



January 20th, 2018

Knowing God - Psalm 139

Sermon Title: God Knows Me. A Prayer

Intro – Conversation with Pastor Rashard

Good Morning Mercy Church! Happy Martin Luther King Jr Weekend!! What makes Dr. King's legacy so powerful still today is of course the beliefs that his entire mission was founded on. Dr King believed a person's worth and value is determined by their creator. Which is what Genesis 1 tells you. Human Dignity

Ephesians 2 – tells us: the Gospel tears down cultural barriers. And the church is supposed to stand out as a foretaste of heaven in that regard.

3 Questions for Pastor Rashard.

You've spent a lot of time as a minority pastor in a majority church. You've done a great deal of study in this, working on your doctorate in this area. How should we respond to Dr. King's legacy?

We get together every month as elders and we pray for Mercy Church. And we pray for Mercy & dream for Mercy. What is your prayer for mercy church?

Prayer – 1. Human Heart. 2. Forward Facing Church for our city

TODAY we are in Psalm 139. So if you have your bible make your way there. Today we continue in our series called Knowing God. but we are going to flip the idea on its head a little today. We've been in the Psalms because the Psalms show us a God who we can relate to as a person, instead of God as a school subject we can just know more about. And the working idea is that this is how God has designed us. To know him like we know a person. Hope, Power, freedom from old struggles, they all come not from information about God but from the presence of God with us. So for the month of January we are in the Psalms looking at what it means to know God.

Today though, instead of focusing on us knowing God, this Psalm is going to reverse that perspective and talk all about God Knowing us. Psalm 139 is David talking, really praying to God. The Psalm is divided up into 5 stanzas just like a song would be. And in each stanza David focuses in on a different angle of God's knowledge of him.

And what I believe Psalm 139 is going to show us today is how good it is for us that God knows us. And I HOPE this psalm will help you in a couple of ways. Some of you are going to just going to walk away with a great deal of hope. Especially if you came in here feeling lonely or in despair. Man I think this Psalm is what the embrace of God sounds like in words. Others of you have been operating like God is a weekend activity or a kind of segment of your life. And I think this Psalm is going to free you from God being a part of your schedule

like yoga or Econ 101 or Carpool line. David is just going to shatter the whole idea that we can put God in a box like that. **And the best part is: The tone of this whole thing is just how GOOD it is for David that God knows him.**

That's my hope today. that you leave embracing the truth that God knows you way better than you know yourself. And that you experience the goodness of that truth. And because this Psalm is a prayer where David is talking to God...I'm basically structuring this sermon like a prayer guide. So by the time we are done you are walking out of here not just with some knowledge about God's knowledge of you, but with a way to talk to him about it. And this is a GREAT beginner set of prayers. So if you've never prayed before, look just write these down and start here. Every day this week.

1 Lord, you have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away. 3 You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways. 4 Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, Lord.

Verse 1 especially is like a summary of the whole Psalm. You have searched me and known me. Searched and Known is language that evokes judgment. David doesn't say "God you skimmed the pages of my life" no he says you have "searched me" and known me. This is David saying ok God you know everything going on with me, and that is good for me. In fact that can be the opener of your prayer:

God you know everything going on with me, and that is good for me

Look at these verses. God knows when you sit down and when you stand up. God is actively aware of the mundane events of your life. God sees it all & knows it all. Look at verses 2-4

- He sees what you do – nothing more inconsequential than that and David is saying **God isn't just concerned with the highlight reel of my life. God cares about all of it.**
- He sees where you go – That means your morning commute to work where your sitting in traffic...God is seeing you right there. "You observe" – That is active tense. Everywhere you go...bathroom, bedroom, vacation...he sees it all.
- He knows what you are thinking about saying – verse 4. Remember Christmas dinner with your weird cousins? You were "holding your tongue" and God is like yeah I saw those words. "Interesting choice of words you had for eddie."
- He sees what you think about – "you understand my thoughts from far away."
- He knows all your ways. He knows the WHY behind all your actions. Cuts both ways: Yes, *your good intentions* and the manipulative plans you are trying to pull for your own ends. He SEES ALL OF IT. KNOWS IT ALL!

And yet, David goes farther.

5 You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me.

This "encircled" is literally he's encamped behind you and he's out in front of you. He's seen your past, he knows your future.

AND, he has his hand on you. This “hand” will continue to come up in this Psalm. Which is a beautiful thread of God’s caring, protective presence that runs throughout. He sees you because he’s beside you. He sees everything.

Now I want to stop for a second and let *you* take stock of how *you* are feeling about all this. Can you even imagine it? **Can you imagine a screen that ran 24-7 displaying every action, every thought, and every feeling you had the moment you had it? Like when you do something that makes everyone go “what were you thinking” and you could say...”let’s take a look!”** That’s what God sees all the time and he sees it before you do and he’s got his hand on your shoulder as you both see all your thoughts!

How does this make you feel? Here’s why this is an important question. **How you respond to this will tell you a lot about who you think God is.**

Defensive: See some of ya’ll by the end of verse four are like WHOA GOD! I thought my parents were overbearing! But You are all in my space! Back off! Who is HE to be looking in on me? AND you think...that screen needs to be destroyed IMMEDIATELY. **If your first response to God knowing everything about you is defensive, then God is primarily just a judge in your eyes.**

There to take account of your right and wrongs and when you die he’ll tally the points and decide whether you go to the good place or the bad place. And that offends you because you haven’t agreed to be in his courtroom.

Denial: Others will hear this, nod their heads in agreement and be like yeah God sees everything. Sees all I do. And I definitely do more bad than good. But, he HAS to forgive me so I’m good. And you are unaffected by the fact that God knows everything about you. You are in denial. And I’ve met so many Christians who are here. Believe God is some kind of a judge, but they treat Christianity is their immunity card. So you don’t really need to care what God sees because you’ve got immunity. And they do what they want through life kind of banking on standing before God one day being like “its all good bro. Get in here.” **That’s just denial.**

If you don’t care that God sees everything, you are seeing God as only merciful. You are in Denial of your regular need for grace, of the wickedness of your own heart, and denial of the authority of God in your life. **Listen to me you may profess to be a believer but if your life doesn’t show that you submit to God, you function like an atheist.** You don’t believe in God, you believe in moralistic deism that turns God into a butler who is just there to hold the door for you as you dance your way into heaven. You say platitudes like “I’m so glad God is watching over us.” ARE YOU SURE? Jesus is NOT your immunity card. Jesus is not your FLU SHOT.

So what is the right way? The biblical way to respond to God knowing us better than we even know ourselves? David starts us down that road in verse 6 by saying something super helpful & super human. And it’s true for how we gotta respond to this entire Psalm.

6 This wondrous knowledge is beyond me. It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.

See David is saying there is a gap between what God knows and what David knows. In Fact, just the knowledge about how God knows what he knows is too great for David. **He's humbled by this. THE KING is humbled. But he does not go to a place of despair.**

The one who rightly understands God will approach him with humble thankfulness. And that response right there is the response of one who gets the gospel message that is at the core of Christianity. The way I've explained it before to you: In the eyes of God when he looks at you...And SEES ALLLLL OF YOU...

Gospel Reality: you are simultaneously more sinful than you ever imagined, and more loved than you ever thought possible.

Your awareness of your sinfulness shatters your pride. When all your thoughts and intentions are laid bare, what room for there is pride? Your awareness of God's love fills your heart with thankfulness.

To be known by God is to be fully known, and fully loved.

Known but not loved – judgment.

Loved but not known – shallow sentiment

The cross is where the judgment and mercy of God meet! Which is why we are so big on it around here! He loves you STILL! And so a measure by which you really understand the gospel is to ask yourself: Are you humble (Aware of your flaws, assuming you are a sinner first & sinned against second)? Are you thankful?

Leads us to the second stanza

7 Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

9 If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits,

10 even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light around me will be night" —

12 even the darkness is not dark to you. The night shines like the day; darkness and light are alike to you.

There is an old poem by Francis Thompson called "The Hound of Heaven." Pretty long poem where he goes through his life running hard away from God. Running to the ends of the earth. Running to different pleasures and projects he hopes will satisfy him. Always running away from God... who he knows loves him. Yet he has this moment while he's still running away where he knows one day the run is going to end in surrender to him. Because the Hound of Heaven cannot be outrun. Here's a way to pray this stanza:

God you are always with me, and that is good for me.

And let me cut right to something here. We are reading the psalms through the perspective of the new testament. That's because Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law & the prophets but to fulfill it. So the NT actually gives us the fullest understanding of the OT. That's why it quotes the OT so much. And for us, when we hear the phrase "where can I go to escape your spirit?" There is an even deeper meaning. FOR CHRISTIANS – The Spirit of God isn't just nearby. The Spirit of God called the Holy Spirit actually resides in us. Which means we are never alone. God is still "Immanuel" still with us. And this is fantastic news....and I'm going to show you how it is fantastic news through verses 11-12

HOW MANY TIMES have you said to yourself some version of verse 11 when it came to something you did or thought in secret? That GOD is WITH YOU right then will be good news to two groups. Those who have secret sin & those who have secret suffering.

First let me talk to those who are immersed in some dark sin you think is secret. You say verse 11- "NOBODY IS WATCHING. NOBODY WILL KNOW. SURELY THE DARKNESS WILL HIDE ME."

- I'll look at porn because NOBODY WILL KNOW
- I'll cheat on this project because NOBODY WILL KNOW
- I'll manipulate this situation and NOBODY WILL KNOW
- I'll spend money wildly to live a second life and NOBODY WILL KNOW

LISTEN: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SECRET SIN! God is with you! The darkness isn't hiding you from him. There is

DENIAL...pretending...but not secrecy. Old poem says it this way:

**Darkness and light in this agree; Great God, they're both
alike to thee. Thine hand can pierce thy foes as soon;
Through midnight shades as blazing noon.**

And maybe RIGHT NOW God is making you aware. The hound of heaven has finally revealed himself to you. Listen: The reason it's great news that God is right there in your sin: It means you are never too far gone to turn to him. The nastiness of your sin...the darkness of it...you cannot outrun the loving grace of God! He will forgive EVEN YOU. This led me to faith. Realization that my flight was futile. And I was running from love. Surrender TODAY! Several people recently. Maybe that's you today.

Second group: Those of you in secret suffering. Who are walking through your days trying to hold it together...but you are hurting. You are actually in darkness masking it with a smile & going through the motions.

When you slip into secret & cry; When you slip into despair...that honest space where you allow your pain to come out and it just swallows you for a while...you think no one sees it. You think you are alone there. God is there too. He sees your hurt. And he says I am your shelter, your refuge. So come cry to me. Lamentations 3 says my soul is afflicted & bowed down within me. Yet this I call to mind and have hope – Because of the Lord's faithful love we do not perish. For his mercies never end. Psalm 23 – even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death YOU ARE WITH ME. And it

means if you ask for mercy, he will give it. God you are always with me, and that is good for me.

Third Stanza

13 For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well. 15 My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began.

This section is particularly powerful isn't it. Maybe we can pray it this way:

God you created me, so I have value and purpose today.

These verses beautifully expand the reality we know from Gen 1.27-28. That God created us in his image, male and female he created us. And here David is saying you knew me, you knew me before I was ever conceived and it was YOU who put me in my mother's womb.

Listen can I just say something that needs saying and I hope you hear this coming from a shepherd. This right here is why Christians take a stand against abortion. It's because we believe life and personhood begin at conception. A human soul is involved from the moment there is life. And because

we believe all people deserve dignity, we speak up and we stand up for those people. And that includes people in the womb.

In 2016, 18% of all pregnancies in NC ended in abortion. 74/day. That is tragic because those are people made in God's image. And we want dignity and honor to be shown to those children.

But Listen, we cannot be naïve enough to miss that real systemic issues are in play here. As the church this is where the rubber meets the road. See if we say "This is murder" but we don't say to the mother "We are here for you, we will help you, we will get bottles & diapers, we will show you how to go through this, we will watch the little one while you go to work, we will throw showers and birthday parties, we will come over and let you take a nap, we will help with school & we will support you..." If we aren't willing to say all that then we don't understand this as a gospel issue about human dignity and we need to keep our mouths shut. We can't say "this is murder, you are wrong, good luck!" That's Not the way of Jesus! That's sinful and a huge blight on the gospel. Instead we get involved! We adopt, we foster, we come alongside, we help pay for soccer cleats & basketball leagues and books, we mentor and one day we all throw a high school graduation party and cry on each others shoulders as they drive away into adulthood. And we grow old and gray and a little crazy giving our best to children who could never repay us because that's THE GOSPEL!!! We get in the fight lest we join a whole host of people who still look back on the civil rights movement with shame because they just stood on the sidelines.

- TODAY – After every service – there are reps from congregations for kids and Christian Adoption services. Talk to someone. Also, we have an adoption & foster care interest meeting on February 5th. Maybe you need to come ask questions, learn.

Now listen before I go to next stanza let me say: I recognize some may have had an abortion. And you are wondering will you be accepted here? YES. Remember, you are never too far gone from God. You are not your past. Like anyone else you need to own your sin, repent, and receive the love of the father. There's a reason we named this MERCY church. None of us earned God's love. We are messed up sinners who God has shown his MERCY to. Receive that love today and let us walk through healing with you.

19 God, if only you would kill the wicked — you bloodthirsty men, stay away from me —
 20 who invoke you deceitfully. Your enemies swear by you falsely. 21 Lord, don't I hate those who hate you, and detest those who rebel against you? 22 I hate them with extreme hatred;
 I consider them my enemies.

Again we get the benefit of reading David on this side of the cross which helps inform how we relate. David sees people doing things that you only do if you are an enemy of God. They are bloodthirsty with no regard for life, no regard for justice. No regard for the oppressed. No regard for the imago dei. And he wants God to take them down! He considers God's enemies his enemies. And David has authority as king of

Israel to take military action against God's enemies. And there are times where he does & no way to know if that's connected here.

We do know that because of Christ Paul says don't attack your enemies. No if your enemy is hungry feed him, if thirsty give him something to drink. Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good. Deuteronomy 32.35 – Vengeance is mine says the Lord.

God you will deal with sin, so I am free to forgive and love.

And when we are willing to hand over justice to the Lord, then we can be released from it. We deserved God's vengeance and he forgave us. So we can forgive others and love them even as they harm us. But David is showing that's no easy task in the heart.

In fact right after he says he hates them with extreme hatred...He pauses and says

23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns.

24 See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.

And this right here is the last part of our prayer about God knowing us. It's us surrendering ourselves to God and asking for him to actively guide us towards the way of everlasting life. The other three parts of this prayer were not necessarily active. They were acknowledging to God his role in our life.

But this is active. This is our response to God knowing us. Last part of your prayer:

God, you know me and love me fully, so lead me away from sin and toward you.

This is the prayer of one who is starting to see how GOOD the knowledge of God is. You start to trust that God is both holy and merciful. You start to see how your sin will never satisfy you the way God's love would. So you FINALLY get to a place where you can say God search out my heart. And lead me away from that sin. Crush it. Lead me towards you.

1. God you know everything going on with me, and that is good for me
2. God you are always with me, and that is good for me.
3. God you created me, so I have value and purpose today.
4. God you will deal with sin, so I am free to forgive and love.
5. God, you know me and love me fully, so lead me away from sin and toward you.