

PRECIOUS—GOD’S THOUGHTS OF US

Psalm 139: 1-24 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

A young man recently walked into His pastor’s office in South Carolina. Bill told Pastor Ed Young, “I can’t find God anymore.” The pastor asked Bill when he last felt God’s presence.” The young man related an incident that happened in back in college when he was pure, chaste, a virgin, but he was continually ribbed by his college friends. Bill was a believer, but he foolishly decided to solve the problem and stop the ribbing. He found a consenting co-ed, rented a motel room and ended his virginity. Then Bill cried saying, “I haven’t been able to find God ever since.” His pastor opened up the Word of God to Psalm 139 and asked Bill to read this psalm. He told him, “It’s not that you can’t find God. The truth is, you can’t get away from God. Everywhere you run, you meet Him there. You can’t lose God. You can lose your open communication because of sin in your life. Yet you can’t lose God, no matter how fast your car is, no matter how high the mountain is, no matter how low the cave is.” He is there—always there! Bill thought he could solve the problem of being laughed at. He did! But he lost the close sense of the presence of the Lord and had been living in unconfessed sin for a number of years.

If one of us loses our sense of God’s transcendence, of His omnipotence, His omnipresence, and His omniscience, a hundred ills or even spiritual tragedies arise in our souls. If a local church loses its sense of God of the lofty position of God in our lives, that church faces tragedy in the future. When we lose sight of God’s high and holy place in our midst as Head of the body, the church, we immediately lose the significance of worship. To truly worship God, we must know deeply and have it engraved in our souls that we are worshipping not only One who is above us, but far, far, far above us. He is our Creator, and we are His Bride, but only mere creatures. Yet, as we worship the Lord as we did this morning, we can pray as we sing, “Father, help me see that while You are nearer to me than the breath I breathe, You, Lord, are also the God of all creation, all the universe, and You are high and holy and exalted. In Psalm 92: 1-2, the psalmist said, “It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Your name, O Most High, to declare Your steadfast love in the morning, and Your faithfulness by night.”

As I ponder this mighty Psalm 139: 14, David wrote, “I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well.” How high we must see God as Creator. Yet as our Redeemer, he came as a man, the God-man and He came as a baby boy into the world He created. But bring home this fact from Psalm 139: 17-18. “How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I could count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with You.”

The psalmist David learned the hard way, like Bill about the omnipresence of God, about His omniscience and omnipotence. His sin with Bathsheba and plotting the death of her husband, Uriah, the Hittite, was a problem that ate his heart out, a problem that allowed him no sleep, and a problem which turned his bed at night into a bed full of tears. Beloved, living every day of our life brings us into the same net David found himself in. Either we walk with God, or like Adam and Eve, or David himself for a while, we try to hide from God. Living every day also brings us into the presence of God to ask Him over and over—“Who am I?”

Casting Crowns put this question into a marvelous song: “Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth Would care to know my name Would care to feel my hurt? Who am I, that the bright and morning star Would choose to light the way for my ever wandering heart? Not because of who I am But because of what You've done Not because of what I've done But because of who You are I am a flower quickly fading here today and gone tomorrow A wave tossed in the ocean A vapor in the wind Still you hear me when I'm calling Lord, you catch me when I'm falling And You've told me who I am I am yours Who am I, that the eyes that see my sin Would look on me with love and watch me rise again? Who am I, that the voice that calmed the sea Would call out through the rain and calm the storm in me? Not because of who I am But because of what You've done Not because of what I've done But because of who You are I am a flower quickly fading Here today and gone tomorrow A wave tossed in the ocean A vapor in the wind Still you hear me when I'm calling Lord, You catch me when I'm falling And You've told me who I am I am Yours I am yours Whom shall I fear? Whom shall I fear? 'Cause I am Yours I am yours.” Today, I want us to explore who our Lord is and find out who we are in the process. To learn both of these, we must blend the two questions and discover as David did, how precious we are to God. How precious are you to God?

YOU ARE SO PRECIOUS TO GOD BECAUSE HE MADE YOU AN OPEN BOOK TO HIM. (I.) Notice Psalm 139: 1-6. “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 lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.” Beloved, none of us is a mystery to Jesus. We may even be a mystery to ourselves, but in us, there are no surprises for the Lord. Everyone else who knows us best, knows only a little about us. Most of us struggle to even know and understand ourselves. But somebody knows us through and through like an open book. The Lord, v. 1 has searched us and He knows us. The Hebrew word for searched is **chagar**. It means to penetrate the inner person, to examine intimately by searching out. The word for “know” that appears over and over in verses 1-6 is **yada**. This

word means the most intimate knowledge of a husband and wife of each other. This is knowledge by reflection, by observation, by experience and by revelation. This discernment of us from afar is **biyn**. It means to distinguish, to discern, to separate, and to perceive. Jinny, my wife knows and discerns more about me than any other human being, but sometimes I baffle her as she baffles me. But hear me when I say—Jinny is an open book to God, and so am I and so are you. As a couple, our discernment of each other is affected by how open we are with each other. Not so with God. Whether we are open with Him or not, He is never wondering about us, and thinking, “Why do you act this way?”

In v. 3, “You search out my path and my lying down” The Hebrew word for search out or scrutinize is **zarah**. It means to toss about and to winnow. God separates us like wheat from chaff. This matter of being acquainted with all our ways is the word **cakan**. It means to be familiar. We are to God as a memorized page. He knows us better than we know ourselves—both our strengths and our weaknesses. Some people seem to know our weaknesses only—how sad for them! Some people are blind to our weaknesses and see only our strengths—bless their hearts. But God knows it all-and He still loves us. As one hymn-writer put it, “He knows me, yet He loves me.” Verse 4 says He knows our words before we speak, which means God knows our every thought. Charles Spurgeon said, “What hope of concealment can remain when the thoughts and speech we try to conceal are all transparent before the Lord?” When I check bad thoughts, and don’t speak them, God still knows. The tongue is the index of our thoughts. A husband or wife can get burned up at the other when one of them says, “I know what you are going to say.” That burns us up, because only God has that supreme knowledge. Getting to know the Lord is what helps me know myself.

This knowledge surrounds me, hems me in, v. 5 and I am ambushed by the Lord. I cannot escape Him, for He hems me in behind and before. Accept it. God is both omniscient and omnipresent. With God, we are in a box canyon—He is above us, beneath us, behind us, before us. Truly, in a good way, as believers, we are always under arrest. Escape routes to get away from God are all barred in, but if we accept this truth, we are being held in the arms of God’s love. When we try to get away from God, it’s like a child trying to get away from a Dad or Mom to run across a busy street. V. 5 tells us He has laid His hand upon us. David says, “I am overwhelmed by Your majesty or Your majestic knowing of me.” David says that God’s knowledge of him is too wonderful for him—it is too high for him to attain to. Don’t calculatedly be so sure you have God figured out. Stay overwhelmed. Romans 11: 33 is one of my verses. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out—How unfathomable they are!” Luther missed a lot, Calvin missed a lot. Arminius missed a lot. Wesley missed a lot, and so does your favorite theologian—and so do I as your pastor. Stay amazed and overwhelmed. Secondly,

YOU ARE SO PRECIOUS TO GOD BECAUSE WHEREVER YOU GO, THERE HE IS TO FACE YOU, LEAD YOU, HOLD YOU, AND UNCOVER YOU.

(II.) Listen to Psalm 139: 7-12. “Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, (Hell or the grave) You are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You.” Oh, the fixes we get ourselves in like Bill in South Carolina. Suicidal people try to escape God in death, but that’s the first person you must face when you pull the trigger. Prodigals try to escape God by running off to a far country, but there is God. Some try the bottom of the sea—some “Black Hole” to hide from God, but He’s with you on the way down and He meets you there. Wherever we go—He’s there. We cannot escape His presence, trying to catch the wings of the morning, nor can we escape Him in a submarine or a bathyscaphe going down 6.5 miles to the depth of the uttermost sea. Ask Jonah if he escaped God’s presence in the belly of the big fish. Try going down to the depths of our trona mines to have the darkness cover you. There God will face you, lead you, hold you, and uncover your desire to escape Him. And in our far country, it isn’t far back to God. He will meet you in your far county, on the highest peak, in the depths of the deepest ocean, in the depths of the darkest darkness, with Him, the night is as bright as the day—for darkness is as light to God. Corrie Ten Boom said it well, “No matter how deep is our hole, God is deeper still.” Get right with Him who knows you best and from whom you cannot escape. Rocks nor mountains can hide you from His face. 3rdly,

YOU ARE SO PRECIOUS TO GOD BECAUSE HE PLANS FOR YOU TO SEE YOURSELF THROUGH HIS EYES.

(III.) Listen to Psalm 139: 13-22. “For you formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with You. Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against You with malicious intent; Your enemies take Your name in vain, Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.”

Beloved, you and I are at the top of God’s most wonderful expressions of His creativity. The highest Tetons, the magic of Yellowstone, the blueness of our blue

sky mixed with yellow, gold, orange and red colors of our quaking aspens, all of it pales to the significance of how God created us in His image. We are precious to the Lord. The Hebrew word is **yacar**. Yacar means most valuable, a most prized possession. God is allowing David through His divine eyes to look inside his mother's womb through the eyes of the Spirit. To look where God formed us, and put us together—our nerves, our muscles, our sinews, our blood vessels, and David says after the tour—"Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well." For each of us, it all began in the heart of God who knew us before we were born. In the secret workshop of our mother's womb, there we were growing and our little hearts were pumping. Like a great artist labors alone in his studio, and will not allow anyone to see his work until it is finished, so with us, birth for us was our unveiling of His masterpiece. Each of our days were numbered in God's book even before a sonogram could look at our earliest unformed substance.

But verses 17-18 is where I get carried away. God's thoughts of us are all precious. It's not true in the rest of life. A junior high schooler some years back tried out to sing in the high school operetta. At the tryouts, the high school teacher said, "Who told you that you could sing?" It took Joe eight years to ever again open his mouth to sing, and that was in private. People's thoughts and words about us can devastate us. But Joe got it together and Pastor Joe Stowell who pastored for a time Moody Church, Pastor Joe sings today. Certainly, Pastor Joe would be more sensitive to others after what happened to him. But Pastor Stowell once told of the day they were hanging wallpaper in the kitchen for his wife. Everything was ready—the tarp, the tools, the water trough was filled and in place on the floor. Suddenly, he heard the rush of water—swoosh. There stood his youngest son, Matthew, one foot in the trough and the other in the spilled water. Two apprehensive eyes glued themselves to his Daddy. Irritated beyond words, Joe just shook his head and said, "You klutz!" Instantly, Matthew was in tears as two truthful, but unloving words devastated his little spirit and sense of worth just like it happened from his high school teacher.

Think of it! It captures my heart. Oh, the preciousness of God's thoughts of us. He never mumbles under His breath, "You jerk," "You idiot," "Serves you right, stupid." No one knows us better than God does, but He never lowers the boom or lambasts us. All His thoughts of us are precious. And what's more, He never quits thinking about us—His thoughts of us outnumber the grains of sand on the seashore. We are so precious to God, He is planning our future as we sleep. One of the meanings of **yacar**, translated precious is rare. Tell me anyone else, including your spouse who lives and breathes you—You are their every thought even as you sleep. Every day, God is ordaining our future for us, even before our birth. He is planning the downfall of our enemies, even as we sleep, for He knows that is our hope. And when we go to bed, praying or sing, just know, He is always thinking of us—and planning to conform us to His image. He even knows our desire to defend

Him, though it is He who defends us. He knows about us hating the speech of those who take His name in vain. He knows all that, and He even knows our complete hatred for the enemies of God. Fourthly and lastly,

YOU ARE SO PRECIOUS TO GOD BECAUSE HE WANTS TO SEARCH, TRY, AND KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS TO REMOVE ANY GRIEVOUS WAY SO HE CAN LEAD YOU IN THE WAY EVERLASTING. (IV.) Listen

to Psalm 139: 23-23. “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!” What is David asking for? He is in essence saying, “I don’t see anything hurtful or grievous in my life at the present time, but maybe You do, Lord.” To be open with God, to open ourselves up to the Lord’s examination is not about asking Him to find something new for Him. No, this searchlight from God, when we open our hearts to it, this searchlight is to discover what He has known all along. When do these times of searching come? Truthfully, they come more often as we grow in grace. The closer we come to the Lord, the more we are aware of His holiness and our own sin. Sin inside us unnoticed by us, though known to God is like an enemy spy. It saps our strength spiritually, our vitality. It ultimately leaves our lives shipwrecked.

Do you see? The discovery of sin in our lives comes as we get closer to Him and thus we come to grips with who we are as we get close to ourselves. As we move closer to the Light, ah—there it is! There is that pine beetle. There is that brain worm. There is that hideous green heart of envy and covetousness. The Hebrew word for grievous way is **otseb**. It means an idol, anything false that causes us physical or emotional pain and sorrow. It is something inside us that makes us writhe, that makes us hot with anger in a moment, or something that continually makes us grieved, weary, irritated, despairing, bitter, disgusted, in turmoil or troubled. The Jews used this word for pain in a mother in childbirth. Another interesting part of this word can mean the pain that we need to receive in godly discipline, (something David never gave his son, Adonijah—I Kings 1: 5, 6). But the most probable meaning of this word is to painfully work to fashion an idol. It speaks of the painful, hurtful ways in us that become for us a cherished icon or idol and we refuse to give them up. It’s something painful that we have twisted into our very souls. Only God can expose and cauterize and eliminate that hurtful way.

When we allow God to search, try and know our hearts and thoughts, He will show us what has wormed its way into our thinking. The dividing line between right and wrong here is a very sharp one. Is there anything that is in the least unwholesome, God help me see it, God remove it so I can walk in the way everlasting. It occurs to me that the timing of David’s Spirit-led thoughts came just after he spoke about his enemies and the enemies of God. Yes, Lord, overthrow the wicked, but test the sincerity of each of our prayers as we pray in the nearness of Your holiness. Amen.