

Psalms 139:19-24

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[0 : 00] Please take a seat and turn back to Psalm 139. It's our last Sunday on this psalm for a while at least, so we've got lots to thank God for haven't we? It's such a wonderful piece of scripture.

When you love someone, you begin to love what they love, and you begin to hate what they hate, and it changes you. You end up loving things that you never thought you would.

And just about two years ago, I can honestly say I had no desire whatsoever to watch the TV programme Mr. Tumble. I had absolutely no desire at all in reading *The Hungry Caterpillar* at 7 o'clock in the morning.

But now I have two-year-old tastes. Emma says I always have. Loving someone means loving what they love. It's not quite the same, is it, when we just know what they love without loving it ourselves. This is the test of simple faith, of true orthodox Christianity, whether we know God in that way. Is that the kind of relationship that we want with God, that we have with him, where what he loves is what we love, and what he hates is what we hate?

[1 : 36] Well that is something of how David describes his relationship with the Lord, isn't it? If you look down at verse 21, do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?

All through this psalm, if we've been here over the last few Sunday evenings, it's as if we've kind of gone into orbit with David, it feels like.

We've kind of gone on a stratospheric journey, looking at the character of God. It's been a mind-stretching journey at points, hasn't it?

Seeing his awesome, immense being. It's been a challenging journey to get this vision of the Lord, who is both glorious and yet could be quite oppressive in his presence.

A God you can't hide from. No secrets. His weaving fingers created you, and they continue to interrogate you.

[2 : 42] As every secret in your mind and in your heart and in your speech comes out before him. And the question all along, as we've gone on this journey, is what are we going to do with him when we get back to earth?

What are we going to do with this God, who will not allow you your privacy? This God that you can't hide from, that you can't shake off.

God that you can't live without. How do you want to relate to him? What are you going to do with him? Because you can know about him, can't you?

And yet not love him. You could learn words like omniscience and omnipresence. And yet not love what the Lord loves and hate what he hates.

And not share in his passions and in his desires. To just have him as an acquaintance. And if you're not sure how to answer that question, Well, this psalm actually is all about helping us to give the right answer.

[3 : 51] To sing the right thing in response to that question. You know, when you're reading your Bible sometimes, something just unexpected kind of slaps you around the face, doesn't it?

On occasion. Something that you're not thinking was going to come up. And often the case is with those kind of passages that they actually are the keys to unlock what you are reading.

They are the standout bits that unlock the wider context. And as we kind of come to a close on this psalm, verses 19 to 24 are a bit like that.

Let's just read those verses again. Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God. O men of blood, depart from me. I speak against you with malicious intent.

Your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? Do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred.

[4 : 56] I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting.

Now, in this psalm, we kind of love and gravitate towards the verses before this, don't we? Verses 1 to 18 are the ones that we love.

In some churches where they sing some of these psalms, they sing up to verse 19 and stop. And we think, don't we, we get to verse 19, we think, what has happened?

What is David doing here? Has he got up in the morning on the wrong side of bed and he's having a bad day? Does David lose the plot suddenly?

Verse 19, the whole feel of the psalm seems to change, doesn't it? Have you ever seen verse 9 on a fridge magnet? Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God. Up until this point, everything has seemed lovely, hasn't it?

[6 : 02] But actually, these shock verses help us to see the whole point of the psalm. They help us to unlock the psalm. Because David is coming back to earth.

And knowing now what he knows about God, on the journey that we've been on with him, he wants the people of God to sing this with him.

To learn to come back into the atmosphere of the world. And to have a real relationship where we learn to love what the Lord loves and hate what he hates.

To grow in desires of things that we never would have desired before. To have feelings about things that we couldn't have cared less about before.

To say with David, do I not hate those who hate you? Do I not hate anything that does not delight you, Lord? I love what you love and I hate what you hate.

[7 : 06] So, two main points tonight. He says to us, let's sing this together. Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God. What a song title that is.

Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God. He says, first of all, deal with the wicked in the world. Deal with the wicked in the world.

What he has been through as he meditates on God's character has changed his desires. And it's God's imminence that has changed him most.

Something now angers him. He burns up, doesn't he, as he re-enters the atmosphere. You may know the case of, or the story of Rachel Den Hollander.

She was the first woman to publicly accuse a guy called Larry Nassar of abuse, sexual abuse. It's a horrible case. And it's been in the news earlier this year.

[8 : 11] He was convicted earlier this year for abusing more than 150 girls under the guise of a sports coach. Now, I'm mentioning this not just to shock you, but because of one particular detail.

Den Hollander, in her statement earlier this year, said, Larry is a hardened and determined sexual predator. I know this firsthand. At age 15, when I suffered from chronic back pain, Larry assaulted me repeatedly under the guise of medical treatment.

Now, that is bad enough, isn't it? And we hate that. That kind of thing makes us angry. But she goes on, and here is the key.

He did this with my own mother in the room. Carefully obstructing her view so she would not know what he was doing. With her mother in the room.

Because of the imminence of the mother, what should make us angry about that, now makes our blood boil. And that is the link between verses 1 to 18 and David's passion in verse 19 and onwards.

[9 : 24] It is because of the very imminence of God in his world, isn't it? In his creation. The one who is everywhere at all times.

The one who knows every thought and every word, David says. When people knowingly abuse and destroy what belongs to him, it is sickening to the stomach.

It makes his blood boil, doesn't it? When he grasps that the whole time that has been happening, God has been in the room of the world. And David re-enters the atmosphere.

He takes that knowledge of God's imminence with him. And he sees what certain people are doing. Right under his nose.

And he burns with anger. How dare you? How dare you? How dare you do it? With him there. It's not just a mere ascent to the facts about God, is it, here.

[10 : 31] Even the devil knows about God and believes in God. But it's an outrage. It's a passionate love of what the Lord loves. And a hatred of what he hates.

And he burns with anger. And hatred for the evil that he sees. Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God. Because God is there. In the room.

As we think about this whole thing, it raises really big questions, doesn't it? How do you square what David is saying here with God's other commandments?

Jesus says, doesn't he, love your enemies. Do you remember in Luke 9, where Jesus and his disciples, they're heading off to Jerusalem.

And Jesus is about to be crucified. And they go through a Samaritan village. And the Samaritans don't accept Jesus. They reject him. And so the disciples, James and John, they say, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to consume them?

[11 : 34] Sounds a bit like, oh, that you would slay the wicked, O Lord, doesn't it? But Jesus rebukes them for that. And yet, we read, don't we, about Jesus himself proclaiming woes on certain other people.

Invoking God's curse on them. What can we say about this? Well, I think we can say, can't we, to the accusation that the Bible is bloodthirsty and violent.

People accuse the Bible of that, don't they? Well, one thing to say just on that is that just because it's in the Bible doesn't mean the Bible is endorsing it. People accuse the Bible of being ultra-violent, of encouraging violence.

Maybe they use this passage in Psalm 139 to prove that. And there is violence and cursing and bloodshed in the Bible, isn't there?

There's no doubt about that. It's not embarrassed about that. It doesn't hide it. And in fact, that is reassuring, isn't it? It's realistic about life in this world in which we live.

[12 : 42] It's realistic about the times when these people lived. And wouldn't those same people who accused the Bible of being violent, accuse the Bible of being unrealistic and sugar-coated if it did not mention violence in the way that it does?

So because it's there, it doesn't mean it's encouraging. But the thing is, God is encouraging us to sing this here, isn't he? This is part of a worship book given to God's people.

He says sing this. One way we could answer that is to say, well, God tells us to hate the sin but love the sinner. I've said that before.

Hate the sin, love the sinner. You can see the logic of that. But in David's mind, that's a completely false distinction. He doesn't abstract the sin of a person from the person in that way.

No, he's talking about people here, isn't he? Men of blood, depart from me. He says get rid of them, not just what they do.

[13 : 58] It's true, isn't it? God sends sinners to hell. Not just their sin. The things that a person does and says and thinks are expressions of their person.

You can't separate them. Ezekiel tells us that God does not delight in the death of the wicked. And as Jesus is nailed to a cross, he cries out, doesn't he?

Father, destroy them. No, he doesn't. He cries out, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. And yet here is David calling curses on God's enemies.

And we are to join with him in some sense. And to think that that is a good thing. I just want to say two or three things to try and help us with this.

I think the first thing that we can see in the passage here is that David doesn't take this into his own hands, does he? He doesn't sort of go rogue and take it into his own hands.

[15 : 04] God says, vengeance is mine, I will repay. And God knows that, David knows that God is in the room of the world. And so he doesn't indulge in revenge.

He asks God to deal with evil. Another thing is that God, that David here is calling for destruction not of his own enemies, but God's enemies.

This is not about his own personal vendettas, is it? But about those who are against the Lord. Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord?

Do I not loathe those who rise up against you? And there is a crucial difference there. We are told to love our enemies. But there is a sense, and there must be a sense, where we should not love God's enemies.

We are never told to love the devil, are we? Or demons. And even, I want to say, some people who are very particularly resembling him, and their actions are especially in line with his.

[16 : 19] Seems to me that there are circumstances where this kind of prayer is appropriate. It's important to say that there are changes between how the people of God live now, as they did then.

We don't live in a political entity, do we? Like they did in David's time. We're not a military organisation. We're not told to take up arms. But certain situations, in particular extreme circumstances, I think mean we've got to pray, Lord, stop them. Lord, we hate what they are doing. We hate them because they hate you. Get rid of them. Where there needs to be a love of what God loves, and a hatred of what he hates in the world. And here David speaks of those who are relentlessly antagonistic towards God, in a very extreme way, I'd want to say. Who are adamantly opposed to God. [17:27] There is a sense here, isn't there, that they are not just people who don't believe in God. Who are non-believers. Not just people who are ignorant and blind of the truth of the gospel in their minds and in their hearts.

It seems in the gospels, the way that Jesus deals with various sinners, there seem to be two rough categories of sinner in the gospels. Both of them deserving wrath and deserving God's punishment. But we see, don't we, that Jesus welcomes and sits with and calls some. But then we see his harshness and rebuke and rejection with others. All I think we can say at the moment is that it takes great wisdom to know where the line is. How did the early church pray about the Saul situation? Did they pray for his conversion? Or for his removal? Maybe they prayed for both.

[18:34] Maybe God answered them unexpectedly. I think it seems that there are different degrees of culpability. There are people who are going to be judged more harshly than others.

Some people who Jesus is harsher with. I think all we need to know though, really, is that we need to be open to praying like this.

Without a sudden, we need to be open to praying like this. wisdom but with a shared passion against relentless open evil. Certainly we need to call upon God to destroy the work of the devil, don't we? And to finally destroy him and those who deeply follow in his way against an abuse of Christ's church and those who hold God and his people in contempt to hate what God hates.

Spurgeon said of David here, he was a good hater. Sounds contradictory, doesn't it?

He was a good hater for he hated only those who hated good. He says, doesn't he, how dare you, how dare you, don't you know God is in the room and in re-entry into the world. He burns in the atmosphere at the wicked in the world. But, but, his interrogation does not stop there. Because as we've seen throughout this series, God is everywhere at all places at all times.

God knows all things and it gets very personal, doesn't it? He's not just out there, God in the world, but he is also God in my room and God who knows me. And the problem isn't just out there in the world.

[20:31] He prays, deal with the wickedness in the world, but, but lastly, he also prays, deal with the wickedness in me. Deal with the wickedness in me.

Why doesn't God kill all the scumbags in the world? Someone asked me that on the street in Greenford a few weeks ago. I'm not sure whether it's a good answer, but the answer I gave was that he'd have to kill you and me at the same time. And David knows that, doesn't he? His survey of the things that God hates doesn't stop out there in the world, but it ends in his own scumbag heart. It's not just about the world outside, it's about the world inside. The psalm, if you remember, it began with searching. Verse 1, O Lord, you've searched me and known me. And David had no choice about that, did he? God searched David, he interrogated him. Without David inviting him. God invades his privacy, reads his mind, knows his speech. And after all, that is a tremendous comfort for him as he trusts in God, who is everywhere with him. But in the end, David pleads with God to search him again. Search me, O God, verse 23, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. It's not just that he knows God is in the room, but that God is in his room. And the thing is, David wants him there. God is in his mind and he wants him there. He is not trying to run from him. He sees that the only place that he can hide from this all-pervading being of God, all-pervasive, is to go closer to him, to invite him to search him more, to invite him closer, so that he might hate what God hates and love what God loves, even when it's in himself. So he wants God to sift him out, doesn't he? To try him, to know his thoughts, to see if there'd be any grievous way in him. He wants God to get his secrets out, to purify him, to burn off the dross, all the deep desires, all the hidden jealousies, all the wants we thought about this morning that are not right, all of the jealousies and the fears of man and the selfishness, all of the impurities and the faithlessness

and the lack of love and all of it. And he raises his arms up, doesn't he, by his sides and he walks into the security scanner and he says, search me, x-ray me, pat me down, Lord. Let anything that is still there, that is grievous in me, come out. Let me bring to you what you already know about me and let me say to you and confess to you what you already know.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, John says. But if we confess our sin, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Even the stuff I don't know about. May your all-searching eye expose it. Anything that remains in me that is a source of grief to you, expose it. Let's get it out on the table. Any place you don't want me to go, omnipresent God, expose it. Any thought that I should not be having omniscient God, expose it and purify me because I love what you love and I hate what you hate, even when that is found in myself. He shows us how to sing, doesn't he, when in the world, and when we start by calling for evil to be removed from the world, we must end with that same call in ourselves and for ourselves. We say with Isaiah, don't we, because God is, woe is me. And I want more than acquaintance with this God. I want to share in his passions. I want to share in what he loves, his passion for goodness and justice and righteousness. To share his passion for what he hates, his hatred for his enemies. And I want to know what I need to repent from. Even my good deeds, what can I repent from there? Even my good hatred of evil, what can I repent from there? And this is Christianity. It is simply to agree with God and to desire to agree with God about ourselves and about what's going on in the world. To confess to him, search me. G.K. Chesterton said that the true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because of what he loves behind him. The soldier fights evil in front of him because he loves his home, doesn't he? He loves what is behind him, the place where he belongs. And David hates God's enemies. He prays for their destruction, not because he's bloodthirsty and he just likes a good murder. But because he loves his Lord. He loves what's behind him. As I've looked at this psalm, being brutally honest with myself, and we have to confess this, don't we, that the problem is I don't care enough about what goes on in the world and enough about what goes on inside because I lack a love of what is behind. I have known about him and I've even known what he hates and prayed the prayers and agreed with it, but I haven't shared the sentiment. The big question is, is this psalm good news? Some say it is good. Some say it's bad. Some perceptively say it depends on who you are. And the question is, what are you going to do with this God? We have learnt he is an immense God, one who hems us in, one who will never lose us, who knows our every need, who has made us and formed us, who writes the story of our lives day by day and we're grateful for that. And we want to ask for [28:16] God's help, don't we, because we do actually desire the things that we never thought we would once upon a time. We do desire what David desires here, that God's enemies, that the devil will be destroyed and that justice will be done. Because things are happening out there and they are happening in here while God is in the room. And we do, don't we, want to love what he loves and hate what he hates, even when it's in us. So let's sing this psalm with David and mean it. We'll sing it in a few moments. Let's pray together.