

Psalm 139 "To be Known by God"

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Preacher: Guest Speaker

[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

And let's pray. Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you for the chance to meditate it on this morning. We ask that you would guide us by your Spirit, that you would illuminate your Word and show us what you would have to say to us today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, how many people would you say know you, really know you? Not counting those that know things about you or know your perspectives on things. Those who know you deeply, interpersonally, authentically, authentically, people that know you when you're not in active image management.

[1:54] Those that know your hopes and fears. How many do you think know you like that? One or two people, more, none.

One, well, what do you think it is that keeps us from being known in this sort of way? Two or three things came to my mind. One is the societal pressure of fitting in, right? We want to project to others what we think they want to hear from us. There's, of course, the practical give and take of relationships where we want to be known proportional to the other person. We don't want to divulge too much too soon. And perhaps, perhaps strongest of all, is the fear that we might be known and that we might be rejected. The others might know us, our personality, our fears, our hopes, our longings, and that they might reject us once they know these. There's all sorts of reasons for why we are not known to others, why we might hide, why we feel the need to conceal.

Now, all of this talk of being known begs the question, well, what does it mean to be known? Who are you truly? What is the innermost part of you that you try to conceal? Are you your darkest thoughts or are you the best version of yourself or a mix of both? Is the authentic you the person who you are when no one's looking or are you most truly you when you're in relationship? If relationship, which relationships? To know thyself, right? The great Greek maxim is easier said than done.

And being known is not straightforward. And yet, of course, to be known, to know yourself, to be known by God, that this is our greatest longing and certainly our most fundamental need.

Well, the psalm that we read this morning, Psalm 139, is a deep source of wisdom for those of us navigating this question. The psalm presents us with someone living before the face of God, found out by God, searched by God, and opening his life to the gaze of Almighty God. We don't know the context exactly.

[4:35] We're told that David wrote this psalm. We don't know the exact time in his life when it was penned. But the verses and images of the psalm suggest someone who has fled from God, or at least who's tempted to flee from God, who's gone into hiding, who may be questioning God's intentions with his life, questioning God's goodness.

But whatever the context the psalmist was writing from, the scripture invites us to be known in the deepest sense that you and I need. As we go through the psalm, we'll see that we're invited to be known by God, our maker. We're invited to be known by God, our knower, and God, our pursuer. God, our maker, our knower, and pursuer. And we'll find that he alone is worthy and capable of knowing us as we were made to be known. So first, our maker.

Well, so much of life is a competition. A career, those who get the job, athletics, those who win the games, or who can lift the most. And while much of life is a competition, there's a lot more in life that feels like a competition, although it's not. Maybe our looks or our status. And so it's difficult for us not to be constantly comparing ourselves to others, measuring ourselves up against one another. And unfortunately, in competitions, there generally is one winner and many losers.

And so many of us, as we frame life in this way, we get down on ourselves. If only this part of my body looked different. If only I was a bit smarter. If only I were a bit more outgoing.

[6 : 30] We spend much of our lives feeling stuck in our bodies, stuck in our personalities, held back. Feeling inadequate, perhaps wondering whether we are worthy of love or worthy of the good life.

And yet the scriptures that we read this morning in Psalm 139, scriptures, in contrast, tell us, they tell you that you've been fearfully and wonderfully made.

That the Lord knit you together while in your mother's womb. We read, your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me.

When is yet, there were none of them. Well, this is good news for us this morning. We were made to live before God, our maker, who reminds us each time, each day, each moment, that he made us and that he made us well.

You don't need to wonder or worry whether you measure up, whether you're worthy of love or the good life, that by function of having been created good by a good God, you are told that you are wonderfully made.

[7 : 47] Now, perhaps some nuance on this point will help for those of us who struggle so much to receive and believe this truth. On one hand, this is not a fatalistic conclusion to say that however you find yourself, whatever state you're in, this is caused by God and you need to accept it passively as a gift.

I don't think that's what the scriptures tell us. There is sin, like a bad temper. There is unexploited potential areas where we need to grow up, areas where we need to mature.

And then there are weaknesses or circumstances that God placed us in that his glory might be revealed. Think here of the man born blind, that where God's glory would be revealed in his healing, right?

There's all sorts of ways that this truth of us being wonderfully made is more complex than first meets the eye. And you might think, yeah, thank God for my temper, you know, thank God for the way that he made me.

Well, perhaps your temper is the downside to a passion that God has given you to use for his good, to stand up for truth, to stand up for on behalf of others.

[9 : 10] And so while you will need to ask God's help for your temper, it may be the flip side of a God-given gift. The boldness that allows the entrepreneur to succeed also causes him or her to perhaps too quickly say the wrong things and lose friendships.

The shyness that keeps someone from career opportunities may also have the introspection to bless the world with writings or sympathize with someone in need. The aspect of you that you may feel holds you back.

How might this be recast as a new opportunity, perhaps an advantage, or else like the man born blind, an opportunity for the glory of God to be revealed?

So affirming that God made you well does not necessarily mean we sit back passively, helpless to change anything. Instead, we're called to seek out how God truly made us.

What are the God-given aspects of myself, of yourself, that I am to accept as a gift? What areas am I called to receive as gifts to be developed?

[10 : 25] And what aspects of myself am I called to accept that certainly don't feel like a gift, wondering how God might use these for his glory?

In all cases, we can know this morning that you were made by a God who doesn't make mistakes, that the raw materials that you are made of, made from, the blueprint of yourself, that this was

made by a good God.

When you think there's aspects of yourself that you don't like, you can know God made you well. You were fearfully and wonderfully made to bring about the greatest amount of good for the glory of God and for the good of others.

Society tells us, be yourself, right? That's, I'm sure you've heard that one before. Be yourself. And of course, there's good truth to this, but the scripture puts it somewhat differently, doesn't it?

Be who God created you to be. You don't find this by simply turning inward, but by turning to another, to the one who made you and tells you who you are.

[11 : 39] And so that's what we see first in this psalm, that God made you and we desperately need to be found by this God.

More than having made you, he also knows you. He knows all about who you are today. He knows about your experiences, the things that brought you in, the door today, and the complexity of life. He knows your ways. In the words of the psalm, we read, you discern my thoughts from afar. You are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it all together.

I don't know how it is for you, but I've been in many conversations where I've tried to express my viewpoint, and at the end of it, I think, I don't think this person understands what I'm saying, right? We can go through life often feeling misunderstood, and yet the scriptures talk about a God who knows our thoughts before they hit us, before they can be conceptualized and formalized or formulated by our words.

[12 : 53] When looking to buy a house many, some years ago, my wife and I, we looked at our budget and thought, well, we can't do as well as we had hoped, and so, why don't we buy a fixer-upper?

Now, if you know anything about me and the skill of these hands, you know that that would be a bad, bad idea, and often we look back on that time and think, you know, how silly of us to think that we might be able to do this sort of thing, but is this not what we do all the time, right?

How often do we misunderstand our ways and our gifts and how we were made? We are, in many ways, so blind to our ways, and yet, all of our ways we read are known to him.

St. Augustine, he knew this well when he wrote famously, in his words, you were more inward to me than the most inward part of me.

You get that? You were more inward to me than the most inward part of me. He's saying that better than he can know himself is the God that knows him, that made him and knows him.

[14 : 21] And there's some days where I'm quite overwhelmed at all I want to be and become, find it extremely comforting to know that the one who knows me better than I know myself is the one who is working on me, the one who's sanctifying me and leading me in this, the way of eternal life.

In a culture obsessed with self-exploration, personality tests, DNA tests to figure out, you know, where you're from, psychoanalysis and making sense of childhood experiences, you know, all good things to know ourselves, but the scriptures show us that the deepest way to be known, more existentially important and prior to all these things is to know and to be known by the God who made you and knows you.

And so in this sense, all our therapy, all our introspection, all our psychoanalyzing is to be reframed to emphasize that we need to keep in step with the spirit who knows us deeply and personally and that on our own, our efforts will be limited.

Now, some of our ways that God knows better than we know ourselves, some of these ways are, in all honesty, deeply troubling.

Well, worse than we would be willing to admit on a Sunday morning to one another that the degree of selfishness and pride, our evil desire, we wonder, can we really tell the full truth about these?

[16 : 11] Can we be known in this way? Are some truths not too difficult to stomach? Can we bear the weight of these? We so desperately want to be thought of well and we so desperately want to think of ourselves well.

And so we, of course, have this desire to hide, to not look our sin in the eye, to turn to delusion because we can't entertain the reality of the depths of our sin.

Now, all this leads to our third point, that God, he made us, he knows us, and yet, he still chooses to pursue you and I.

The psalmist prays, where shall I go from your spirit? Where shall I flee from your presence? And later on, O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

Now, transparency and being known has, does it not have the worst wrap in our day? You think about airport security, there's nothing less comfortable than going through that scan and having to return to take off the belt that you forgot.

[17 : 28] And we think about the internet and how the going wisdom is that the government and service providers should know, you know, absolutely nothing about what we're doing online.

When we think about transparency and being known, many of us think back to George Orwell's famous 1984 Big Brother sense of transparency, this oppressive, impersonal knowledge that seeks to catch us.

Of course, in contrast to that in Psalm 139 is that God seeks us out not impersonally, not, yeah, not impersonal omniscience, not uncaring knowledge, but this deep sense of caring and loving to know us, to know us deeply.

The scriptures tell us that the God who made us knows us deeply, that this God came down to earth in the person of Jesus Christ and died for each and all of our sins, that our sinful ways, the things that we know about, the things that we don't know about, our sinful choices, even the things that we most seek to conceal from others, that Jesus died for these things that we might be freed from sin and reconciled to God.

This relationship of safety and security that God provides to us is the thing that our hearts long for, that outside of this relationship, the stakes are too high for full confession.

[19 : 14] confession. I don't know how it is, but when we're confessing or you're saying something that you've done wrong to one another, we'll often tell those stories in a way that best reflects us, right?

Because we want to manage our image and we don't know what that will do to us if somebody else knows the full weight of what we've done. So we half confess, but when we come before God whom we cannot successfully run and hide from and who loves us the same, we can be fully transparent about our sins and we have the safety of this relationship where as we deeply need and as we deeply long for to be known and to be loved, to allow him to transform our hearts and lead us in the way of eternal life.

One pastor and writer, he put it this way, he says, if there was even one thing God did not know about me, that might be the thing that would put me beyond his grace.

If I could hold back anything from him, I would. Of course, keep back my darkest deeds, my most shameful secrets. I would display my best and hide my worst.

But then when the books were opened in the last day, it might be found that these sins were the ones for which there is no forgiveness, the ones he had not foreseen when he accepted the sacrifice of his son on my behalf.

[20 : 50] My confidence would be undermined and destroyed. But, no, all of my ways are known to him, and even this complete knowledge does nothing to diminish or destroy his love for me.

And so, this morning, if you haven't come before the face of Almighty God who knows you, who loves you, who pursues you in the person of Jesus Christ, he welcomes you to do so.

This is the relationship you and I most need. And if you have, he invites you to live more fully before his face, to live knowing and embracing the reality that all aspects of your life are lived before God, and that there's no part of your life that will go well if you try and conceal it or lock it off from God's pursuit.

Our longing to be fully known and fully loved is met in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the relationship we most need, and so we can pray with the psalmist, search me, O God, you've searched me before, now search me again, get rid of everything that keeps me from you, that holds me back from the way of life everlasting.

Let's pray. Father, we are grateful for this, your word that speaks to us, the ultimate relationship that we need to live lives that are exposed, that where we will find forgiveness, where we can be known and loved and cherished by you as we were created to be.

[22 : 53] We ask for each of us in this room for the areas that we conceal before you and others that you would help us to come clean before you, that you would shine your light in our lives, that we would say the same thing as you, as you already see in our lives, and that you would do far more than we can possibly ask or imagine, knowing the mess in our lives, knowing the sin and all the things that we wish to be different about our lives, and that you would bring transformation by

the power of your spirit, that you would lead us on the way of everlasting life, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.