

Search Me O God and Know My Heart

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Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back into Psalm 139, and we're going to look together at verses 23 and 24, there at the end of the psalm.

And we're going to take it in terms of, Search me, O God, and know my heart. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my anxieties, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Well, the first thing to be said here is, of course, that at the beginning of the psalm, we're told that God searches and knows us.

We're told that this is something that is true of mankind from the dawn of human history, and it's true down to the present time, and will be down to the end of time as we know it.

God constantly searches the hearts of people, and he knows the thoughts of people. And, of course, at one level, this is mind-boggling stuff, because if you know yourself, you know that your own thoughts and reflections are almost enough to be going on with at times, and the thoughts that you glean from others, and in your own little environment, even if it's bigger than somebody else's, or smaller than somebody else's, in your own thought life, you know there's a lot going on.

[1 : 4 8] And so it is difficult for us, in a way, to really comprehend that God knows all of the thoughts of all of the people all of the time, and that is true in every generation.

Such knowledge, he says, is too wonderful for me. It's beyond me. I can't attain to it. It's something that is altogether beyond me.

But we're not required to understand the full extent of God searching and knowing the hearts of all the people.

We're simply told, this is the way it is. And this helps us to understand something of God's greatness, of his capacities.

And again, you've got the whole dimension and range of human thought life and experience, from the best to the worst, and it still remains true.

[2 : 5 7] He knows the thoughts of all the people, in all the places, all of the time, in all of human history. And then it's put another way too, that we can't hide from him.

We can't hide anything from him. Not a thing, not a single thing. He knows human beings through and through. And all of their thoughts and words and actions are there before him.

It's simply impossible to hide from him. Where shall I go from your spirit? Or conceal our inmost thoughts from him. Verse 7. It can't be done.

And we were thinking earlier on today about the whole business of quenching the spirit. And we were arguing that the spirit there in 1 Thessalonians 5, 19, has to do with the Holy Spirit of God.

We looked at Paul's use of the words tonnuma, the spirit. And we saw that when the spirit of God comes to us and he teaches us, he presents to us God's view of things, God's view of ourselves and our need of salvation and so on.

[4 : 18] It is important that we do not resist his ministry, that we do not suppress it. He allows that to happen. And we are to be careful, lest we should grieve him and quench him by our irreverence and our arrogance and stubbornness.

Because all the while that we may be opposed to what the spirit is saying to us in the word, he knows. He's searching us through and through. And from an evangelistic point of view, when you're talking to people, those of you who share your testimony and so on, it's good to remember that we can address that to people.

We can say, this is the God with whom we have to do. There isn't anything hidden from us. He knows you. And he has appointed a day in which he will judge you. And it's important to see that he has given a way of escape, a deliverance for us.

Because that same spirit is testifying to the truth in Jesus on every hand. When we share the gospel, that's what the spirit is doing.

The spirit who knows the people to whom you speak, knows them through and through. That spirit is the spirit who brings conviction to bear upon us.

[5 : 41] Jesus said, when he has come, and he has come, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. Of sin because they believe not on me.

Of righteousness because I go to my Father. And of judgment because the prince of this world is judged. And by and by it will be seen to be the case.

So, we're to help people see, this is the God with whom we have to do. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2.10 that the spirit of God searches all things.

And then he gives us a really tantalizing one. Even the depths of God. That's the spirit.

The spirit who applies the redemption purchased by Christ. That's the spirit we're talking about here. The spirit of God.

[6 : 46] And says the psalmist, search me, O God, and know my heart. Really, what he's saying there is, discover my heart to me. In the light of your word.

That I may see what I am. That I may recognize that I come to you humbly and penitently. So that when we, you see, when we ask God to search our hearts, we are referring to the work of the spirit of God who searches all things.

So, I want us to think about this cry of a psalm writer in two parts for our own benefit. Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Search me, O God. But clearly, when he says this, he's reminding us that this is a prayer really for those who are already the Lord's people.

They've got a clue about what it is to ask the Lord to search them. They know their own hearts in a measure, and they want to know more, in order that they're brought to depend on the Lord more than ever.

[8 : 06] The unsaved person is not going to easily contemplate praying.

I mean, there of course, the unsaved person who at least believes in God. He or she is not going to pray this, unless they are particularly self-righteous, like the Pharisee of old, who thought he was up to the mark.

He thought that, God, I thank you, I'm not like other men. I'm not like that sinner over there. I'm better. I do this, this, this, this. And he cracked up his score, and he expected God to receive him on that basis.

Well, he was self-deceived in his own self-righteousness. He may dare, but it is an embrace in self-righteous ignorance that he may do it.

Search me, O God. But David is talking here as a believer. And he's talking as one who knows in a fair measure that he has been searched, and that he is known by God.

[9 : 17] Verse 1, following. And here he comes back, and he wants God to search him out all the more, so that he himself, from God, may know his own heart better.

And if you think about David in Psalm 130, he tells us, he knows how to rate things. If you should mark iniquities against us, O Lord, who will stand?

Bet. There is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared. Who knows that if the sovereign, just sin-hating and sin-penishing God, were to mark his iniquities against him, and look for him, a mere mortal, to deal with them, to reconcile himself to God, it couldn't be done.

He wouldn't have a chance. We read in Psalm 1, that the wicked shall not appear or arise in the judgment.

And the word is an interesting one, because the word in the original is a cum, to arise, to plead one's cause, and to win.

[10 : 42] And that's true. The wicked can't do that. They may think they can. They may think they have a chance of arguing with God, at the judgment, and winning through.

No way. They will not arise. They will not stand and win their cause in the judgment. And David knew that. And David knew that to imagine that you yourself can put your case forward to God, God receive me on account of what I am, is simply going nowhere.

It's a doomed approach that will finish up with eternity lost. And so for then converted, to risk praying, search me, O God, is risking being exposed to God's wrath and condemnation.

Because the Spirit, when he comes in his convicting power, convicts, as I said already, of sin, of righteousness, and the lack of it in the sinner, and of judgment.

Think about it for a moment. One of the great prophetic visions of the Bible was given to Isaiah at his calling as a prophet, Isaiah 6.

[12 : 08] And when he saw the Lord high and lifted up in the vision, what did he cry? Oh great, I'm glad you've come to me on my terms.

Is that great? No. Woe is me! I am unclean. I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Woe is me! I'm unclean. And do you remember how God sent the messenger to take the coal, the burning coal, off the altar and touched his lips?

Your transgression is forgiven. Your iniquity is pardoned. In other words, God was saying, it's not about what you are, it's about what I will do for you.

And a true picture of himself in relation to God when he was searched and known in the glare of God's presence was a woe is me.

[13 : 14] I am unclean response. That was his response. You remember the story of Job, that great and godly man. The same thing is true. Okay, we know that God was testing him and demonstrating to the spirits both fallen and unfallen and the chief offender, Satan too.

He was demonstrating that Job would not curse God and die. And Job was taking issue with God for the way he was being treated.

And he became righteous over much, didn't he? He said a bit too much against the Lord. And in Job 42 and from verse 5 we have an interesting insight.

He says, I have heard of you with the hearing of the ears, but now my eyes see you and I repent in dust and ashes.

In other words, he was searched and known and the Lord made known the Lord's verdict on Job. Godly, but he just became a little bit too sure of himself and righteous over much and God put him in his place.

[14 : 41] And he was discovered to himself by the one who searches us through and through. And that, of course, ties in with the second bit of this, know my heart, try my thoughts.

Go into the inmost part where no one can get in and examine and know. Show me there what I am.

Show me the plague of my own heart. The old preachers used to use that turn of face. show me the plague of my heart. And you see, that's what he needed to see.

He needed to see that in there still, godly though he was, there were those evil thoughts and appetites and aspirations that were simply wrong.

And he wants God to test him and prove him and expose to him what was wrong. And this is important to see.

[15 : 47] You see, it's not about God having to be asked then to discover these things. No, rather, it is he's asking God to discover to himself, to the psalm writer, to the godly person, what I'm really like.

That's not a, that's not an easy process. It's, it's a difficult process. It discovers to us that we're not what we thought we were. He exposes our anxieties, our anxious thoughts in order to help us.

You see, there are conditions in our hearts that we're not always aware of. The writer of Hebrews said, in one context, Beware, lest a root of bitterness spring up among you and many be defiled.

Now, who knows there's a root of bitterness growing there, that weed that's growing. We need God to discover it to us. We mightn't even know how that started.

It may be a root of resentment. It may be a root of resentment against God. God, you're giving me too hard a course to run. There's all sorts of ways of looking at this.

[17 : 13] And our anxieties revolve around that root. Whatever it is, it is sin because it is displeased with God.

And David wasn't beyond that. don't forget. He wasn't beyond that. He tells us that himself. Things displeased him that God did.

And, you see, when he asks in this way, try me and know my anxieties, in other words, see what is causing this anxiety.

anxiety. Often, our anxieties arise not from genuine observable difficulties, but from our own lack of faith or confidence in the Lord.

Or, or from our sentiment about how things are with others, and so on. And so, he wants God to discover to him what is really going on in there.

[18 : 21] And, the powers of darkness, of course, are always working on these anxieties and fanning them into flame to make them worse for us.

so that we're not in control always of what we're really like, of the anxieties we have within. Take, perhaps, one of the best examples in the Bible, the Apostle Peter himself, first among equals as he was.

Peter thought, you remember, that he was most strong when he was most weak. I shall never betray.

I shall die with you. And then, Peter is told by the Saviour, before the cock grows twice, you shall deny me thrice.

Oh, that will not happen. And what happened in his anxiety there, in the court of the high priest's palace, standing by the charcoal burner with the soldiers and the servants, warming themselves.

[19 : 40] You're one of his. No, I'm not. Don't know what you're talking about. In his anxiety to protect himself, he discovered his heart.

This choice follower of Jesus discovered just what was in me. Not I am strong, but I am miserably weak.

You are with it, you are one of his, your speech betrays you. No, don't know him. Settle down again for a wee while and then the third time it comes, you are his.

And he began with oath and curse to deny knowledge of Jesus. He twisted and turned and sinned greatly. You see, our anxieties can cause us great difficulty.

And we need them discovered to us before we run into trouble. and when we ask the Lord to search us and to know our anxieties, try me and know my anxieties, discover them to me.

[20 : 54] Head off trouble. Never think when you pray the words, as I'm sure you do on occasions, lead us not into temptation.

That's right. That's what we're asking. Head off the trouble that I don't see coming. Because I don't know my own heart.

I need you to discover these things to me. See if there be any wicked way in me, and show it to me.

Such a way that will grieve your spirit, as we've been thinking recently. Such a way as grieves the godly. How often in recent times, with all these commotions in the church, have we said, well, I didn't think so and so would behave like that.

It's true, isn't it? They grieve the godly. But we can too, without necessarily meaning to. And we need God to help us, you see, to discover these things, and the potential for these things, to us.

[22 : 17] I'm sure I've told you the wee story about Bonner Bridge and the FP folks that were there in the Migdale, in the Marys of Bad Bay.

And they were sitting, and there was a little bit of tongue-lashing on certain characters. And they were just round the dinner table and they were speaking and they began to say so and so about this and that and that, casting so and so in a bad light.

And the story goes that old Donald was sitting there not saying a word. And they asked him for his contribution, and they were very quiet on it, Donald.

Ach, well, he said, I was thinking about the millstone. I was thinking about the millstone.

And Jesus' words, if you cause one of these little ones who believes in me to stumble, better that the millstone were cast around your neck and you were cast into the depths of the sea, than to cause one of mind to stumble in the way.

[23 : 39] That's a profoundly scary thing. Ach, yes, he said, I was thinking about the millstone. And it shut him up. And it's important, you see, not to grieve the Spirit of God, not to grieve the people of God, and not to grieve ourselves either, for that matter.

How often when we discover we've said the wrong thing, it causes us grief, or it should. It should cause us personal grief, when we sin against the light we have and the knowledge we have.

A superficial view of the life of faith in Christ can lead us to ignore such teaching as is here. When we see what the Bible tells us and when we see the ongoing relevance of David's words here, we embrace these words.

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxieties. Discover these things to me. And lastly, lead me in the everlasting way.

Lead me in the way everlasting. Well, surely, the way everlasting was put before a man in his post-fall context.

[25 : 17] We can only look back at the pre-fall context and our first parents and the probationary period they were in and the prospect of being established in eternal life.

We can only look back at that and say that might have been, but it wasn't. We've got to look at it from the fall onward. And from the fall onward, the everlasting way was put before our first parents.

It was held forth. The free gift of God is God's to give. It's of God's making and it's of God's giving.

And it was held forth in the promises right from the beginning of fallen man's history. And it was given, for example, in Genesis 3, 15, we call it the proto-evangel, it was given, the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent.

He was held forth, the day would come when the fulfillment of the words, the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. A word that was reiterated by the prophet Isaiah, for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the time came when he came.

[26 : 46] The great seed of the woman, and that was, if you like, underscored to even our first parents, for when they had sinned and discovered their moral and spiritual nakedness in God's sight, he slaughtered animals, and he clothed them to cover their nakedness.

God was in action there, making provision for them. And his provision of forgiveness of a covering for sin was reiterated in the sacrificial system, as it was given chiefly under Moses' ministry, the tabernacle, the priestly service, and so on.

And it was given, you see, to help those who were walking the good path on towards glory.

It was given and it was held forth that way of salvation until the Messiah himself came. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Whosoever follows me, said Jesus, will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life, the light that gives life. I am come that they might have life in all its fullness, that they may walk in the way everlasting.

[28 : 27] He said himself, he who has the Son of God has life, life, and he is in and on the everlasting way.

And you see, it's important for us when we say in the words of the prayer here, lead me in the way everlasting, that we understand Jesus not only as the shepherd who became the Lamb of sacrifice for us, but who is the shepherd still leading and guiding us in his way.

He enables us to find the narrow way and to walk in it. That's why we often sing the words of Psalm 25 from verse 4, O Lord, reveal to me your ways and all your paths, help me to know.

Direct and guide me in your truth, instruct me in the way to go. We need him to do that for us. Plummer, in his excellent commentary, says on this one, whoever will be led in the right way must be led by the Almighty.

And we come to him who not only knows the way, but who is the way. I am the way, said Jesus, and in him we are set upon the everlasting, way.

[30 : 02] We come to him knowing what it is to pray these words, search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my anxieties, and see if there is any wicked way in me.

And you see, we know that when we discover those wicked ways, we have a way of pardon, and of cleansing, and of renewal, so that we are enabled to go on in his way, from strength to strength.

And that helps us, you see, to be firm and clear, not only in what we believe, but in how we live our life for Christ. And when we see men and women going on in their sin, foolishly thinking that their way is the right way, we know that there is a way that seems right to a man.

The end of that way is death, and because we know from the Lord the right way, we want them to come with us, and we want them to experience what we've come to know, so that we encourage them into the narrow way, the best way, the Jesus way, and lead me in the way everlasting.

May he do that for us, may he encourage us in that way, for his name's sake. Amen.