*God’s All-Searching Knowledge*

Psalm 139:1-6

7/2/23

Today we start a study on Psalm 139. This is one of the more well-known psalms, and its message is quite relevant to our cultural moment. This psalm confronts our cultural constructs of self-discovery and self-determination. God’s knowledge of us is far more intimate than our self-knowledge, His watchful eye is inescapable, and His sovereign purposes cannot be set aside. This psalm presents a very high theology of God that must be responded to. That is its point. **People must deal with the inescapable, all-searching presence of God.** They do so by either running from it or surrendering to it. Psalm 139 calls us to do the latter.

The song is broken into four stanzas. It is my intention to deal with one stanza a week. Structurally, stanzas 1-3 focus on three attributes of God that lead us to the response expressed in the closing stanza. With all that in mind, let us read the psalm; then we will begin to examine it.

Psalm 139 begins with a heading. Many people doubt the authenticity of these headings and therefore do not view them as a part of the Scriptures. I do not want to get lost on that issue, but you should know that there is discussion about it. My personal stance is that they are Scripture because they are in all the manuscripts we possess. I need strong manuscript evidence proving their later addition before I can say *that does not belong in the Bible.*

Not every psalm has a heading; and those that do have varying information. Some state what circumstances gave birth to the song. Others include musical information. Psalm 139’s heading tells us two things. First, this was written for the choir director. That means it is a teaching psalm. Its purpose was not to facilitate a worshipful response to God by the congregation, but rather to instruct the congregation about the God they worship. Second, we are told who the human author is. I say *human author* because the Bible is inspired by God and therefore is rightly called the word of God. Yet God gave it to us through human agency as the Holy Spirit moved men to write His message. In this circumstance, the human instrument was David.

From the heading, we move into the first stanza, which is vs. 1-6. This stanza focuses on the exhaustive knowledge of God. The theological term for this is omniscience. Omni means *all*. Science means knowledge. Omniscience means that God possesses all knowledge. Everything that can be known is known by God. Nothing that can be known is not known by Him.

As you look at the text, you see just a sample of God’s knowledge. He knows all our actions and the motivations that compel them. He knows the words that come out of our mouths, and the thoughts that remain unexpressed. His knowledge is all-encompassing. This is a truth attested to throughout Scripture. We are told that God knows the number of hairs on our head. The point is not that God is interested in counting hairs. The point is that God knows everything about us, even the details we cannot know. His knowledge is exhaustive and all-encompassing. He knows the number of sand-grains on the seashore and the count of bubbles in the sea surf. No speck of dust floating in some far-flung galaxy that He is unaware of.

Now, if we are not careful, God’s omniscience can become an abstract principle to us. The comprehensiveness of His knowledge is incomprehensible to us. David felt, and wants us to feel, overwhelmed by it. Yet our inability to grasp the fullness of His knowledge does not mean that omniscience is a theory for seminary professors to play with. It is a truth with practical implications for our lives. The text identifies at least three of them.

First, and most significantly, God’s knowledge is personal. Yes, God knows how many hairs are on your head, but God isn’t really interested in such things. His knowledge is not facts and figures, like you and I might have of a famous person whom we have read about but never met. His knowledge is an intimate, personal knowledge. Look again at the text. David says *you have searched* ***me*** *and known* ***me.*** *You know when* ***I*** *sit down and when* ***I*** *rise up. You understand* ***my thoughts***. *You scrutinize* ***my*** *path and* ***my*** *lying down. You are* ***intimately acquainted*** *with* ***all my ways****. You* ***enclosed me*** *and laid Your hand* ***on me.*** David is not meditating on the vastness of God’s knowledge of the universe. He is focusing on God’s personal knowledge of who we are, what we do, and why we do it. The center of this focus is the line *You…are intimately acquainted with all my ways.* God knows everything about us; our secret hurts and pains; our insecurities and weaknesses. He sees our successes and failures. He knows what motivates our actions, brings us joy, causes us sadness. He sees the hurts and betrayals we experience, and the battles we worked so hard to win that no one else took account of. He understands us better than we understand ourselves. More than that, the intimacy of His knowledge means He enters these experiences with us, which is a profound thought in and of itself!

This is the real point of God’s omniscience. God is not intimately involved with the sand on the seashore, even though He knows each of their number; but He is intimately acquainted with those whom He made in His image so He could enjoy a relationship with them. Relationships require *knowledge* of who a person is. God’s knowledge of us is perfect, positioning Him to have the perfect relationship with us. What is amazing about that is how He knows the extent of our sinfulness yet still desires a relationship with us! Despite the wretchedness within us, God loves us so much that He sent His Son to be our Savior. That is truly amazing.

So God is omniscient, possessing an all-encompassing and exhaustive knowledge of all things, including us. God has a personal knowledge of all people. Next, we come to an uncomfortable truth: God’s knowledge is evaluatory. Notice the verbs in the text. *O Lord, You* ***have searched*** *me. You* ***understand my thoughts****. You* ***scrutinize*** *my path and my lying down and are* ***intimately acquainted*** *with all my ways. Before there is even a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all.* God is not just aware of who we are and what we do, but He is weighing us in the balances of His standards. Each of these descriptions are worth consideration.

First, God searches and knows us. You and I can only see what people show us. Someone can deceive or mislead us about who they truly are. But not so with God. *The Lord sees not as man sees: man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart* (1 Sam. 16:7). God searched us out and knows the real us. Furthermore, He understands our thoughts from afar. We can see people’s actions and even guess at motivations, but only God can see the secret working of our hearts. Not only does He know what we do, but He also knows *why we did it.* We are told several times in the Gospels how Jesus knew what was in the heart of people and addressed their non-verbalized thoughts. This is because He is God. He knows when a kind word covers up the bitterness that resides within us. He knows when a smile masks depression. He is aware of everything going on inside of us.

Not only is He aware of it, but He is *scrutinizing it.* When we scrutinize something, we examine it closely to see how it works. God scrutinizes us. He carefully watches us to measure the worth of things. He scrutinizes our actions, represented by our paths, and our inactivity, represented by our lying down. Both what we do and what we don’t do is measuring in the balances of God’s standards. Such knowledge should make us uncomfortable. We may be able to pull the wool over people’s eyes, but we cannot pull the wool over God’s eyes. He sees all and knows all. He judges, not the appearance of things, but the condition of men’s hearts.

When I was thinking about this, my mind went to Belshazzar in Daniel 5. If you remember that story, Belshazzar is having a feast when a hand appears and writes on the wall, striking fear in his heart. Eventually, Daniel is brought in to interpret the writing. Part of the message was *you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting*. God had scrutinized Belshazzar’s life and found it deficient. Therefore, God’s wrath was about to come upon him. When He scrutinizes our lives, what does He find? If it were not for Christ standing as our substitute, we would also be condemned. This is what makes God’s grace so amazing. He knows the real me, yet still chose to redeem me. Jesus took my insurmountable debt of sin on as His own, giving me His infinite righteousness in its place. For God’s people, His knowledge filters through the lens of the cross.

Now, that does not mean we are free to sin. God continues to scrutinize us. We cannot hide anything from Him. He is intimately acquainted with all our ways. Before a thought is even fully formed in our minds, let alone before words escape our mouths, God knows it all. Everything about us is constantly being measured against the standards of His holiness. And as we have mentioned several times recently, we will give an account to God for how we have stewarded His grace.

This leads to our final observation. God’s exhaustive and inescapable personal knowledge of us should humble us. Look at vs. 5-6. David felt encompassed by the knowledge of God. You have enclosed me before and behind. God goes before us, seeing thoughts and actions before they are fully formed in us. God goes behind us, scrutinizing the reasons, motivations, and effects of everything we do. We are inescapably encircled by the knowledge of God.

This should humble us, for *such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.* We have a propensity to view God as a slightly better being than ourselves. Yet David’s meditation here is designed to elevate our view of God and humble our opinion of ourselves. This is a lesson Job had to learn. We are told that Job did not sin against God in his response to the tragedies that rocked his life; yet when his friends began to accuse him of sin, Job made a mistake. In defending himself against their false accusations, he became overconfident in his innocence. As the debate when on, Job wanted to stand before God to 1) vindicate himself and 2) have God give an account for the experiences he endured. When God finally broke into the scene, He proclaimed the greatness of His knowledge and ways to Job for several chapters. Listen to how Job responded: *I know You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted…Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know…I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You; therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.* I wonder if David wasn’t quoting Job when he wrote *such knowledge is too wonderful for me.* Job’s encounter with God humbled him, causing him to know that God’s wisdom is infinite and good; He owes no explanation to any man for His ways. The greatness of who He is should humble us immensely.

I am tempted at this point to step into the application of this principle; but to do so would be to jump to the conclusion of the psalm before we have examined all the parts building up to it. So I will close with this simple observation. Many people have way too limited a view of God. I have never read it, but J.B. Philips wrote a book entitled *Your God is Too Small*. In the book, he attempts to show both Christians and skeptics how their concept of God is too low. He is more than a better expression of ourselves. He is infinitely higher than us. There is truly no one like Him. Just like J.B. Philips, David is trying to expand our view of the greatness of who God is in this song. We may try to capture God’s knowledge with neat little words like *omniscience*; but when we drill down to the truths that word encapsulates, it should leave us speechless before the infinite wisdom of God. It should drive us to repent of the evil we do. And it should compel us to worship with expressions like *Behold our God, seated on His throne, come let us adore Him. Behold our King. Nothing can compare, come let us adore Him!*