lord, how can it be that you can love us?

[31 : 31] You are all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present, but you are also love. And so it is that you, the omniscient God, knows all things about us and you love us. You are infinitely involved in each of our lives because you love each and every one of us here today. Such knowledge is indeed too wonderful for us. And for this, we thank you and praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.