

Psalms 139:1-6

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[0 : 00] Psalm 139. I want to spend a couple of weeks looking at who God is and how that will help us.

! A mountaineer was once asked, why do you climb mountains? Why do you climb mountains? Because they're there, was the reply.

Because they're there. The great message of the Bible that you have in your laps is that God is there and that there is no getting away from Him. The Bible never bothers to prove that God exists. The very first statement in the Bible is, in the beginning, God. And that's the way the Bible goes on. It simply declares that God is. It doesn't bother to prove that because everyone knows that God is. It isn't that we're ignorant of His existence. We know only too well. But the Bible tells us we suppress that truth. We squash it down. We don't face up to what we know.

[1 : 07] And so the Bible never wastes time proving the existence of God. It simply addresses us. And it tells us that God is and there's no getting away from Him. To try and run away from Him is only to run to Him.

And that's the message of Psalm 139. The theme of the Psalm is the God who is there. And this morning, I want to look at the opening six verses. When I was a little boy in school, growing up in Swansea, the quickest way to start a fight in the playground was to accuse someone of staring at you.

Do you remember that? I'm sure it still goes on. I witnessed it on the tube not long ago. Why are you staring at me? It doesn't only happen, does it, amongst children.

What do you think you're staring at, people say? People are very sensitive, aren't they, about being stared at. And when somebody stares at us, we become embarrassed and confused and frightened.

And sometimes you see that people become positively hostile. The God before whom all hearts are open, all desires known, from whom no secrets are hid, that is the God of the Bible.

[2 : 17] That's the God of Psalm 139. That's the way he's described in this Psalm. He is omniscient. That's the theological word. It means that God sees and God knows everything that there is to know.

He knows all that there is to know. But he knows all there is to know. Can you see in verse 1 about me? Look at verse 1.

O Lord, you've searched me. And you've known me. The last me is not actually there in the original. It is, O Lord, you have searched me and you know.

It's more powerful, isn't it? And what I want to do this morning is I want to really try to explain to you the doctrine of what that is and then to try to apply it to you. It's not normally the way I preach.

It's the way the kind of Puritans used to preach. They'd explain the doctrine and then they'd apply it. The trouble is they'd have about 20 or 30 points. And I'm not going to do that this morning. And so let me try and explain to you the doctrine.

[3 : 20] The omniscience of God. O Lord, you've searched me and you know me. It might be that you're into archaeology, I don't know.

Some of you may even have been on an archaeological dig. It must be fascinating, I would have thought. It must be a fascinating experience. It must be pretty frustrating too. Because very often on those archaeological digs, they don't find anything.

It requires, doesn't it, an awful lot of patience. You don't go on an archaeological dig and arrive in your JCB or your bulldozer. You go about it, don't you? You would dig carefully.

Every inch of earth is carefully sifted. Every fragment minutely examined and investigated and sent away. It's very interesting that the word here that is used literally is dig.

Oh Lord, you've searched me. And the idea is to dig deep. Lord, you've searched me. It's as if God has engaged in an exhaustive search, a minute, a thorough examination, in order to learn everything there is to know about us.

[4 : 29] Of course, it's a picture you mustn't push. A picture too far because God does not need to conduct an investigation in order to know you. As though God were ignorant and he needed to find out.

God doesn't need to be instructed by anyone. God doesn't need to be instructed by anyone. Teachers need to write reports, don't they, sometimes? And it's difficult to think of something positive to say.

You don't want to be totally negative. I'm sure teachers have to use their ingenuity to come up with something for the people to take home. I was telling you about Phoebe's report that said that Phoebe's strong attitude sometimes leads her to make poor choices.

That was her report this year. I read of Arthur Marshall, who was not very good at geography, and the teacher wrote in his report, he does well to find his way home. And sometimes, I expect if you're a teacher, you want to be ruthlessly honest, don't you?

This boy will never learn anything. He's never learned anything, and he never will learn anything. That's true about God, though, isn't it? He will never learn anything.

[5 : 40] He's never learned anything, and he never will learn anything. God has never learned anything. Because God's knowledge is perfect. He simply knows, and he already knows.

He's always known. All that there is to know. He knows me like that, says the psalmist. And he uses this illustration, and he says, He's pried down into the innermost recesses of my mind.

Oh Lord, you've searched me, and you know. And in the verses that follow, he expands on that, and he fills it out, and he shows us clearly that there is nothing that God does not know about us.

He knows when you sit. He knows when you stand. He knows when you come in. He knows when you go out. He knows what you think. He knows what you say.

He knows what you need. All the circumstances of your life, he knows it all. You know when I sit, when I rise. You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path, my lying down.

[6 : 37] You're acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you know it completely. You hemmed me in behind you before. It's all there, isn't it?

Our comings, our goings, our ups and downs, our thoughts, our moods, our actions, our circumstances, they're all known to God perfectly. And he knows them instantly.

Now that is the doctrine. That is the picture that we have of God. That he is omniscient, all-knowing, all-seeing. And so depending on your relationship to God this morning, that is either deeply disturbing, isn't it?

Or it will delight you. And so it all comes down to your relationship with God this morning. Does it disturb you or does it delight you? So let me try and apply it. Because in Psalm 139, here is a man who is delighted by it.

He's not intimidated by it and he's not threatened by it. He isn't a fugitive from God. He's not on the run. You misunderstand the psalm if you read it in that way.

[7 : 42] He's delighted. Do you notice what he says? He says, such knowledge, verse 6, is too wonderful for me. It's too good to be true. It causes me to worship God.

He's not threatened or intimidated. On the contrary, he is liberated by this fact that God knows him in an intimate way. But for many people, perhaps for you, it's not like that.

This knowledge that God knows you in this way might make you feel uneasy. It makes you feel uncomfortable and feel exposed. He knows where you've been this week.

He knows what's been going through your mind. He knows what nobody else knows about you.

There are things about us out there that we're ashamed about that we wouldn't even share with our closest and nearest and dearest.

There are things that we are too ashamed of. But God knows. He knows the things that you've been saying. The words on your tongue.

[8 : 45] The things that have been whispered in someone else's ear. And Jesus says, doesn't he, on the last day, these secrets will be shouted from the rooftops. Because God sees it all.

Nothing is hidden from him. And that makes you feel uneasy and uncomfortable. Now, let's try and tease out why is that. Surely, as we understand this doctrine, it's natural, isn't it, for us sinners to feel like that.

Let's go back to the start of the Bible, to Genesis 1 and 2. The account of the creation of man and woman. And when God created man and woman, he put them in a garden in perfect surroundings. And he provided them a companion for each other. And at the end of chapter 2, you've got the culmination of the creation account. And it says, Adam and Eve were naked and they felt no shame. And that's a really, really important statement.

It goes further than telling us just what they were wearing or what they weren't wearing. That day in the garden, it says to us that the way God created human beings, naked and not ashamed, in the same way to one another but also to God.

[9 : 57] There were no barriers. There were no masks to hide behind. No skeletons in the cupboards. No guilty secrets. No being ashamed.

Open and transparency. But then you read, don't you, Genesis 3, sin comes into the world. And when they rebel against God, the very first thing that they become aware of is their nakedness. And at that point, when sin enters in, they start to feel ashamed. And their instinctive reaction is to cover themselves up. And it's pathetic, isn't it?

They get fig leaves and they cover up their nakedness. That's what sin does. Why do they become ashamed in Genesis 3?

Because they've got something to hide. That's peculiar to human beings. Just if you go home, if you've got a pet, you can stare at a dog, can't you? You can stare at a cat or a rabbit, and they'll stare back at you without blinking.

[11 : 01] Animals are not disturbed by being stared at, but try it the next time you're on the bus. The world says there's no real difference at all. The Bible says God made man after his own image.

And likeness, that's the difference. And you are not an animal. Animals behave according to impulses and instincts, but human beings are made in the image and likeness of God.

And you are a rational creature that is able to stand back and to think about things and talk about things and discuss things with fellow human beings. You never find animals doing that.

Human beings are moral creatures, rational, free moral agents. You are responsible for your actions, choosing between good and evil, right and wrong. That's what it means to be made in the image of God.

The Bible tells us that man has chosen evil and broken God's law, and we become guilty before God. And that is why you and I become uncomfortable when we become aware that God is staring at us.

[12 : 03] And God is searching right through us, and it makes us feel uneasy. Because we're guilty, and we've broken His law, and we're sinners. And there are things in my life and in your life that you are deeply ashamed of.

And yet here is a man in Psalm 139 who's got no problem with that. He's really aware of the scrutiny of God upon him. He says, you've known me. You know my comings and goings, my ups and downs.

You know everything there is to know, and that is wonderful. It's wonderful. At the end of the psalm, if you go there, he invites the scrutiny of God on his life, and he welcomes it.

And he says, Lord, please come and search me and know my heart. Try me. He invites the scrutiny of God. Now the big question is, how do I get to that point where I'm not intimidated by it?

Where I'm not frightened by the gaze of God, but I'm delighted by it, and comforted by it, and strengthened by it? How do we get there? Let's go back to Genesis 3 again.

[13 : 10] Do you remember? They feel their guilt, and they're ashamed. But God does something wonderful, doesn't He, for Adam and Eve. They had sinned. They had rebelled.

But what does God do? Does God say, I'm finished with you? That's it. Does He say, I've written you off? No. What's the first thing He does? We read in Genesis 3 about an act of God's sovereign grace, that God comes into the garden, and He looks for them.

Where are you, He says? God comes seeking them, confronting them about their nakedness, exposing their shame. And then we're told about this kind of excuse, this attempt they made to cover themselves with fig leaves.

But then we read in Genesis 3.21, that God provided them with a covering, didn't He? I don't know whether you've noticed that before, but God, in His grace and in His kindness, He covers over their nakedness and their shame.

He takes their guilt, and He provides a covering for it. And they try to cover themselves, but it's woefully inadequate, isn't it? The fig leaves. But God graciously provides animal skins.

[14:26] Animals that have been sacrificed by God. God gives the first sacrifice of an animal. And He provides sinners with the skin of that animal, in order that they may be covered from their sin, and their guilt, and their shame.

It's a glorious picture, isn't it? That's the message of the Bible, the good news of the Bible, that God Himself has provided a covering. He's provided a covering for my sin, and my guilt, and my shame. And He's done so on the principle of a sacrifice, of a substitute who takes my place. And so when Jesus arrives on the scene, just before His public ministry begins, John the Baptist sees Him walking towards Him, and says, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. And God has provided a covering for our sin. When the Apostle Paul, in Philippians 3, says, not having a righteousness of my own, which is of the law, but a righteousness from God.

It's not a righteousness where I try to rustle it together, that I think, oh, my religious works, my good deeds, they will somehow shield me, and cover over my shame.

[15:39] It'll pull the wool over His eyes. No, not having a righteousness of my own, the Apostle Paul says, but a righteousness from God, that is through Jesus Christ.

And that is the righteousness that covers me, which is from God. You see, there is no other way that your life or my life will be able to stand the scrutiny of God, except through the blood of Jesus Christ.

And so the question is this morning, isn't it, is your sin covered over? Proverbs says, he that covers his own sin will not prosper.

That if you try to cover it yourself, if you try to get away with it, you will not get away with it. But we know, isn't it, we've already seen in our service from the assurance of pardon that he who confesses and forsakes his sin will find mercy.

That if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just, and He'll cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So let me ask you, is your sin properly covered?

[16:54] And if that's true of you today, if you're a Christian today, if your sin has been dealt with in the proper and only way through the blood of Jesus Christ, God's provision, then instead of you rather being frightened and intimidated by this doctrine, this doctrine becomes something in which you rejoice in.

And it's so comforting, and it's liberating. It's the most comfortable truth. Sometimes in a marriage situation, you get so close that when husband and wife kind of speak with one another, they anticipate what each other's going to say.

You know what she's going to say before they say it. You know the moods that your wife or your husband has. You know how she'll respond.

But that doesn't intimidate you. You don't feel threatened when marriage is like that. No, you thank God, don't you? Because God has given you such an intimate marriage.

Well, you magnify that by a million times and you haven't got there. God knows me as intimately as that. And that ought to rejoice my heart if I'm a Christian, that I've got nothing to be afraid of anymore.

[18:14] My sin, my guilt, all the things that I've been hiding, they're covered, legitimately covered. By the blood of Jesus. And it can never be dredged up and used against me again.

The fact that God knows me intimately is ultimately my security. Look at verse 5. There's a lovely way of putting it. Verse 5, it's a picture, isn't it, of strength and tenderness.

Of strength and security. He says, you hem me in behind me for you lay your hand upon me. So you see it in the park, don't you?

With little children. And the dad is playing with his child in the park and he is hemming the child in. And he's shepherding the child or the child in reigns, the toddler.

And the toddler is unaware of the dangers of their environment. The toddler is ignorant of the kind of limitations. And so the parent kind of guides him, shepherds him, stops him from going about in danger.

[19:19] His hand is lovingly laid upon him. There's nothing intimidating about that, is there?

Nothing frightening about that? You don't say, oh, look at that awful parent shepherding his child across the road.

And that's our relationship with God. It's wonderful. That God knows me so intimately, so powerfully. He knows everything there is to know about me. And in this dangerous environment of the world, he hems me in behind me before.

He puts his hand upon me. And so when the devil dredges up some sin that you weren't even aware of, and you go on in the Christian life, and you discover more and more about yourself, it's like peeling an onion, isn't it?

And we know that the heart is desperately wicked. Who can know it, Jeremiah says? And you may think, as you get nearer and nearer to God, and you see yourself in the light of his holiness, and you see layer and layer of deceit and sin.

And what a comfort it is to know, isn't it, at that point, that that is no surprise to God. God has always known it was there. And God knows the very worst about you.

[20 : 38] He knows the very worst about you, and nothing can disillusion him. Nothing can surprise him, even the worst. And yet he gave his own son to die for you.

And when Christ died on the cross, he died for the worst that you're capable of. He didn't die for me in my Sunday best. He died for me at my worst.

And so nothing that I can come up with will ever frustrate that or undo that. And God knows, and he's always known, and he's always known me, and he's always known you. And not only does he know you at your worst, he knows you at your best.

That should comfort you. Sometimes we are really dissatisfied, aren't we, with our progress in the Christian life. The good we want to do, we don't do it.

We're frustrated by the sin that dwells within us. And he knows what you really want to be like. He knows that when you set aside time to pray, and the words don't come together, he knows the groans and the sighs of your heart that are too deep for words.

[21 : 52] I love the story of how Jesus dealt with Peter. Peter has denied him three times. Peter's more or less given up, and he's gone back to fishing. And Jesus comes along to Peter, and he says, do you love me more than these?

Pointing to the fishing gear. Is this where your heart is? Do you love me more than these? Is this where you want to be? Do you love me more than these?

And Peter says, Lord, you know that I love you. Then Jesus' second time says to him, Simon, son of Jonah, do you truly love me?

Do you love me? What does Peter say? Peter says, Lord, you know that I love you. And a third time, mirroring Peter's denial, do you remember?

Jesus says, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And what does Peter say? Do you remember what he says?

[22 : 56] He says, Lord, you know all things. Do you see what he does? He takes the omniscience of God.

Lord, you know all things. Everyone else knows, Lord. All the other disciples know how I've let you down. They all know how I've screwed up. I can scarcely hold my head up, but Lord, you know what's in my heart of hearts.

And you all know all things. And so the hymn which says, isn't it, Lord, though my love is weak and faint, it's there. There is a love for you.

God not only knows the worst, but the best of us. And he knows what he's going to make us. Let me finish with that. That's so encouraging, isn't it? That in Romans 8, we know that all things work together for good for those that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose.

For whom he foreknew, he also did predestine to be conformed according to the image of his son. That he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

[24 : 02] What does that mean? It means that God has a plan for you and God's plan is that you would be made like his son, the Lord Jesus. That's his plan. And so you and I get discouraged in the Christian life.

And some of you might think, is God discouraged with me? And I tell you, God is not discouraged with you. And God could never be discouraged with you. Because he knows the finished product and God knows what he's going to do with you.

And the Christian life, sometimes he's take three steps forward and two steps back or the other way around. And sometimes it's worse. And sometimes we get very discouraged. But God knows. He knows. He's known.

And he's always known. And he knows that one day those who are in Christ will be conformed to the image of his son. And so what a glorious doctrine. It ought to thrill us, not threaten us, if we're Christians.

And how we ought to rejoice and to be drawn out to worship God as the psalmist is here. At this great fact that God knows. Lord, you know. You've searched me and you know and such knowledge is too wonderful for me.

[25 : 12] Let's pray.