

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made – Psalm 139
Argyle – 1/28/18 – Psalms Mini-Series

Introduction to Worship

Psalm 139 begins, “You have searched me Lord and you know me.” Can you believe that? The Creator of the universe knows you. And he wants to connect with you this morning and to receive your worship. So, let’s set aside all those distractions that are clamoring for our attention and focus our hearts and minds on the living God.

Introduction to Scripture

I still remember the first time I connected with Psalm 139. I had recently graduated from college and was working as a volunteer leader in Young Life. I must have read Psalm 139 before, but it was in 1975 at a Young Life Campaigner Bible Study at Bill Dages’ house in Havertown, PA that Psalm 139 hit me like a ton of bricks. I was a kid who had always struggled with a poor self image. I wasn’t the athlete I wanted to be. I never liked what I saw in the mirror. I wasn’t as smart as I thought I should be. When I compared myself to others, I didn’t think I matched up very well. It was this sense of neediness that caused me to be open to the gospel and to invite Jesus into my life several years earlier. I was grateful that God loved me and that my sins had been forgiven, but I just didn’t like myself very much.

Then came that Bible study on Psalm 139. As we read this psalm, imagine how these words might have spoken so powerfully to me. (Read) (Pray for....)

Introduction

As I was working on an outline for this sermon, I came across these words in Michael Wilcox' commentary on Psalm 139. "Words like omniscience and omnipresence can be a useful shorthand for stating the facts about God. With regard to Psalm 139,they are not perhaps the best words." So I crossed omniscience and omnipresence_out of the outline I was working on. Wilcox goes on. "It is such a personal and deeply felt expression of what the psalmist knows of God that we should want to describe it in simpler, more direct terms." I have taken Wilcox's advice and adapted his simpler, more direct outline for my sermon this morning.

God Knows Us

One thing this psalm teaches us is that God knows us. After college I split time working as a machinist and as a substitute teacher. On one of my teaching days at my alma mater, Springfield High School, I had a student who needed to come in after school to complete an assignment. She brought a friend who was waiting to walk home with her. This friend asked if she could kill time by writing on the chalk board. I told her that as long as you erased the board before she left, that would be okay. I didn't pay much attention, but after awhile I realized that she

was filling the board with all kinds of information. There were dates, colors, an address, a telephone number, names and so on. I asked her. “What is all of this?” She said, “That’s stuff about the guy I like – his address and phone number, the color of his eyes, the color of his hair, his parents and his brother’s names, his favorite ice cream, the teams he roots for. And these” she said, “are going to be the names of our children. I asked what his name was and she said, “I can’t tell you. He doesn’t know that I like him.” She really liked this guy and so had gotten to know a lot about him.

The psalmist tells us that God is so interested in us that he knows us inside out. Listen to this. He knows when you sit down and when you stand up. He knows what you are thinking. He knows when you go out and when you lie down. He knows what you are going to say before you say it. Jesus said that he even knows how many hairs you have on your head. Think about that for a minute. God is so interested in you that he knows everything about you. God knows us.

God is With Us

Not only does God know us, but he is with us. The psalmist wrote, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

I remember one of my seminary professors saying, “When you go to your first church, remember God didn’t arrive on the same bus that you did. He is already there and at work.” He was attempting to tamp down our arrogance in thinking that we were God’s answer to whatever challenges that church was facing. The fact of the matter is, God is already there, wherever we go. We know that God is present with us in our worship this morning, but when we go home today, he’ll be there, as well. He’ll be with you at Washington Center. Tomorrow he’ll be with you at school or work. When you move to another town or state or country, he’ll be there, too. Not even the darkness, whatever that might look in your life, will keep God from being present with us. I have always found that comforting when I have been depressed.

This fact that God is with us wherever we are can be a great encouragement, but it can also be distressing if we don’t want God around. God cares so much about us that he will pursue us even if we are running from him. Just ask Jonah. God is with us.

God Made Us

Not only does God know us and is with us, but he made us. These are the words that really got my attention in that Young Life Bible study. “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I

know that full well.” Other translations say, “Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex;” or “Body and soul I am marvelously made.”

When we think of God as the Creator, we think big. We think of his creation of the world - of mountains and oceans and the sky. We might even think bigger - of his creation of planets and the sun, of galaxies and the universe. The psalmist points us in the other direction toward what we might call micro-creation - God carefully creating us in our mother’s wombs. As one writer put it, God not only created “life,” but he created “a life” - yours and mine.

The psalmist used the metaphor of knitting to communicate the depth of God’s involvement in our creation. My daughter, Rebecca is a knitter. It is amazing to watch her take yarn (picture) and carefully knit it into a scarf (picture) or hats (picture). I don’t think she has done a sweater yet, but this (picture) helps us picture the complexity and wonder of what God has done in creating each one of us. I am wonderfully made. So are you. Stop believing what the world tells you about how you don’t measure up. Instead, embrace the fact that you were carefully and wonderfully made by the same God who made the mountains and the oceans and the sun and the planets. It turns out the way I look and the abilities I have and my personality are God’s handiwork. When he made me, he did it with his characteristic excellence. God made us.

God Tests Us

Not only does God know us, is with us and made us, but God, also, tests us. This psalm takes a weird twist in verse 19. Up to this point it is filled with praise and thanksgiving. Then the psalmist wrote, “If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? ²² I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.”

Michael Wilcox writes, “This is one of those psalms that disconcert us with a sudden switch from the noble to the venomous, all the more perplexing because the psalmist himself seems to see nothing odd about the change of tone.” (The Message of the Psalms). Wilcox goes on to make a helpful observation. “For all its vehemence, the hatred in this passage is not spite, but zeal for God. In the ‘day of salvation’ the New Testament will re-direct this fighting spirit, but it will endorse its single-mindedness.” Wilcox points to II Corinthians 6 to remind us of the need to take a strong stand against evil. Paul says, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?”

There is evil in our world and we should share the psalmist's hatred for it. We should pray against the evil that leads to the persecution of Christians and the sexual abuse of Olympic gymnasts and the beheading of innocent civilians and the sex trafficking of children and the selling of heroin and the neglect of the poor. If we don't hate these things and pray for God to stop those who are responsible for them, what does that say about our moral compass? Jesus taught us to love our enemies and pray those who persecute us. That doesn't mean that we don't oppose evil and pray for God to stop these evildoers. We can trust his wisdom in how he will do that.

Before we finish with this point, I want you to notice that the psalmist doesn't just call for God's judgment on others, but also on himself. He prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." The New Living Translation says, "Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Do you have the integrity to not only hate evil in others, but also in yourself? Do you have the courage to ask God to point out anything in you that offends him?

With the same love with which he made us and know us and pursues us, God also test us and reveals our sin to us so that we may repent of anything that robs him of glory and those around us of blessing and us of wholeness.

Conclusion

Psalm 139 has radically changed and continues to change my understanding of myself and of God. Is there anything in this psalm that speaks to you, as well?

Many years ago I was introduced to a song that reinforces the truths of this psalm. It's called "He Knows My Name." I've asked Brian Wells if he would lead us in singing this song to close my sermon. Please sing this with us. (Song)