

Text: Psalm 139 (Pew Bible pg.618)

Title: “Faith Sings ... In God’s Presence”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles with me to the psalm we read earlier, Psalm 139. This is one of the most popular psalms in the book, perhaps second only to Psalm 23. Why? Because it takes us deep into the character of God and His interaction with us human beings.

Now let me show you where this all starts. David is in trouble once again. He is up against some fierce enemies who hate him and hate the Lord. We’re not sure who they are or what they have done, but David is surrounded by evil and evil people.

Psalm 139:19 - If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!

Psalm 139:20 - They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.

This sounds a lot like what we go through when we are tempted, when overwhelming evil surrounds us. At times like this we can become practical atheists ... we act and think as though God didn’t exist. We think we are facing this evil alone. But when our faith is strong God is more real to us than the evil that surrounds us ... God is bigger than the evil that surrounds us ... God is more powerful than the evil that surrounds us.

ILLUSTRATION – A few years ago Nan and I toured the Tower of London where Great Britain’s crown jewels are on display. These are the royal crowns, scepters, orbs, swords, rings and robes worn by the king or queen at coronations and other state functions. Tourist get on a moving walkway, similar to what you see in airports, like a conveyor belt for humans, and they stand in place as the moving walkway slowly takes them by the various cases that display the crown jewels. The room is darkened so that the brilliance of the jewels shows up more magnificently.

In a similar way, Psalm 139 slowly takes us through the brilliant qualities of God. But these attributes and activities of God show up more dynamically because they are displayed against the backdrop of King David’s difficulties ... in this case, evil people surrounding him.

Note: There are things about God that you will never see or understand until you are forced into dark circumstances where the only light you have is the light of God Himself.

So David is singing in the awesome presence of God. What is it that gives us assurance in times when we are fighting the battles of life? It is our knowledge of God.

1. GOD KNOWS MORE THAN YOU CAN EVER COMPREHEND (vv.1-6).

Let’s just stand still and let the Scriptures here in Psalm 139 take us by the brilliant qualities of God. These next verses are full of God’s “knowing” activity. Just look at them.

Psalm 139:1 - O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.

“Lord, you’ve probed and examined everything about me and based upon that you have intimate knowledge of me.”

Psalm 139:2 - You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive (another “knowing” word) my thoughts from afar.

“Lord, this intimate knowledge tracks every second of my day; you even understand my thoughts from a distance. It’s like you’re in my head.”

Psalm 139:3 - You discern (another “knowing” word) my going out and my lying down; you are familiar (another “knowing” word) with all my ways.

“Lord, you search out and measure the journey I take and You know when I lie down to rest at the end of it. You know my ways better than my closest friend.”

You put the sitting and standing of v.2 with the going out and lying down in v.3 and you get the full scope of every activity in life. God knows all about it.

ILLUSTRATION – A few weeks ago there was an uproar when people who had iPhones discovered that their smart phones were tracking their owners' locations and storing data about people's whereabouts without their knowledge. Americans don't like this kind of invasion of privacy. Well guess what? God knows more than you can ever comprehend.

The Lord knows all your actions every day. He knows when you get up in the morning, when you get ready for school or for work, and what you have for breakfast. He knows the route you drove to work, and sees all the details on your desk. He sees you driving home and walking into your house. He watches what you watch on TV, and knows when you go to bed at the end of the day. He also knows your motivations and your imaginations throughout every action of the day. And more than that, He knows our reactions.

Psalm 139:4 - Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

Before we form a word on our lips, the Lord knows what we are about to say.

Psalm 139:5 - You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.

“Lord, you have 360 degree knowledge of me. Your knowledge has me surrounded.”

When it says “You have laid your hand on me,” it means, “You have cupped Your hand over me,” like you trap a little bug under your hand.

Psalm 139:6 - Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

The fact that God knows everything about us can be incredibly intimidating, or it can be incredibly comforting and reassuring.

But this knowledge is wonderful ... we can't comprehend it!

Romans 11:33 - Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Hebrews 4:13 - Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

ILLUSTRATION - Who is sitting in your seat? Which "you" is sitting in your seat? There are actually three people in your seat. There is the person that you think you are, there is the person others think you are, and there is the person God knows you are.

So God knows more than you or I will ever comprehend. How does this knowledge of God sustain us when we are fighting the battles of life? It sustains me because I know that the things that I can't tell others, God knows. The things I'm afraid I can't face, God knows.

Here's the next thing we see about God.

2. GOD IS CLOSER THAN YOU REALIZE (vv.7-12).

You know, we need to wake up to this reality. As you go through every day, God is in on every conversation. He is there in every meeting. He's in the car with you as you drive to work. When you feel surrounded by evil, the presence of God is more real than you realize.

ILLUSTRATION - I heard about two mischievous boys who were always getting into trouble. If anything happened in the neighborhood, the parents knew their boys were involved. The parents finally decided to take the boys to a minister who had way of scaring children straight. The younger son was the first to meet with the minister, who was a huge man with a booming voice. He sat the little boy down in front of him and got right in his face. He wanted to impress on the little guy that God saw everything they did. The minister leaned over and said with his booming voice, and asked, "Where is God?" The boy didn't say a word, but just sat there with his mouth dropped open. So the minister repeated the question, "Where is God?" Still the boy did not respond, so the preacher raised his voice even louder asked, "WHERE IS GOD?" The boy let out a yell and ran out of the room and all the way home. He ran through the door, up the stairs, and dove into the closet. When his older brother found him he asked, "What happened?" The younger brother, gasping for breath replied, "We are in BIG trouble this time. God is missing and they think we did it."

God is not missing. He's closer than you realize. The Lord is present and active in every place.

Psalms 139:7 - Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

Maybe this knowledge of God has so overwhelmed David that he thinks of fleeing, but that's impossible. You can never run to a place where you can get away from God.

“Where can I flee from Your presence” or literally “you’re your face.”

ILLUSTRATION – It’s like being in an art gallery and seeing a painting where a person is looking at you no matter where you stand.

Psalm 139:8 - If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

No matter how high you go, or how low you go, God is there.

Psalm 139:9 - If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

Psalm 139:10 - even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

So maybe if you hitch a ride with the sun as it rose in the east and traverses across the sky to the west, it can never take you somewhere where God isn’t present.

I think it’s interesting that David says in v.5 that it seems that God’s hand had trapped him or was cupped over him. But really God’s hand is guiding and holding on to him.

ILLUSTRATION – When our daughter Allison was in China for a summer of mission work we claimed this verse in prayer for her.

Psalm 139:11 - If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,”

When he says, “the darkness will hide me,” the phrase literally means “the darkness will crush me and bruise me.”

Psalm 139:12 - even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

There is no place so dark but that the light of God’s presence can’t penetrate it, if we will but open our eyes to see it. God is closer than you realize.

So how does this knowledge sustain me when I’m surrounded by evil or when the darkness of depression presses in around you? I know I am never alone. God knows more than you could ever comprehend. He is closer than you realize. And ...

3. GOD IS MORE INVOLVED IN YOUR LIFE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE (vv.13-18).

Let me just show you how involved God is in your life.

He knew you before you were born, and created and arranged your body within your mother’s womb.

Psalm 139:13 - For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

By the way, that word “created” is an interesting word. It means to create something for one's own possession. God didn't create you and then disown you. He created you for Himself.

When it says that God created his “inmost being” it means that God created more than just your body. He created the inner you ... your emotions and moral character. God made you uniquely with the body you have and the personality you have.

And this knowledge of God causes David to erupt in praise and worship.

Psalm 139:14 - I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

God is more involved in your life than you can imagine.

Psalm 139:15 - My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

ILLUSTRATION – I have in my hands here the ultrasound pictures of my two grandchildren while they were still in their mother's womb. If you've ever seen this kind of photo, you know they are very nebulous. It's hard to make out the features. But God sees perfectly what He is making.

Psalm 139:16 - your eyes saw my unformed (this is the embryo) body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

God scheduled your every day before you were born, and records every day of your life in His book. God marvelously plans out our lives. So you put all this together and it tells us that every embryo is a person, a creative possession of God with days planned ahead, a life ordained in heaven to be lived on earth.

So I am not the master of my own destiny. My life is in the hands of God. So God is more involved in your life than you ever imagined. He created you for Himself. He arranged the schedule of your life and, next, He thinks wonderful thoughts about you.

Note: You and I can look over the events of our life and it can fill us with regrets and questions. But do you see that God presides over it all.

Note: Does that mean that God is responsible for our sins and our mistakes? No. But it does mean that God wasn't surprised by them.

Psalm 139:17 - How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

Psalm 139:18 - Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

How does this knowledge sustain us in the battles of life? I love this picture of God. One of the most basic things of walking with God is keeping Him in our thoughts throughout the day. And it helps me to know that God is so involved in my life ... that He thinks about me all the time.

CONCLUSION

So what do I do with this knowledge of God ... that God knows more than we can comprehend, that He is closer than you realize, and that He is more involved in your life than you can ever imagine? We come to pray with David...

Psalm 139:23 - Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Psalm 139:24 - See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Note: David starts with declaring who God is ... “You have searched me and you know me...” (v.1). Now he says, “God I want to know what you know about me.”

So our response to this is...

- Be humble – “Lord I want to know what You know about me. I want to see myself the way You see me.”
- Be honest – Get personal. “Lord, search me. Dig deep and know my heart.” You know we like to grade our own papers, don’t we. When we grade our own papers, we generally think about the externals. David said, “God, know my *heart*.” He prayed, “Test me and know my anxious thoughts.” To test means to put something through the fire. “Lord, reveal my anxious thoughts and the offensive ways in me.”
- Be hopeful – God isn’t just interested in showing us the sins and weaknesses in our life. He does all of that because He has a higher calling for our lives ... “lead me in the way everlasting.”