*Wonderful are Your Works*

Psalm 139:13-16

7/16/23

Today we return to Psalm 139 for a third time. In vs. 1-6 David meditates on God’s omniscience, which means that God possesses all knowledge. In vs. 7-12, the focus shifts to God’s omnipresence, or the fact that God is relationally, experientially, and knowledgeably present everywhere. Our stanza for today (vs. 13-16) focuses on God’s omnipotence. As we have noted before, the prefix *omni* means *all*. Potence means *power. Omnipotence* means that God possesses inexhaustible power for the accomplishment of His will. Conversely, there is nothing that can keep God from fulfilling His purposes in creation.

Notice that I did not say that God has the power to do everything. The moment I say that someone will ask *can God sin*. The answer is no. God is not capable of evil. James 1:13 says *God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one.* That is why omnipotence means God has the power to fulfill His perfect will in all things. There is nothing that can thwart His plans. His inability to sin does not limit His power; rather it demonstrates the surpassing greatness and goodness of it, for He only uses His power for what is right.

Think for a moment about the vastness of God’s power. Genesis 1 says that God spoke into the black nothingness of eternity past, forming everything out of nothing. He spoke, and it happened. Furthermore, God sustains creation. Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ *upholds the universe by the word of His power*. If God were to take His hand off the universe for a moment, everything would spin out of control. Such is the astounding power of God.

The bible is full of stories where God demonstrates His power in profound ways. Think of the 10 plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, or Joshua’s long day, when the sun and moon stood still in the sky for a period of about 24 hours. I have read liberal theologians trying to explain that event as a misconception, because, they argue, it is scientifically impossible for the universe to hold together while the earth stops spinning and the moon stops orbiting the earth for a day. Yet what it scientifically impossible is not beyond God’s power.

We could spend our entire time this morning contemplating various displays of God’s power in the Scriptures. But as we turn our attention to Psalm 139, we find that David’s meditation on God’s omnipotence has a specific focus. He focuses on God’ personal engagement in every facet of our lives. He forms our bodies, shapes our personalities, and orders our days. As was the case with God’s omniscience and omnipresence, David wants us to see how the immense God of the universe is intimately concerned about and involved in every detail of our lives.

The first thing we see is that God personally fashioned us in the womb. The formation of a baby is an incredible thing. The moment an egg is fertilized, life begins. Although the new life is attached to and dependent on its mother, it is an independent person. It begins to grow and develop as the cells begin to multiply. By six weeks, you can visibly see and hear the heartbeat. Very early in the process you can see, thanks to ultrasound technology, the hands, face, feet, and other body parts developing. Through this amazing process, a baby is formed.

Yet David tells us that this is more than nature taking its course. We are not deists, who believe that God created the universe to function by natural laws, then took His hands off it so it could operate by the principles He established. No, God is intimately involved in creation. He shows the same level of care in forming every one of us as He took in molding Adam out of clay. He weaves us together in our mother’s womb. It is not nature taking its course. It is God personally forming each of us to be exactly what He wants us to be.

My grandparents were missionaries among the Navajos for 9 years. The Navajos are famous for the wool rugs they weave. Making a large rug could take up to two years as a woman sat for hours at a loom fashioning the rug according to her specific design. They say that no two rugs are ever identical. That is the imagery here. God is like a skilled artisan seated at a loom, forming us according to His unique design for each of us.

Not only does God take special interest in forming our physical characteristics, but He also shapes our personalities. Vs. 15 mentions our frame, while the opening line of vs. 16 refers to our unformed substance. This points to God’s craftmanship going beyond our physical makeup to reach our inner being. God assigns our personalities, strengths, and abilities. He also ordains our limitations. And He does so according to the secret working of His will. He skillfully wrought us, making us to be exactly what He wants us to be.

Now, this does not mean God is responsible for our shortcomings. Yes, we are fearfully and wonderfully made by a perfect God; yet we corrupted His perfect design with our sin. This causes us to misuse God’s good gifts for sinful purposes. Part of the process we undergo as believers is sanctification, or the transformation of our behavior from the practice of sin to the practice of righteousness. In this process, we discover that our greatest strengths are often our biggest weaknesses. A strong leader can use their gifts for great good; yet they can also run people over. A merciful person is uniquely equipped to show compassion; yet they may withhold truth for fear of causing hurt. Our strengths can easily turn into shortcomings when we walk by the flesh rather than by the Spirit. Believers want to discover how God has formed them and learn how to channel their personalities and giftings for God’s glory.

So we see that God has fashioned us, both physically and ontologically, to be exactly what He wants us to be. Finally, we see that God has ordained the days of our lives. Vs 16: *in Your book were written all the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.* In the same way God fashions us while we are in our mother’s womb, He orders every aspect of our days. He determines when and where we will live and at what point we will die. Some will say this teaches fatalism, or the belief that God has so ordered everything that we have no will at all; we are just robots following the preprogrammed agenda God hardwired into us. But this is to have way to limited of a view of God’s omnipotence. Yes, if I were to exercise that level of sovereignty over your life, I would have to violate your will to accomplish mine. But that is because my capacities are limited. There is no limit to God’s ability to work His purposes in the world. He can superintend our lives without destroying our personhood. Knowing that God is this intimately involved in every aspect of our lives, right down to the millisecond at which we breath our last, should give us give us a calm assurance in all life’s circumstances, for we know that nothing can thwart God’s perfect plans.

Confederate General Stonewall Jackson, who was a devout presbyterian, embodied this truth. They say he was fearless in battle. The reason was that he believed God had written in His book all the days that were ordained for him, and that nothing would add to or take away from those days. He once said, “My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed.” He went into battle knowing that God’s perfect will would be accomplished no matter what.

As followers of Christ, we should have the same confidence. That does not mean we take needless risks. When Satan tempted Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple, He responded by saying *do not put the Lord your God to the test.* We are not to show contempt for the gift of life God gives us by putting it needlessly at risk. Yet, we should also remain calm in hardship because we know that God has ordered our days. Nothing has come upon us that is outside His power, and nothing will happen to us that catches Him off guard. We can entrust our souls to a good God, knowing that He has everything under control and only does what is right.

These truths are very applicable to our cultural context, for they speak to many of the challenges we face. We are told that abortion is okay because it is a fetus, not a person. That language is designed to undermine the truth than an unborn baby is a person, because if it is a human life, then it is obviously wrong to take it. But if it is just a collection of cells that possess no true personhood, then we are free to eliminate it. Yet the psalm says that God forms a person in the mother’s womb. Life starts at conception. God knows that person even before the mother knows she is pregnant. All life, including unborn life, has value to God. Every baby is a unique creation of God and ought to be celebrated!

Or consider the moral revolution sweeping our country. Terms like transgenderism, gender dysphoria, and misgendering all have this basic belief: that it is possible for a person to be one sex biologically while having a different sex ontologically. Thus, they may have the body of a man, but on the inside, they are a woman, or vice versa. Yet Psalm 139 says that God forms each person to be exactly what He wants them to be. We cannot separate our inner person from our physical person. They are linked. When we say otherwise, we are saying that God got it wrong when He formed us. So Psalm 139 exposes the faulty premise of the entire movement for what it is: mankind’s ongoing attempt to, although they know God, not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him. Instead, we become futile in our speculations, and our foolish hearts become darkened. Professing to be wise, we are fools who exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for all manner of sin (Ro. 1:21-23).

Or consider the multi-billion-dollar plastic surgery industry. I understand the value of dealing with cleft palates and the consequences of burns and so on. Yet most of the money in that industry comes from people who do not like their appearance, so they pay someone to change it. It is the same problem. People are discontent with who God made them to be. They decide they are better creators than Him, so in an act of playing God, they try to fashion themselves into an image they prefer.

Yes, Psalm 139 addresses many of the cultural challenges we face with great clarity. And it is worth meditating on how it applies to these and other challenges. But there is a greater value to the truths we are considering than simply correcting the wrong thinking of our culture. The reason the bible directs our attention to these things is to stir us to worship God. This is the emphasis of in vs. 14. David responds to God’s intimate care in creating him by saying *I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.* Our response to God should be humble adoration for His greatness.

A pastoral mentor of mine once told me how, when he was young, he struggled immensely because of how he looked. He certainly wasn’t someone society would hold forward as the ideal male specimen. But in a unique act of God’s kindness, he was confronted with the truths of Psalm 139, where God impressed on his heart that He had made him just as He wanted him to be. He was fearfully and wonderfully made by a good God who doesn’t make mistakes. He confessed the sinfulness of his discontent and learned to be at peace with who God had made him to be. This experience transformed his life, enabling Him to worship and serve God with a freedom he had never known.

Beloved, God made you just the way He wants you to be. He is satisfied with His work, even when we are not. He sees the beauty of your form, and the potential of your personality to reflect His glory. He has ordained your days, filling them with His blessings (even when we are suffering), and appointed good works for us to walk in. Knowing the greatness of who He is and the personal care He has for each of us should cause us to worship Him as we should, to live for Him in every way we can, and to be content with the good gifts He has bestowed upon us. This great and mighty God, infinite in wisdom and limitless in power is personally concerned about and intimately engaged with you. He loves you. Lean into that love, resting content in His goodness, and marveling at the greatness of who He is.

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who called you, and He also will bring it to pass.*