

The Greatness and Glories of God

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Let's go to Psalm 139 tonight. I think that if David, that is, King David, not David Young but King David was here and he sang these songs he would just be bubbling over because the Psalm that we're reading tonight and studying tonight really speaks of those glorious truths of God's presence, God's never failing, God's always intimacy with us and as we look at Psalm 139, this Psalm talks much about knowing the Lord but mostly it talks about the Lord knowing you. Now, while about everything David is going to say about how God knows him is true of God's knowledge of every man but only God's children, God's elect, glory and joy in it the way David is going to. He's just going to overflow with the greatness and glories of God and this is a Psalm, by the way, that every child should be taught because it speaks to some of the glorious attributes of God that make him distinct from all other entities or all other so-called gods that have ever existed. I'm just going to take it a section at a time as I share it with you and I'll watch my time and we may have to cut things off but that's okay. I know you typically get enough preaching on Sunday. Maybe you can't get enough period, but hopefully you get a good amount.

First of all, I. In verses 1-18, he makes a pronouncement of God's greatness. Now, I'd have a subpoint under the pronouncement of his greatness and that is the greatness in God's knowledge of him. He delves into the omniscience of God and all that that means to him. Once again, that's true of every man. God knows everything about every man but the child of God glories in that truth. You can ask yourself knowing that God knows you very thoroughly, does that bring you joy or does that bring you fear? David, being in covenant with God, so is every believer, by the way, the election of God was so true in David's life. I mean, you wouldn't have had any trouble convincing King David of the sovereign election of God. There he was, the little runt son in the household of Jesse who just tried to be faithful in the menial tasks God gave him like keeping the sheep and the prophet comes to his house one day and picks him out over and above the more impressive, strapping, strong, handsome brothers of his. So David knew God just chooses whom he's going to use and the way he's going to use them. David knew there was nothing outwardly he'd performed or done. Now, I'm sure David understood that God was in his life in a special and real way but he had no idea that God would call him to be the greatest king in the history of God's chosen people of Israel.

So David is reflecting, if you will, on how an elect one of God glories in God's great knowledge because if you don't know you're God's choice, if God hasn't chosen you to be

one to whom he's going to bestow favor on, then what we're about to read would terrify you. It wouldn't be a joyous thing, it would be a dreadful reality. But if you know you're God's, that somehow in God's infinite ability and in God's infinite wisdom and in grace and love beyond human comprehension he chose to show his unmerited favor toward you, then these glorious truths become a blessing and a joy to your heart.

Well, he talks about God's omniscience. Let's look at verses 1 through 6 and then we'll try to unpack it a little bit. He says,

1 O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. 3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. 5 You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.

That's another picture of God's saving grace on his life. Verse 6,

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.

Now, in verse 1 he says the Lord has searched me and known me. Now David isn't in effect talking that, "God is searching me out and testing me to see if I'm being true to him." Now look: God knew what David was. He was what we are: a wretched failure before a true and holy God. But he's saying, "You come to me in this loving covenant faithfulness," and he's not in a sense saying, "You know me and search me out to try me out all the time. I just know that this is you working in my life continually. I'm deeply aware of your omniscience, your presence in my life."

Look at verse 2. He amplifies on this. He said, "You know when I sit down, you know when I rise up and You can understand my thoughts from afar." So here he talks about God knows when he's passive, when he's just sitting down. God knows all about when he's active, what he's doing when he rises up. He says, "You know all of my thoughts from afar." In other words, before our thoughts come and are formed in our minds he knows them. It doesn't mean God is way off but he still knows our thoughts, he means when our thoughts are far from our brain God knows them. That's quite omniscient, is it not? God knows the beginning from the end. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows everything. You see, God's eternal. He's not subject to time and so things that unfold in time are already past tense to him because he has an eternal perspective. So David says, "This is glorious that you even know my thoughts when they are still far away from my own mind." One scholar points out that the Hebrew verbs here are in the perfect tense which means these things are continuing to be in effect in his life, that is, this is the ever present constant reality David realizes about his relationship with God.

Now, look at verse 3. He says, "You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways." When he says you scrutinize my path, the path

means my journeyings. He's saying, "Even if I travel far from home, you know everything. You even scrutinize all the tiny details of everywhere I go and everything I do while I'm traveling: where I'm going to stop to spend the night; what I'm going to eat for supper. Whatever it is, you know it all very well." Now, this has got to be written in reflection of the false idols of the people of his day. They could just put their idol in a back room and go on a trip and forget about their idol for a while and come home. Like the guy over in Decatur with his little idol in his gas station, give him a glass of chocolate milk and a couple of quarters and be done with it. That's literally...and nothing has changed in thousands of years. People who worship idols, that's basically what they do. They give them a token offering or service and then they kind of let that idol be the sponge that soaks up their failure or error of the last week and some people try to treat the true God of heaven that way. They view Sunday as just something I've got to do to come and soak up the sin of my past week.

So David says, "You're not that kind of God we can just set off and manipulate and come to you. You are there scrutinizing me every step of the way." The word "scrutinize" there is the same Hebrew word for "winnowing the wheat," when they would take the wheat with those winnowing tools and they would bounce it in the air and it would separate it out. In other words, "God, you're separating all the minute details of everything about my travel life." He says, "You are intimately acquainted," in verse 3. That means much more than a casual knowledge.

Then verse 4, "Even before there is a word on my tongue," he's really already said this once, he's reaffirming it, "Behold, O LORD, You know it all." That is, "Before the thoughts in my brain are collected into speech, you know every word I'm going to speak." That's a thorough knowledge. Now, meditating on that knowledge when you are not yet converted and you have a natural conscience that condemns you is quite frightening but for David to know he rests in the covenant loving faithfulness of a holy God who has chosen to forgive him, that's a glorious thing beyond compare.

I think one of the glories is if God knows us that thoroughly yet still completely loves us, we could never be lost. Do you get that? You see, there's some part of you that thinks, "Well, you know, there's a little bit about me and there's a little bit about what I think and what I feel and what I do that God might not be in on all that." No, the psalmist says, "Before you do it, he has scrutinized every minute part of it and he loves you intensely." Not because you're special but because he's that kind of a God. What a glory that is. What an encouragement.

A little further there in verse 5, he says, "You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me." The idea of enclosing me, the idea here is to make something secure. It's what you would do if you have a valuable object and you pack it very well. You cover it over and you cover it behind. You secure it very, very well. So David says, "No matter where I am or what I'm doing, I've come to realize I am in God's presence, I'm under God's protection and when I need it, I have God's power."

Now, look at verse 6. Then he says, just thinking on what I've told you so far, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it." David said, "God knows all my thinkings, all my doings and it's so complete, his knowledge and power are so far above the abilities of the being called man that we have to just punt, if you will, and say, 'I can't even enter this thing. It's too big. It's too wonderful. It's too high.'" Verse 6, "I cannot attain to it." To put it mildly, he says, "Our mind cannot begin to fathom the depths of the mind of God."

What a God he is and that's one of the reasons why I say these basic things ought to be taught to kids. They need to come forth into their teenage years marveling over the transcendent and infinite greatness of God. I'm very concerned that in far too many Christian circles today children grow up learning Bible stories but not knowing too much about the great God in the story and behind the story. Knowing the story is important. Knowing the narrative is important but it is definitely secondary to knowing what God is saying about himself in the story. You know, we can go on and on about that. Just knowing the facts of the narrative can lead to a lot of haughtiness and pride but if you know the God behind the narrative, it leads to humility and yieldedness and submissiveness to God.

He said, "I just can't attain it." The prophet said in Isaiah 55:9, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts." It's kind of what the psalmist is saying is, "First of all, I am proclaiming the greatness of God's omniscience."

Now secondly, he shifts over to another aspect of God as far as God's attributes go. Now he wants to speak of God's presence with him in his omnipresence. His omnipresence. His omniscience, he knows everything about me. His omnipresence, he's always there with me. I know we've hit on some of this but he's going to amplify it even more beginning in verse 7. He says,

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

Now look, this is more than just poetry that a gifted writer is writing, this is the inmost experience of David from his heart. He's not trying to get away with pondering what might happen like he's tried to get under the reach of God, he's just saying, "If I go anywhere, if I try to flee anywhere, you're there." He has no desire to get away from God, he's just saying that, "If you did try you'd never out ran you, never get away from you." He said, "I can go to the further most place and you are there."

Look at verse 8, he said, "If I ascend to heaven," That's about as far as you can go. He said, "You are there." Verse 8, "If I make my bed in Sheol," or you could say hell or the place of the dead, that's as low as you can go. He says, "behold, You are there." One of the things that we try to remind ourselves of is that God is omnipresent and often will teach people that there's a place of eternal punishment and if we're not careful, we can get a little out of balance by saying, "And God's not there." That's wrong. God is in hell. A

lot of people who live without God in this life and reject God in this life and ignore God in this life, they say, "Well, I'll just go to hell and I'll not have to deal with God." No, you're going to go to hell and run straight into God.

He says, "If I go to Sheol, thou art there." He's not there in his love. He's not there in his grace. He's not there in his mercy. He's there in his wrath. He's there in his retribution. He's there in his judgment but God is in hell. How can he not be there? He's God. If you limit a realm from where God is not present, he's no longer God. David is not teaching the doctrine of eternal punishment but he is saying, "Go to the depths of hell or the heights of heaven and God's presence is there." Do you understand, my friend, you will not get away from him? No matter where you go, no matter what you do. You can go to the further most place and then he says, you can travel the fastest and you still can't get away from God.

Look at verse 9,

9 If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,
10 Even there Your hand will lead me.

When he talks about taking the wings of the dawn he means that lightning fast flash of the first rays of the sunshine as they clear the eastern boundary flashing to the uttermost. That means actually that first ray of light bursting across. You can't see that, it's so fast. That is literally the speed of light. He said, "Travel the speed of light and I find out not only are you there, you're leading the way. Nothing is out in front of you. Nothing is faster than you."

Then he says, "I always have your continued direction and protection. Verse 10,

10 Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold
of me.

Now, he says lead me in the sense, of course, of, "You are the one who will be guiding my every step in everything I do." That is one of the mind-boggling realities of knowing God that we choose our own path and we choose to sin but even in our steps, God accomplishes his perfect ends concerning us. He did not offer your sin. He did not induce you to sin or is responsible for your sin but whatever path you walk in, at the end of the day you'll find, "God led me through this for his own glory and my own good." He is that sovereign.

When he talks about your right hand, the second part of verse 10, he's talking about the right hand of strength. If you are a right-hand man, you're the strong one. You're the one someone relies on, that is, the authority relies upon. He said, "You will be right there for me no matter how far I may go, no matter how fast I may travel, your right hand is there for me.

Now look at verse 11,

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," 12 Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.

Now, he's talking about in verse 11, absolute darkness like as many of you probably have been down in one of the caves that you can go up to Kentucky or other places and they'll have a little time when the guide will say, "Okay, grab somebody's hand. We're going to turn off the lights." And they turn off the lights and it's just cave dark. You can't see anything and the psalmist says, "Get in that kind of place," and we kind of get the feeling like we can lose God's gaze on us if we get in a real dark place but that's not true.

Verse 12, "Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You." We had a fellow in our church years ago, I've told you this, I think, a time or 2 but when you preach 35 years sometimes you get to repeat yourself some. He said before he came to Christ he was a bouncer in one of our little nightclubs around here and I think at that time the law said they had to close down at 2 o'clock in the morning. He said, "You know, it's amazing. Those people are out there just drinking and partying and dancing and having a good time. The band will stop. They'll turn the lights on and they scurry like roaches. Just running." He thought "Well, what's the difference?" It was the light because they think somehow, "God, I guess, can see me now. I've got to run and hide." No, God saw everything. God saw everything that's been going on the whole night.

A family told me that, they're old like me now but when they were a child, their dad took them into a restaurant and they, I think, the whole family was there and they walked by the lounge area, you know, the front of the restaurant and the lights were real dark in there and the little girl said, "Daddy, why is it always so dark in there?" He said, "Honey, the girls, the women are so ugly in there you can't look at them with the lights on." Well, there might be some truth to that but the point is: why is it dark in a lounge? We think we are hiding but the psalmist says, "Night and day are alike to you." There's no hiding from God. He's just omnipresent. He's everywhere all the time at the same time.

Now, notice some marvelous things, the third subpoint here. He has talked about God's omniscience, "God knows everything about me all the time even my thoughts before they are formed in my brain." God knows all of those and then he said, he's omnipresent, "I can't go too far, too high, too low, too fast. I can't get in a dark enough place. God's always, always ever present all the time." Now, notice he talks about his omnipotence. His omnipotence and it's seen in this case in God's creation of man. Notice verse 13,

13 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.

Now, inward parts teaches us 2 things. When he says, "You formed my inward parts," it means God controlled the initiation of life. God was involved in the initiation of life. Secondly, God was involved in forming every part of my very life. He was the initiator and he was the continuing weaver and former of my life. God assembled me and he put

me together. Mother Nature did not do this, God the Father did this, the psalmist said. You see, life begins at conception.

In verse 16, let's turn over there just a little closer, "Your eyes have seen my unformed substance." From the moment you are a one-celled human being in the womb of your mother, God was involved there. That's why we will never, ever budge on the issue of abortion. We believe in the sanctity of human life and what thoughtful Christian men and leaders said years ago has come to fruition. Once you start down that funnel of being able to redefine what life is and redefine when life begins, then the dominoes just keep falling and keep falling and keep falling and they've done that.

C. Everett Koop was the Surgeon General under Ronald Reagan's administration and C. Everett Koop was a Presbyterian and a committed Christian. As a matter of fact, many of the pediatric surgical instruments that are used today, he designed them himself. He was a brilliant man and he never budged one inch on his convictions about what science teaches about human life. I found this little quote when he was Surgeon-in-Chief at Philadelphia's Children's Hospital. He said, "The story of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ leaves no room for doubt. The angel told Joseph, 'That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.' From the moment of conception, God had entered human life. Pregnancy begins with fertilization, not with implantation." Then he said, "The change of the definition of when pregnancy begins by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists lacks integrity." Here's what he's referring to: many, many, many years ago, the scientific community said, "Alright, we're just going to arbitrarily decide a woman is not pregnant when there's the fertilization of the egg because there's about a week or so before the egg is attached to the wall of the uterus. We're going to wait at least a week," and so they opened the door and said, "We're going to crack open this door and say for those 7 days it's not really a baby. It's not really a life. She's not really pregnant." A little bit later *Roe v Wade*. A little bit later a woman can kill any baby about any time. Do you see what we're talking about? One little domino falls and then the next one and then the next one and then the next one. At risk of getting on a hobby horse, Baptist churches, evangelical churches a century ago, a century and a half ago, began to get lax on accountability and discipline in the church. They began to look the other way at fornication. They began to ignore adultery. They began to ignore unbiblical divorce. And now we've got wanton, active homosexuality in many of our churches. One domino falls, the next domino falls, the next domino falls. You see, we have no moral authority, no credibility on anything anymore in the church at large.

This is one powerful picture. C. Everett Koop was right, when we let them not based on any scientific reality, it was a philosophical move, the same way the American Psychiatric Association just one day decided homosexuality is no longer abnormal. We just declare it normal. Based on what? Some of you are too young to understand this stuff. You've got to realize there's been a radical change in philosophy in American culture and it is that we are throwing out the objective truths of the Judeo-Christian ethic and we're coming now to what you would call sociological law or totally subjective truth. Whatever is true for you is true for you and it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks except there's a God in heaven who made man and made creation and made us to function

a certain way and gave us moral absolutes to cover in life so we can live with the best peace and prosperity and sanity and avoid the anarchy and the chaos that always comes when a culture begins to decide, "We can make our own laws and snub our noses at God." So here's just a little example from C. Everett Koop. Used to be that the Christian truth that governed the definition of life in our culture was the moment of conception is a human being, then they started pushing the door open and you know where we are today.

Well, look at verse 14, he said,

14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.

Now, I'm going to close with this. As David says, "How wonderful it is." Now notice, folks, this is what 3,000 years ago. Science as we know it wasn't even thought of but David says, David by divine inspiration has a grasp into the complexities, the glory and even the miracle of God creating life. But listen to something: David knew enough to be awed but what about us? We know that every living creature is made up of microscopic cells so small that the letter "o" on this typewritten page would contain between 30-40,000 of them. Each microscopic cell is a world in itself containing an estimated 200 trillion tiny molecules of atoms. Each cell, in other words, is a micro-universe of almost unbelievable complexity. All these cells put together make up a living creature. Each cell has its own specialized function and each works to an intricate timetable which tells it when to grow, when to divide and when to make hormones and when to die. Every minute of every day some 3 billion of these cells in the body die and the same number are created to take their place. During any given moment in the life of any one of these cells, thousands of events are taking place, each one being precisely coordinated at the molecular level by countless triggers. The human body has more than a million million of them. A million in each square inch of skin, 30 billion in the brain and billions of red blood cells in the veins. Obviously such a complicated and unerring development of cells cannot possibly be the result of evolutionary chance.

David proclaimed, "He created me." There is better science in this book than in some of the leading scientific laboratories in the world. Why? Because men do not humble themselves before an objective and true God who has revealed truth about himself and about man in this sacred volume. David is just overwhelmed with it. Think about 3,000 years ago a man writing those things and now that we have scientific understanding, what do we find out? We find out it just affirms the truth of that old book. And all of God's people said, amen.

Let's stand together.