

Sermon on Psalm 139 – Isn't God Amazing? (Part One)

“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.”

It's believed that 250 people are born into this world each and every minute. It's also believed that 105 people die in this world each and every minute. In the book of Deuteronomy, God tells us, *“There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life.”* Jesus tells us, *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.”* And we know that the same could be said about all the other birds, bugs, fish and animals that fill the earth. Jesus tells us even, *“the very hairs of your head are numbered.”* Not one of them turns grey, falls out, or gets washed down the drain without God knowing about it. And to think God keeps track of it all!

Isn't God Amazing? In addition to creating the world and caring for it. In addition to sending his Son Jesus to live, die, and rise again for our salvation. In addition to sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts to create and strengthen faith, isn't it amazing that ***I. He Knows You! II. He's With You!*** That's something the psalmist David marvels at in our text for today. Psalm 139 was one of the last psalms written by David. Think about what David had been and what David had become. From a lowly shepherd boy watching over sheep to a mighty king shepherding the nation of Israel. From moments of victory over giants to moments of shame with a woman who wasn't his wife. A visit from one of God's prophets proved that although you might be able to hide things from others, you can't hide anything from God.

Could you imagine what it would be like to read the minds of other people? Could you imagine what it would be like to know someone who could read your mind? How uncomfortable would that be? God knows all and sees all and hears all. He knows the unkind words we say about others even before we say them. He knows the times we've spoken our minds without actually using them before we spoke. He hears the words of gossip and the mean spirited things we say to and about others. But...those people upset us. Those people anger us. Those people do things we don't like. Those people aren't perfect, but then again, neither are you, and unless you can claim perfection in everything you think, say, and do, you're on the same boat. We're all on the same boat. One that deserves to sink down to the deep, dark depths of an eternity in hell. In the book of Hebrews we're told, *“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.”*

May the fact that God knows all and sees all and hears all bring us to our knees in repentance. May it also lead us to rejoice. That's right, because as much as God's omniscience might be terrifying, it's also very comforting. Did you notice the name David uses to address God in this psalm? He uses the name “LORD.” Whenever you see that name in all capital letters, it's referring to the covenant name of God. The God who doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, but rather forgives us for Jesus' sake. The God who passed in front of Moses saying, *“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”*

Although all people are created by God, all people come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Even articles of clothing that claim to be “one size fits all” often fail to live up to that promise. Even though clothing manufactures make clothing for you, they don't really know you. That's why they make a wide variety of shapes and sizes hoping to fit you just right or come pretty close. Some might think we have a “one size fits all” kind of God, a “what's good for the goose is good for the gander” kind of God. But they don't know God the way you do because God knows you personally and individually. You're not just a face in the crowd. You're someone whom God created fearfully and wonderfully made as we'll hear next weekend. You're someone God saved in Jesus. Before the world was created, God chose you to be his own. Before you were born, God planned every one of your days. You have a place and purpose in life and it's not to live for yourself because as Paul writes, *“Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died. And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”*

Seems like tattoos are becoming more and more popular nowadays. Standing behind someone at the store the other day, I noticed that she had a tattoo of someone's name on her shoulder. I assumed it was a boyfriend or a spouse or a parent or a child. It got me thinking, "you must really have to really love someone to have their name permanently inked on your body." Did you know that in a way, God has a tattoo with your name on it? He shares this secret through the prophet Isaiah saying, "*see, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.*"

Isn't God's love for us amazing? So amazing that he offered up his one and only Son so that we could be his children. Look at his hands. You won't see tattoos, rather you'll see scars left by the nails that nailed him to the cross. It was there that he was punished for your sins. It was there that he suffered the agony of hell so that you would never have to. It was there that he opened up the gates of paradise so that all may go in. Through his perfect life, his innocent death, and his glorious resurrection, all of your sins have been forgiven and eternal life in heaven is yours. Faith created by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament made you his child and faith strengthened by those very same means keeps you his child. The hands that were pierced for your transgressions continue to play an active role in your life. David writes, "*Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.*"

Parents watch over their children with the hopes of keeping them safe. When they have to leave them at home, they hire a babysitter. Someone they trust. Someone they leave with cell phone numbers and all sorts of instructions. They might even call home during the course of their evening to make sure everything's okay. They do these things because they love their children. But even the best parents can't see and control everything. But thankfully our Heavenly Father can and does. David paints a picture of that with the words, "*you hem me in.*" The words carry the idea of an army surrounding a city so that no one can escape. In the same way, God surrounds us. He goes before us when it comes to the future. He cleans up behind us when it comes to our sins, guilt, shame, and regret. In a way, you could say, "God's got your front and God's got your back." He even lays his hand upon us to assure us that he's got everything covered. He holds us fast in his hand to protect us from what's below.

God knows you better than you know yourself. He knows your weaknesses, not to take advantage of them, but rather to help you overcome them. He knows your troubles, not to exploit them, but to help you there too. This past year I received an email from someone telling me why they hadn't been in church for awhile. They were having a rough time in their life and just needed some time to sort things through on their own. Sad to say, spending time away from God and His Word isn't going to make things any better. It will only make things worse because Jesus himself tells us that branches that aren't connected to the vine will only wither and die. But branches that stay connected to the vine will grow and bear fruit.

I realize that it's easier said than done when it comes to going through those dark times in life. But did you notice what David has to say about those dark times? "*If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.'*" Too often we don't give God enough credit. Too often we fail to give credit where credit is due. Too often we don't trust God the way he would want us to. We question his wisdom. We wonder about his ways. It's easy to trust him when days are sunny and bright. Not so easy when the dark days of life come along. But even though it might seem dark to us, it's not dark to God, because night and day are alike for him. Having a good day? Praise God! Having a bad day? Praise God! That's right, because "*we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*" Sometimes it's those dark days that lead us to look to God all the more for help and strength. God knows his children. God is with his children. God promises to bless them according to his will. Isn't God amazing?

The psalmist David realized it. The apostle Paul realized it too. In the book of Romans he echoes the words of David by saying, "*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*"

Lord-willing, we'll continue this psalm and this sermon next weekend.

Amen.