

Psalms 139:1-6

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[0 : 00] And please turn back to that psalm, Psalm 139. It's on page 521.! Being stopped and searched is excruciating. I had to get on a plane last year. I had to get on a plane last year.

I had to go up to one of these presbytery meetings, hello, to Aberdeen. And it's that moment, isn't it? If you've ever been on a plane, you have your baggage and everything, you put it through the scanners, and then you've got to walk through the scanner, haven't you? And on this one occasion, it happened.

Walking through the sensors, the alarms went off. Arms in the air, patted down, scrutinised, x-rayed, examined.

Everyone's watching you, aren't they? Wondering what on earth you're up to, what you're trying to snuggle on to the plane. And you can't wait to get through to reassume your position with everyone else, to reassume your innocence.

hearing Psalm 139 should be a bit like that experience.

[1 : 33] It is God stopping us and searching us. When you think of that, it's surprising, isn't it? Because Psalm 23 is, Psalm 139 is like Psalm 23 that we looked at last year.

It's a favourite, isn't it? It's up there. If you know any of the Psalms. It's one of those Psalms that makes us feel warm and fuzzy. There are bits of Psalm 139 that might be on your fridge at home. Like verse 14. I praise you, I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. I think by the time that we've gone through this Psalm over the next few evenings, we will still want to put it on our fridge.

But there is a journey that we need to go through first before we get to that point. Because this Psalm is designed to test us. It is written to search us out.

Whilst it's a favourite, actually, as we read through it, it could be quite uncomfortable reading, couldn't it? We get a picture of the closeness and the intimacy of God.

[2 : 51] That can be an encouraging thing. But at the same time, we read of him invading our personal space. He could be getting too close for comfort for some of us.

There are some bits later, aren't there, in the Psalm that people leave off liturgies in some churches because it doesn't sound very nice.

Do not I hate those who hate you. Destroy the wicked Lord. Some bits that are quite uncomfortable, aren't there? And that is part of the genius of this Psalm.

Because as David contemplates the God who searches meticulously, exhaustively, personally, who pierces him intellectually and relationally, he will stand on a precipice.

He will either shrink back from this God or he will join him. He will allow him to interrogate his life.

As God invades his privacy, he will either hold the Lord in contempt or concur with him and agree with him.

[4 : 12] And in that sense, as we sing this Psalm, as we read through it, our reaction to God's character too will be scrutinised in the same way. We will be searched ourselves.

It's actually how the Psalm begins and ends, isn't it? If you look at verse 1. O Lord, you have searched me. And then verse 23.

Search me, O God. David meditates on the attributes, the characteristics of God throughout the Psalm. On his mind-bending comprehension of all things.

On his inescapable omnipresence. On his inscrutable power as creator. And once he realises how much God knows about everything, how much God knows about him, the question will be, do I still want to know him anymore?

That's the test. So that's what our prayer needs to be. Our prayer needs to be, as we go through this, will we, with David, submit to God's scrutiny?

[5 : 28] Will we, with him, like at the end of the Psalm, say, search me, O God. This evening, we're going to focus in on verse 1 to 6.

So let's hear those verses again. O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up.

You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.

You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high.

I cannot attain it. As David reflects on God's character, first of all, he reflects on the God who knows all things.

[6 : 34] The Lord who knows all. Just with me for a moment, pick out some of the verbs in those verses that we just read. Doing words. And what does the Lord do?

Well, verse 1, he searches, doesn't he? And he knows. Verse 2, you know. Verse 3, you search, you are acquainted.

Verse 4, you know altogether. There's a theme, isn't there? The verbs are all about knowledge. God's knowledge. David pictures the God who scrutinises all things there.

So let's dwell on this. Right now at this moment, all is known to him. You know, the moment you took your first test or exam at school, or when you go to a pub quiz, when you try and answer one of the questions on University Challenge, in that moment, you realise that you are not God.

because that moment tells you that your knowledge is measurable. Exams and quizzes and dissertations are all about that, aren't they?

[7 : 58] How much do you know? What can you tell us? David thinks about what he knows of the Lord in his omniscience.

It's the posh word for God knowing everything. In the psalm that we read at the beginning of the service, it says, God's understanding is infinite.

His understanding is beyond measure. You cannot measure his knowledge. The exam would simply last forever and ever.

Our confession, the Westminster Confession, it says that in God's sight, all things are open and manifest. His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent.

There are no grey areas in his knowledge. There are no loose ends of things going on in the world. There are no puzzles. There are no mysteries.

[9 : 00] No riddles. No problems or philosophical problems or sociological problems. He knows all of history.

Moses says in Psalm 90, for a thousand years in your sight is as if it was yesterday when it's passed. He stands, as it were, outside of time, like he's on a mountaintop, looking down into history, looking at the past and the present and the future, as if it was one day.

Each event in every place, each moment in all of history is immediately present to him in his mind. He knows all in the realm of nature because out of the fullness of his own knowledge and the fullness of his own ideas, he created nature.

He knows the motion of the planets, the movement of the stars. Did you hear in that psalm at the beginning? He determines the number of the stars. He gives them all names.

Do you know that there are about a hundred thousand million stars in our galaxy? And there are millions upon millions upon millions of other galaxies in the known universe.

[10 : 27] And he knows each one. But his knowledge that David dwells on here isn't just a kind of super-fuelled version of Wikipedia.

Okay? It is not like our knowledge, but just bigger. Because as God searches and God discerns things, it's not as if God needs to learn anything, is it?

He doesn't examine things not knowing about them. So David here, by using those words, is using poetic language, isn't he? God's knowledge isn't based on observation like it is for us.

He knows what the atoms in the chair that you're sat on are doing without needing a lab or a microscope. He knows exactly what is happening right now in the Orion Nebula without a telescope. All that can be known to him anywhere is present to him eternally in his mind. There has never been a time when he did not know what could be known.

[11 : 43] And there will never be a time when he will get a little bit hazy and forget things. God doesn't have to make notes like us, does he? He doesn't have to compartmentalise things like we

do, switching from one subject matter to another.

He never has one of those moments that we do where we know something in the back of our minds and we've got to bring it to the forefront of our minds. He never has to talk out loud to get his thoughts going.

He is conscious of what he knows all of the time. All things are always at the front of his mind. He is a master mind with no specialist subject because his specialism is omniscient. It is everything. Isaiah asks us whom did he consult and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge and showed him the way of understanding?

[12:53] Someone said when God asks a question in the Bible which he does, doesn't he? it is always rhetorical. He even knows the unknowable from our point of view.

He knows himself. He is the Lord of theology. Are you still with me? Just a few moments thinking about it makes us wonder, doesn't it?

It is a knowledge that is out of our grasp. Verse 6 A knowledge that is too wonderful for me. Too high. We cannot attain it. It is knowing this God isn't it? That leads to the praise of this God. Praise always starts with the subject of God isn't it?

Not with us. where there is nothing ordinary about him. His knowledge here is just simply awesome. Hence why this psalm is worthy of a place here.

[14:04] The subject matter requires the attention of the choir master in verse 1 doesn't it? The chief musician. The subject matter is worthy of the most excellent singer.

It needs to be dedicated to temple worship. This God needs to be sung about. Nowadays we might feel a bit like God because we've got Google, haven't we?

It gives us the impression that we can be omniscient like him. That we can type in anything and get the answer to anything. We can have infinite knowledge like God. But the thing with God's knowledge it is not just factual knowledge.

But his knowledge is personal. David sees, doesn't he, God's knowledge penetrates him. He reflects on this about God because God knows everything.

That's the first point. The only conclusion must be that God knows everything about me. So secondly, the Lord knows everything about me.

[15:15] If you look in these verses what David does here is he gives a series of extremes, doesn't he? I'm sitting and rising, my ways, my lying down, heading me in behind and before.

They're called merisms. It's like when we say, isn't it, I've painted the whole wall pink from floor to ceiling. It's a description of two extremes which includes everything else in between.

Heaven and earth is another one, isn't it? So the knowledge God has of him is complete here. The same knowledge that holds all of time and space has David sussed here.

He knows David from head to toe, through and through. His knowledge infiltrates his being. One of the searching words in verse 3 there, you search out my path, it can refer to a farmer searching through his crop, sifting his wheat, winnowing it out.

The Lord has sifted David with his knowledge. His knowledge penetrates all that he is. Stopped and searched.

[16:40] So if we're singing this with David here, what does God know about you? Let's walk through this with David. Well, first of all, he knows about all the activity of your life.

Verse 2, when I sit down and when I rise, it's one of those merisms, isn't it? Everything I do, my casual life, what I do on holiday, what I do in the evenings, my work life, my social life, my church life.

I wasn't going to do this, but I'm going to quote to you, Sting, that song, I'll be watching you. Every breath you take, every move you make, every smile you fake, I'll be watching you.

Every single day, every word you say, every game you play, I'll be watching you. Down your street, to your front door, into the living room and into the bedroom, he knows the patterns of your day, he knows how you feel when you get up in the morning, he knows what you're thinking when you put your head down on the pillow at night.

He knows what you're doing, when you're doing it, and why you're doing it. He knows what you're thinking right now. Verse 2 again, you discern my thoughts.

[18:15] He is conscious of our thoughts. It's a strange thought, isn't it? He's conscious of our thoughts even before we are. He knows where your thoughts come from.

He knows where your mind drifts. He knows where your thoughts are leading you. We often think, don't we, that because God is in heaven, he's up there somewhere, he is transcendent, his thoughts are not like our thoughts, his ways are not like our ways, but he is lofty that somehow he doesn't know my tiny little thoughts, he can't know, he's not interested in my tiny little mind about the mundane things of my life, but on the contrary, David says from afar, you discern it all, verse 2, he knows what you're thinking when you brush your teeth, he knows what you're thinking about so and so or such and such, he knows your hopes, he knows your best memories, he knows about the monsters in your mind, he knows about what you obsess over, what you dwell on, he knows about the inconsistencies and the contradictions in your beliefs and what you know, Spurgeon said that thought is speech before God, he knows our inner monologue, he is acquainted verse 3 with all my ways, he knows your quirks, he knows your idiosyncrasies, your eccentricities, he knows how many sugars you like in your tea, he knows your favourite TV show, he knows what size your socks are, he knows how quick your temper is, he knows how slow you are on the uptake, he knows how gullible you are, how stubborn you are, how patient you are, how nervous you get in certain situations, he knows what makes you shrink and what enlarges you, he knows what energises you and what exhausts you, what riles you, what encourages you, he knows which buttons people should not press with you, he knows your tender points and your emotional wounds, he knows all of the baggage, he knows all of the insignificant details of you, Jesus said didn't he, even the hairs on your head are numbered, one, two, three, searching out your path and you're lying down, as you go to bed tonight you will lose consciousness of your knowledge, won't you, you'll be in the land of nod, and you will lose consciousness even of God himself, but God remains conscious of all, we may forget him but he will not forget us, we may forget his path and his way, what he is like, we may forget things about him that we've been told over and over again, but he remains totally aware of our ways, of who we are, winnowing, sifting, searching, he knows our audible words too, doesn't he, in verse four, even before we speak a word, he knows it, kind words, hasty words, harsh words, ordinary words, our words, don't they so often get garbled when we're talking with one another, Alan Greenspan said, I know you think you understand what you thought I said, but I'm not sure you realise that what you heard is not what I meant, in conversation we find ourselves getting misinterpreted, don't we, we get in muddles, but he knows exactly what we mean by what we say, the words that I use to conceal meaning, the words that I use to manipulate and to create ambiguity, when I don't have the words and I'm speechless, the Lord reads in between the lines, he never has to ask the question of any of us, of David, I wonder what David would say about this, the Lord knows David and your opinion about anything before you give it, there is nothing he does not know about you, he knows those things tonight that nobody else does, he knows those things about you that not even you know, can you feel him searching you tonight?

[23 : 27] Hebrews says no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and must give an account to him, they are exposed to his eyes of whom to we must give an account, can you feel him x-raying you in what David is saying here?

The question we need to ask of ourselves is what do we do with this picture of God here? How does this all knowing Lord make us feel?

God's word has more than one way of working doesn't it? We read it, but it also reads us. The way that we read this psalm reveals something about ourselves.

We realise here, don't we, that we can no longer pretend with God. in his penetrating gaze of our lives, our mask, it just drops off doesn't it?

He knows everything about me. We can fool each other, we can put on a mask, can't we, even tonight, but we can't fool God.

[24 : 46] So where do you want to go with this tonight? Do you want to go with David, who at the end says, search me O God.

Invaded by God in this way, what do you want to write in verse 6? Just look there. This knowledge God has of everything, of me, is too, what's the word you want to put in there?

Too alarming, too convicting, too wearying, too wonderful. how does it feel to have someone come into your life, coming into your home, someone knowing your thoughts, rummaging around the things in your mind.

We might want to run from somebody like that, might we? This knowledge is too alarming, it's just too much. Knowing that he knows my past, my failures, my sins, what I've done and what I'm going

to do.

We might want to try and run away from someone like that if they use those things against me. To be a Christian means admitting that we are exposed to God's sight.

[26 : 06] There is nothing hidden from him. But the wonder of the gospel is that there is a way that the omniscient God is willing to forget something.

He is willing to wipe his memory, to clear his knowledge in a sense of something. There is a way that his eyes won't see you in your sin.

David says in an earlier psalm, blessed are those whose sins are covered, whose deeds are forgiven. Being a Christian means coming to God and telling him everything, telling him everything he already knows about us.

Coming clean with him. And in simply doing that and in trusting in his covering in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we come voluntarily, as we confess what God already knows of us, he is one who says, I am the one who blots out your transgressions.

I will not remember your sins. The Lord knows all things, and the Bible speaks on our level, doesn't it? There will never be a time when God doesn't know everything.

[27 : 35] But because of Jesus, God will have one subject where he will be useless in a pub quiz team. one topic of conversation that he'll just freeze up on, not sounding irreverent, your sin.

He is willing to forget. He is willing to cover it. He is willing to wipe his memory banks to clear all the data, to cover it up.

And so being a Christian means that God in strutable knowledge of all, changes from being a threat to being our greatest comfort, doesn't it?

A Christian can know that they are never misunderstood by God, that he understands us perfectly in a way that nobody else can, that we can never be misinterpreted by him, that we never have to explain ourselves to God.

He knows. He knows all things about you. And so he knows what you need. His gifts to you are never just slightly not what you needed or what you really wanted in the end.

[28 : 58] And there are things in life, aren't there, that you just can't Google. There are things about ourselves, there are things about the world and about life that perplexes us.

But in Christ, God's knowledge is no longer against you, it is for you, being part of his church. I'm almost finished, but just imagine this very flawed picture for a moment.

Just imagine that Drayton Green, the field there, stands for all that God knows, so that area there. And if you were to draw a circle on Drayton Green that represented what you know, how big would the circle be?

If you were very arrogant, maybe it would be a blade of grass. Now just reflect on the things that perplex you and worry you and concern you in your life, things that you don't know and can't explain.

Is it possible that in the space around that dot or that blade of grass on Drayton Green that represents God's knowledge, is it possible that there might be reasons that only he knows within his knowledge, that only he understands for things that you can't explain right now?

[30 : 23] He knows the reasons for things that perplex you about your life. And as you come to him, as you confess and tell him what he already knows, his knowledge isn't against you in Christ, it is for you, to weave his providence for his church, all things for the good of those who love him.

God knows everything, he knows everything about you. So tonight you could run from him, or you could tell him everything, tell him everything he already knows.

Let's pray together.