

Psalm 139

Part 1

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[00:00:00] I would like to read tonight from the Book of Psalms. Psalm 139. Psalm 139 to the chief musician, a psalm of David. O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain [00:01:02] unto it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me, yet the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins, thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance [00:02:04] yet being unperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sands. When I awake, I am still with thee. Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, ye bloody men! For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. [00:03:05] In this psalm, David, the writer of this psalm, expresses certain of his experiences in his life with God, in his life of faith. And I am sure we can learn a lot from them for our own way down here with the Lord. And I would like to touch on certain features of this psalm that David brings before us here. And in the first few verses, up to verse 6, David speaks about the omniscient God, the all-knowing God. He speaks about God who knows everything. That's how he starts. O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me.

There is a God who knows everything in my life. This thought must be unbearable for an unbeliever.

To know that there is a God that knows everything in my life, all the things of which I hope nobody else knows them, but God knows them. It's also a thought that [00:04:07] is or should be awkward to a believer who has hidden things in his life from which he wants nobody should know them. Maybe nobody knows them, but God knows them. He knows everything. But it's also a thought that is very comforting for the believer who wants to go his way with the Lord to know he knows everything in my life. In this psalm, you shall find later on that the psalmist always seems to connect thoughts which on the one hand challenge us and on the other hand comfort us at the same time. Thinking about Peter, who was a Christian who had once gone on his own way and he had denied the Lord and the Lord asks him afterwards, Peter do you love me? And two times he says, yes Lord, you know that I love you. And the [00:05:08] third time he only says, you know everything, you know that I love you. He says, Lord, I have failed, I have done a lot of mistakes and probably my love for you was not to be seen, but you who know everything, you know that I love you. Every believer loves the Lord, but maybe it's only a small flame, not a bright burning fire, but the Lord knows about it. He knows everything and he is able to stir this love in our hearts which he sees. And now the psalmist mentions seven things that God knows. I'm not going to all them in detail. The young people may study that on their own. These seven points, what the Bible says about it. We have positive and negative examples of this in the Bible and of course we have the perfect example of our Lord Jesus. And the first thing it says, thou [00:06:04] knowest my down sitting. Thou knowest where I sit down. Where do you sit down? Do you sit down at the feet of the Lord Jesus as Mary of Bethany or do you sit on the seat of the scornful as Psalm 1 mentions it? Different places where we could sit. Peter sat down at the fire where the soldiers were sitting and there he denied the Lord. The Lord Jesus himself when he was 12 years old, he sat among the teachers and listened to the words and asked them questions. Even as a child he gave us the example where the right place is to sit. So it is good for the young people to be here tonight to sit down where the Lord is before us, where the word of God is brought. But of course we could be sitting at other [00:07:01] places. The Lord knows it. Maybe you are sitting at a place where you shouldn't be sitting and nobody knows about it but the Lord knows about it. He sees where we sit down and our up rising when we get up. Very often in the Old Testament we find of men and women of faith that it says that early in the morning they got up to do what God told them to do. To be ready to follow the Lord and do what he tells them to do. One of the most impressive examples I know about is Abraham in his well known chapter in Genesis 22 where God said to him, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest and offer him as a burnt offering. And then it says in verse 3, Abraham rose up early in the morning and settled [00:08:02] his acts. I could have well understood if Abraham had postponed this as long as he could but it says he rose up early in the morning. God had told him something to do and he rose up early and he went. But we could of course also be energetic in doing the wrong thing. It says of Israel that they rose up early in the morning to have a feast at the golden calf. This was of course not very commendable what they did but they put all their energy in these things. What are we doing when we get up? The Lord Jesus, we have a wonderful example of him as well when he was in the garden of Gethsemane. It says of him that he got up for prayer and then he went to Calvary to fulfill the work the Father had given him to do. With all the energy of his obedience he went. Well God knows when we get up, what [00:09:02] we do, what we put our energy in. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Well that's a point nobody else knows, our thoughts. What we do other people may see but nobody can see what we think. But there's one who knows even ourselves. And that's where it all begins. It says in the Bible when we have a list of what comes out of man's heart, the first thing is evil thoughts and then all the other things follow. But every deed that we do we have first thought it. And I'm sure you would agree that it's the grace of God that we did not put everything into practice that we have thought. But God knows about the thoughts as well. It says he knows the thoughts afar off. And so how wonderful it is if we, in our thoughts, do [00:10:01] something that the Lord could be pleased with. He says to Joseph, I should

take the Word of God and should meditate on it day and night. His thoughts being occupied with the Word of God. That is something that really is commendable and that God would like to see.

But we all know there are other thoughts in our hearts. The Lord Jesus is a perfect example. He once said, my thought goes not further than my mouth. Or the other way around. But he could say that his thoughts and his words were in complete agreement with each other. It speaks about more things. About the path and the ways. The path may be more the individual path each one goes. And the way is a way where we all go collectively with others. Psalm [00:11:05] 1 speaks of the way of sinners. And the book of Acts speaks of the way, the Christian way. These are the two ways we could be going on. And each individual has a path on which he goes. There is not a word in my tongue, the Lord thou knowest it all together. Of course he knows all the words we say. The words that are in our tongue. He knows them. That is the challenging thing on the one hand as we have seen. But on the other hand also a comfort as we have seen when we mentioned Peter. That we have a God that knows everything.

And he closes this with saying, such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain unto it. Simply the thought that there is a God that knows everything in every man's [00:12:02] life and in my life as well. That is too high for humans to understand. He simply worships him when speaking about this character of God. And now with verse 7, in the next paragraph he speaks about the God that not only knows everything but the God that is all present who is everywhere. And it is impossible for man to escape him. And he says, David says whither shall I go from thy spirit or whither shall I flee from thy presence. Man's history after sin had come into the world is a history of man running away from God. It says of kind that he, well I better try to find the verse in Genesis. It says of kind that he, well [00:13:06] I better try to find the verse in Genesis. In Genesis chapter 4 verse 16, and kind went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. He went out of the presence of God. He left his presence. He tried to flee from God. And we know that even a believer or servant like Jonah tried to do this, to run away from God. And he had to find out what we find in this psalm as well that this is simply impossible for a man to escape God. And so David says where shall I go and where shall I flee from thy presence. And as I said before these verses are in a way written that they are a challenge [00:14:06] as well as a comfort. And so he says if I ascend up into heaven thou art there and if I make my bed in Sheol behold thou art there. God is still there if he escapes. Even if I make my bed in Sheol he even considers putting an end to his life and he says even then God is there. Thou art there. Whatever might happen in a believer's life he will end up in the arms of his God and his Savior. That's the grace of God. And so he says there's no way to escape him but it's also a comfort to know God is there. Even if I do something in my life which may not be right and nevertheless thou art there. For the unbeliever we have [00:15:04] these examples in Judah for example. It's also true. But they will just go into the presence of their judge. But if it's a believer like David he knew even in such a case God is there. Thou art there. And if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea even there shall thy hand lead me. Even if I'm going away even if I'm trying to escape to the uttermost parts of the earth then his hand is there to lead me to lead me back. Maybe I'm going on ways that are foolish trying to run away from God but even then even if I go to the uttermost parts of the earth there is this hand that will lead me back. That will take me and say well come back. You have gone far away from me [00:16:06] and that leads me back. Naomi says in the book of Ruth that she had gone away from God. That's something we can do on our own. We need nobody to help us to run away. But then she said but God brought me back. That she had come back was not her own it was God.

I'm sure nobody of us would come back when we run away if there was not this hand that leads us

and brings us back. And so he says this all present God even if I were at the uttermost parts of the sea even there is this hand that shall lead me and thy right hand shall hold me. He has gone to the uttermost parts of the seas away and helpless and he needs somebody to hold him but there is this right hand that shall hold me. Maybe there [00:17:05] is no right hand no human right hand to hold you but there is still one that holds you. The right hand shall hold me. Yes I fully understand and appreciate and sympathize with the idea that one sister once said to me but I want to have a human arm to hold me. I can understand this certainly but there are situations where that is not the case. Or maybe you had an arm to hold you but the Lord has taken it. Maybe a partner with whom you have lived a lot of time together and the Lord has taken him home. There is still this one hand, right hand which speaks of strength and power that shall hold you. That is still there even if all human hands are no longer available. Even if perhaps through my own fault I have run away and be in a situation that is far away, the uttermost parts of the sea but the hand [00:18:04] is there. That is what he says. There is this right hand that shall hold me. I think that is an encouraging and comforting word for us to know whatever happens this hand is there for us to lead us, to hold us when we trust him, when we need him. If I say surely the darkness shall cover me even the night shall be light about me. Again we have the same thing. On the one hand it is this challenge that he says even if you want to hide in the darkness that is useless because this divine light is shining into the darkness and making everything light. We cannot hide anything from him. We can hide from men. We can do things in the darkness so that nobody is going to see it but there is this penetrating light [00:19:02] of a holy God that is getting through all this. We cannot hide anything from him. Even if it is darkness it is becoming it shall be light about him. But on the other hand it is also a comforting thought to know maybe we are in situations where everything around us is dark and we don't see any way anymore. But he says the night shines as the day, the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For him everything is light. For us we may be in a situation where there is darkness, where we don't see the way but from the divine perspective everything is light and he can show us the way even in darkness. We may know he is there and he can show us the way. He can even lighten the way through darkness [00:20:03] that may be around us. So we have both sides. On the one hand we try to hide things from God which is impossible. But on the other hand we may be in situations, circumstances of darkness but he is light and he can shine in this darkness as the old present God who is always there. In the next paragraph from verse 13 onwards he speaks about the fact that this God he is talking about is the creator of every individual being. He is not only the creator of man in the beginning in the book of Genesis but what he is talking about in these verses in poetic language is the development of a human, of a being in his [00:21:01] mother's womb. He describes it in poetic language but he says that God has taken an interest in and has created every person that is on earth. He speaks about himself, how wonderful it is that God made him and God put him on the earth. God had created him in a wonderful way. Even when he was not there on this earth in the time when he was in his mother's womb God had worked on him. And that tells us that each individual God wanted to be here. God created him and God had a plan for him. It says in the King James Version, Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. He had covered or preserved him so that he was born. My wife and I we lost three children during pregnancy. God obviously did not want them to be here [00:22:01] but the fact that you are here proves that God wanted you to be here, that God had a plan for you and he has created you in a way that is wonderful as it says here and that is what the psalmist is thinking about. And he says my soul knows it right well. My brain, my intellect, my argument was this. What is the sense of it all and I don't like this or that situation in my life but my soul, if I'm a believer, my soul deeply inside knows that God loves me and that he has put me here with a purpose and with a plan. The God that knows everything, the God that is always there, he knows each individual and he has planned our lives and he wants us to be here and we can thank him that we are wonderfully made, that he has made us as he wanted us to be and wanted us to use as we are. Very often [00:23:02] we might think about the things we don't

have and we would like to have and that we would like to be different because we could do a lot of other things when this and that would be different in our lives. The situation would be different. My health situation would be different. I could do a lot of things but God has given me a special situation which I am and in this situation in which I am he wants to use me. The Apostle Paul also asked the Lord three times to take away the soul and the flesh because he was thinking well it would be better for him if he did not have it but God said to him, stop asking me about that. My grace is sufficient for you because my power is sufficient for you to work through weakness. And I think we all know a bit about that, that there are situations where we start with well if my situation were different probably things would [00:24:03] be easier but that's not the case. God has given us just the situation we are in to glorify his name. So us in the situation which we are, he wants to use us and that's what David is thinking about and praising God for it. Then in verses 17 and 18 he speaks about the thoughts of God. That's what we have today in the Word of God. He said, How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! Things about God's thoughts, God's words and he says how precious are the thoughts of God unto me. How great is the sum of them. The sum, so to say, the counsel of God as a whole. Thinking about that he says well how precious is that. If you think about the whole counsel of God from [00:25:04] beginning to end, if you think about it he says how precious are these things. In Psalm 119 there is a verse that says that, I can't quote it in English so I better look it up. Psalm 119, verse 160. No, it's not the verse, it's not the verse, it's not the verse, it's not the verse. Oh yeah, I didn't mind the Darby translation. But it says in verse 160, the sum of thy word is truth. I have a righteous judgment. The sum of thy word is truth. The [00:26:05] whole sum, everything together in the word of God is truth and it is precious to his thought. That is maybe a practical application that on the one hand we should be interested to get the whole counsel of God, to get the whole picture so to say. So it may be good in your life, there are different ways how you can study the Bible and you have a lot of time in your life to go through the Bible several times and one way might be really good to just read it as every book from beginning to end so that you see how the plan of God is unfolding and going on from the beginning to the end. To see all these counsels of God, how he unfolded them, the sum of them. But then he says in the next verse, if I should count them they are more in number than the sands. Now he is so to say taking the individual [00:27:07] things, he is going to count the things that make up the sum. All the simple, single truths, he counts them. As this hymn, count your blessings, count them one by one. Starting to go in the individual blessings, asking what is the sum? What are these different truths? And if he says, well if I would do this, try to count them, they are more in number than the sand. And that is what you will realise if you go into the depths of God's word and try to study the individual truths in more detail, you will find out that you will never come to an end with it. As soon as you study something, you will realise there are more things you want to study, you want to look into more detail which come up when reading the scriptures. So they are more in number than the sands. You will never finish counting the blessings [00:28:04] of God, counting all the different parts of his thoughts, being occupied with that will give us a lot to think about. And so he closes, when I awake I am still with thee. I think this sentence which we find twice at least in the Psalms has two different meanings probably. Here we have the idea that David is thinking about the thoughts of God, he is occupied with God's ideas as we had in Joshua. Meditating on it day and night and then he is thinking about these things and then practically speaking he falls asleep. And then he wakes up and he says, I am still with thee. And that is really of practical importance, the things with which we occupy our minds before we sleep will follow us into the night and will still be there the next morning. So if we are the last thing of the day, we think about God's [00:29:06] words and these things, this will so to say follow us. And he wakes up and he says God is still there. The things he was thinking about, this blessed person and his thoughts, he said I am still there. But there is another psalm in which this verse appears in Psalm 17. There he says in the last verse of Psalm 17, verse 15, as for me I am still with thee. And I will behold thy face in

righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. When here David thinks about the point, when he does, when he closes his eyes [00:30:05] here he is opening them on the other side and he says I am still, when I awake with thy likeness I shall be satisfied. He was speaking before in this psalm about others who were working in this life only to leave goods and substance to their children and so on. But he says as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. There is also this thought when the believer closes his eyes down here, he is there, where he will meet the one with his likeness, the one that is his savior that died for him. And this is only the grace of God. It may be, and may it be so, that we long for this moment. I think in one of the past days I told you about [00:31:03] a brother in our meeting who is going on shortly. I told him that he is not going to live very long. And he is really excited about that. He really said I am waiting to see my Lord. And he will see him. The moment the Lord calls him he will see him. But even if you as a believer do not think about him, but think about all your own business. You are very busy down here and suddenly you have to go. Nevertheless you will see him face to face. That is his grace. That you will see him. But here the psalmist was thinking about this moment and he said well I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. Yes. Then we will really be satisfied. Here on earth we may sometimes have the feeling once to be unsatisfied. Things are not as we would like them to have. But the perfect satisfaction [00:32:02] in our lives will not be down here. It will be when we see him as he is. When we will so to say awake with his likeness. Of course we are not waiting for that moment. We are waiting that he comes to take us home and to see him. But the psalmist is already considering also this moment when he has to die. From verse 19 on in this psalm, the next couple of verses, the subject he is writing about is, to put it quite general terms, the believer in the world. And of course we are here on Old Testament ground but the principle is he takes the position of God. There are those that hate God and he says I hate them. Because they are your enemies. Of course in the New Testament we are not called to hate anybody. But the principle is the same. There is the world and there is God. And they reject him, [00:33:02] the Lord Jesus. They don't want to have him. They are his enemies. And so we take the position of God. We share in his suffering. We share in the way that he is the rejected one, taking up the cross and following him because he is rejected by this world. And that's why James says if you want to be a friend of the world, this is not possible. Then you are an enemy of God. You show yourself at least as an enemy of God because you have taken the wrong side. And that was the problem we spoke about at the beginning when Peter was sitting at the fire, where the soldiers were sitting or where the enemies that were going to put his Lord to the cross. This was not a place where he should sit. And that was of course the place where he denied his Lord. But here David says well I take the place, the side of God and not of the world. Of course it's in the Old Testament and therefore he says well I hate these persons. In the New Testament we are also called to hate but not [00:34:09] persons. In the book of Revelation in one of the letters in chapters 2 and 3 it is recommended in that assembly that they hated the works of the Nicolaitans. They did not hate these persons but their works, the sin that was there, they hated. They took the same position because that's what God says. You hate the work of the Nicolaitans which also I hate. It was God's position they were taking. And that's what He expected of us, that we take His position concerning these things in the world. What God says, it is sin, it is not according to His mind, then this should be also our opinion. And this was the difference of what would be also our opinion. And this was what David was doing in this psalm very clearly. And then the last two verses in this psalm, we could give the headline self-judgment. [00:35:03] Now he says, search me O God and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts. In the beginning he has started with saying you know me, you have searched me, God does this anyway. But here he asks him to do that. God may show him what he thinks about him. Search me O God, know my heart, where all the things we do, all our decisions are taken and know my thoughts. This is a prayer of David which is very pleasing to God. And I don't know how often we dare to ask this because God will answer this such a prayer. He says, show me if there is

anything in my way, anything that would lead to a grievous way, that would [00:36:04] lead into trouble and lead me in the way everlasting. Show me what is not right in my life and lead me on the way everlasting. This is a blessed way. An older brother once told me when I was younger, he said once in my life I prayed to the Lord to show me everything in my life which he didn't like. And he said God answered this prayer very completely.

And it was a time in my life that followed which was not very easy because he had really to realise that there were some things in his life that God didn't like. But if we are honest, God will show us these things and the result will be that he can lead us in the way everlasting. This is the better way than the other way that we go to the uttermost parts of the sea and he has to bring us back, which he will do because he is faithful. But [00:37:05] we can also ask him, lead me in the way everlasting. So that I follow you from the beginning, that you can guide me, show me. He knows us anyway. Why not asking him to show us the things in our lives that have to be corrected. If we do this in this spirit of self-judgment, he may lead us on a way that is to his glory in which he will glorify us. We may close with the example with which we started. Peter, we've seen how he went away and how God had to bring him back. But we also find this at the end of the psalm in his life because of what Jesus said to him in John 21 where Peter says, you know everything in my life. Then he says to him, there is a time in your life, there was a time in your life when you were [00:38:02] younger, you went wherever you want. Well, that's typical for young people to go wherever they want. But he said, when you get older, somebody will take you and will lead you to a place where you do not want to go. We may wonder what he means, but we don't have to wonder because he tells us what this sentence means. It says in the Bible, this he said showing, indicating in what way he, Peter, would glorify God through his death. He would die. Peter had said to the Lord, I'm prepared to go into prison and into death for you.

And that's just what he does. But not when he thought he was able to do it. But when leading him. In the book of Acts we see that he's in prison, Acts 12, and we also know [00:39:03] that he died a martyr's death. And God says, expressed in John 21, that he glorified God when he died. What a man. When he was doing his own way, God had to lead him back. God had to follow him. And he's doing that with Peter and with you and with me. But how wonderful it is if we could say, Lord, lead me on the way everlasting, that my life might be glorifying you, wherever you lead me. And this great God of whom David is speaking, we know him much deeper, much more intimate than David did. We know him as our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. But these characteristics are still true. He knows everything in our lives. He knows the ways we go. He's always there, wherever we go. And there's this hand that will lead us, if necessary, lead us back. And there's this right hand that will hold [00:40:04] us. We can trust him for everything, for every way that's before us, for every situation that's coming. He is there and he takes a deep interest in us because, as we have seen, he has created every one of us. He wanted to have us here. He wanted to use us in his plan to glorify himself in our lives. And he takes an interest in us. So let's go on the few paths we still have until he comes, trusting him as the one that can lead us on.