

Who Am I: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made *Psalm 139*

Introduction (Show video: “What Kind of Asian Are You?”)

Who are you? No. Really. Who are you? At the core of your being—that part of you that makes you... you—who are you? Are you, at your core, a Wyomingite? Are you, at your core, an American? Are you African American? Are you Asian-American? Are you Native-American? Are you smart? Are you dumb? Are you poor? Are you wealthy? Who are you?

Permit me to ask you another question: “What sets you apart from the rest of creaturehood?” Some eastern thought gurus will tell you that you are who you think you are. Others will tell you that it depends on the socio-economic class you were born into. Some will tell you that it really depends on the kind of influence you are having or had on society.

In the day and age we find ourselves in, it seems that you can be whatever you want to be, believe yourself to be, or identify with as being. Burger King’s slogan used to be: “You can have it your way” but has since switched it to: “Be your way.” The question I really hope to answer throughout this sermon series is simply: “Who are you?”

When it comes to the big questions of life, we all begin with certain assumptions. Because not one person here this morning witnessed the birth of the cosmos, you assume one of two things: there is someone/something responsible for its beginning, or it is simply the result of random chance. The only way I can answer the question: “Who am I?” is that I must begin with the assumption that all of life is either the result of an intelligent Being who created it or all of life is the result of random chance. So, for the sake of transparency, I want you to know that I am beginning this sermon series with the assumption that the God I read about in the Bible is responsible for the creation and the design of all that exists. This is the same assumption David had when he wrote Psalm 139.

Before I unpack Psalm 139 for you this morning, I want to state the two conclusions David reached about life that will serve as the foundation for this sermon series. So here are David’s two conclusions:

1. God is who he is and there is nothing that I can do to change him.
2. I am who I am because of who God is.

Let me warn you that we will spend most of our time on David’s first conclusion, and that it will be theologically dense. I promise you that if you are willing to go deep with me, you will not only be helped, but you will discover diamonds that will serve you for years to come. David’s second conclusion will serve as the application for his first conclusion.

God is Who He is and There is Nothing I Can Do to Change Him

There are three characteristics of God that the Psalmist wrestles with that will either cause a person to run from God or to God. Three characteristics of God that will either be for you bad news or good news. These three characteristics are seen in verses 1-2, 7-8, and verse 13; consider what these verses are saying about God and about you:

“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.” (vv. 1-2)

“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, you are there!” (vv. 7-8)

“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” (v. 13)

The characteristics of God that are described in these verses are the Omniscience, Omnipresence, and Omnipotence of God. Omniscience is God’s ability to know all things. Omnipresence is God’s ability to be present everywhere and anywhere at the same time. Omnipotence is God’s absolute power over all things. A God who is all knowing, all present, and all powerful is a threat to our desire to be independent. This is not good news to a culture whose motto is “Be your way.”

One of the treasures of the West is William Ernest Henley’s poem, *Invictus*:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

For David, a God who is all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful is a God he could not be free from. Do you see what the implications are for your life if the God of Psalm 139 does indeed exist? There is no room for another captain of your soul if the God of Psalm 139 exists.

If God is omniscient, then not only does he know your thoughts before you know them, but as David rightfully concludes, it is he who searches, **“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”** (vv. 3-5). The Hebrew word for *hem* can also be translated *barricade*, *bind*, *encircle*, or *lay siege*. What do you do with a God with whom all of our thoughts are known and motives understood? A God who is all-knowing is either a threat or a guide. David’s response is appropriate: **“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it”** (v. 6). In other words David concludes: “In light of such knowledge, my mind is blown. I really cannot comprehend that he is that familiar with the likes of me!”

If God is omnipresent, then his ability to be everywhere and anywhere at all times means that there is no place that I am able to hide from his sight: **“If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, 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”** (vv. 8-9). We all know that God’s presence is in heaven, but his presence can also be found in *sheol*, which is the grave. What’s David’s point? His point is that even in death, I cannot escape the all-present God! If I run to where the sun is rising or hop on a boat to sail towards where it is setting... there is no escaping, you oh God! Henley began his poem:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

David’s response was that no matter where he ran, there was One he could not escape. Is this good news? In verses 11-12, David seems to think so: **“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.”** In the darkness is loneliness, suffering, danger, disease, and absolute terror. Listen, have you ever stopped to consider why one of the final things promised to the people of God when redemption is complete and everything is made new is that there will be no more night (see Rev. 22:3-5)? Darkness is not the time or place for thriving and human flourishing. David says that to be free from God means that there will be no omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent hand to guide you; there will be no thriving.

Henley concluded his poem *“I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.”* However, David responded that if he really wanted to be the master of his fate, or the captain of his soul, that there would be no omniscient, omnipresent God to hold and guide him. To be free from that hand is to be lost in the darkness.

God is omnipotent. If God is all powerful, then what that means is that he can do all things and anything... and just in case you are tempted to ask me the question: “Oh, so can God create a rock so big that he cannot lift it?” You can ask this question on a 3 x 5 card and submit it for our Q & A at the end of this series, but let me put your mind at ease by pointing out something that is one of the points of this Psalm: God will not do anything that violates his character. Remember that! Write it down in your Bible or on your notes paper and commit it to memory: “God will not do anything that violates his character.”

As the only being in existence who is all-powerful, he is the creator. This means that we are created beings. There is a creator and we are the result of his handiwork. Matt Chandler, in his sermon on Genesis 1, made the following observation: “You and I are created beings, we are not the creator. We have been created and that is great news. Here’s the great news for 2020: You’re not the point... that is the most freeing thing ever. The more that you are the point, the more you will jack up your life. The more that you are not the point, the more opportunity you will have to be free.”

Listen to how David connects the dots from God’s omniscience, to his omnipresence, to his omnipotence: “**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**” (vv. 13-14).

What makes me fearfully and wonderfully made in the eyes of the Creator? We, the created, are separate from the rest of the animal kingdom, for we bear his image. Psalm 139:13-14 is David’s application to Genesis 1:27, “**So God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**” And unlike me, the all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful one does not make mistakes. What makes me... me is not what I think I am or what others say that I am, but who God declares me to be.

So here is the application to David’s three conclusions for who God is:

I Am Who I Am Because of Who God Is

We will explore this more in the weeks to come, but I want you to follow the logic of the Psalmist just a little longer. If God is all-powerful, then he must be infinite and perfect at all times. What this means for everything else about God is that he is limitless. What I am about to say next is so important: What God’s omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence means is that God is equally limitless in his justice, in his love, in his holiness, in his grace, and in his goodness.

What we tend to do with God is see or understand him as the sum of all his attributes (character traits); we understand his different attributes as parts that make up the whole. When we do this, we can wind up making more of his love than we do of his holiness. We can make more of his grace than of his justice or his righteousness. One of the first things that we do when we do this is, especially when life does not go the way we want it to go, is that we develop a distorted understanding of God’s infinite goodness. In other words, he is not good enough because of what happened or is happening to me. When we pit one of God’s attributes against another, we make him out to be manic-depressive, schizophrenic, or at best conflicted.

For God to be God, he must be all his attributes equally; his justice is equal with his grace, his love is equal with his holiness, his goodness his limitless without ever minimizing any of his other character traits. This is why David was able to conclude that an all-knowing, all present, and all-powerful God was not one to run from, but one to rejoice in: “**I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well**” (v. 14).

What was his conclusion? What was his response to a God who is limitless in every way? “**How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them**” (v. 17)! In other words, I know that because of who you are God, I am what I am: “**fearfully and wonderfully made.**” Our response to Psalm 139 should be: “I am who I am not only because God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, but because he is holy, because he is righteous, because he is just, because he is full of grace, because he is love, and because he is good regardless how I feel or the emotional or physical wounds I bear.

Application

What I want you to hear very clearly today is that you are fearfully and wonderfully made by a God who image you bear and one who does not make mistakes. You are not a mistake. When you were conceived in your mother’s womb, God did not miss something. The culture will lead you to believe that God messed up with your birth. The world wants you to think that you know better than God regarding how you are to use your body and what it means to be human. The culture wants you to question whether God’s design for your body is good. Listen. You are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of the all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful God!

What we learn from the Bible is that beyond all that has shaped who I am, there is a common bond the links us all together and that is we are all sons and daughters of Adam. Beyond the color of my skin, beyond my family name, beyond my experiences and failures I am a descendant of Adam just like you. The implications of our ancestry being linked to Adam and Eve are staggering because it we are then forced to look at people not in racial categories, but in ethnic categories all sharing the same ancestor. So, what does it mean to be a son or daughter of Adam?

- 1) **To be a son/daughter of Adam is to be one made in the image of God.** In Genesis 1, we learn that when God created Adam and Eve, He created them in the image of God, for the Bible says: “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” (Gen. 1:27). The Bible says that when God did this, He pronounced it to be very good.

We are unique in comparison to the rest of creation because we were created in image of the living God. We were created with the emotion, intellect, and will for the purpose of worshiping the living God. Adam and Eve experienced an unhindered relationship with their creator and even fellowshiped with the One whom the Angles cry: “Holy, holy, holy...” face to face. Before anything else we were created as image bearers of the living God.

- 2) **To be a son/daughter of Adam is to be human.** Adam and Eve did not evolve from monkeys or some primordial slim that happened to be struck with lightning. Such ideas may give reason for us to think that only one closely related to monkeys in intelligence could invent such silly ideas, but they too share the same thing we do. We are all human beings made of flesh and blood with capacity to dream, invent, weep, laugh, love, work, and even worship. Yellow, red, black, or white we all belong to one race: Human, and our humanity is reflected through many different cultures and ethnicities.

- 3) **To be a son/daughter of Adam is to be fallen.** Thirdly, to be a son/daughter of Adam is to be tragically fallen. When we come to Genesis 3, we learn of the most horrible event in human history: Adam's willful and deliberate rebellion against the living God. God told Adam that he could eat from all three in Eden except one. Tragically, Adam chose to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We learn from the Bible that Adam's rebellion resulted in a nature being passed down from his generation down through all related to him, and that nature is sin. This is the reason the Bible gives for why the world is the way that it is today.

Because we are all descendants of Adam, we are all genetically and spiritually flawed; we are all born with a sin nature. Adam's sin accomplished two things: (1) When Adam sinned, he did so as a representative of the whole human race. Romans 5:12 says very clearly that "***sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...***" (2) Adam's sin was and is spread down from parent to child. I am sure you have heard this verse before, but it we must not forget it; David said in Psalm 51:5, "***Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.***"

This is why God sent David's greater son, one who is a greater Adam, to live the life we were created to live – a perfect life. Jesus was the perfect human in our place, and because he was equally God in the flesh, he was willing, qualified, and able to reconcile God's perfect justice, holiness, righteousness, grace, love, and goodness by dying in our place for our sins on a cross meant for us. The Bible states: "**For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.... For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life**" (Rom. 5:6, 10).

This is why the Jesus said something that speaks into Henely's famous poem: "**I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life**" (John 8:12).