

God Knows

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[0 : 00] If we ask, wherein is the greatness of this psalm, we find the answer is in the first word, Lord.

The psalmist immediately directs our attention to him, not to himself, nor to the situation he is in, but to God.

It is of God that he intends to speak, and not of himself. That's what E.J. Young wrote about this psalm. And you can say why he would say that.

You see, there's a temptation for us to read through this psalm and to say, in the words of the old song, it's all about me. Me, myself and I, everyone knows it's all about me.

And in the age of self, we often have that approach to the Bible, that every time we go to it, we are going there thinking it's really all about me.

[1 : 04] But it's not a matter of, you know, whether it's all about me or all about the Lord, because sometimes we have to recognize it's both.

When the apostle Paul wrote these words, the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Who's it all about? Well, it is all about Jesus. Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us.

And there is that fixed focus on him. And this was indeed what Paul was determined to do. I'm determined to know nothing among you, said Christ and him crucified.

It's all about Jesus. But it's also all about Paul. Can you not hear almost the tone of astonishment in his voice as he writes these words?

[2 : 04] He loved me. Can you believe it? And he gave himself for me. This is extraordinary. So at one level, it's about Christ and what he has done.

And another level, it's all about Paul and what Christ has done for him. And so it is with the psalm, Psalm 139.

It is all about God. But it is also all about you and me. It is here for God's glory.

But it's also there to give to us comfort. And I think right now, that is something that we particularly need.

I saw advertised some time ago, this book. It's called The Inside Out Revolution. I'm not sure if you can make out the subtitle on the screen there.

[3 : 07] But it says, the only thing you need to know to change your life forever. Let me read to you what is the kind of introduction to the book. Would you like to experience amazing clarity, peace and freedom, even in the midst of challenging circumstances?

In this groundbreaking new book, bestselling author Michael Neal shares an extraordinary new understanding of how life works that turns traditional psychology on its head.

This revolutionary approach is built around three simple principles that explain where our feelings come from and how our experience of life can transform for the better in a matter of moments.

Understanding these principles allows you to tap into the deepest intelligence behind life. Access your natural wisdom and guidance and unleash your limitless creative power.

You'll be able to live with less stress, greater ease and a sense of connection to the larger unfolding of life. Welcome to the space where miracles happen.

[4 : 18] Are you ready to begin? These are big claims to be made by a kind of self-help book. But I would argue that I do not know the merits of this book or not.

Never read it. But I would suggest to you that the claims that it makes belong to this book that we have in front of us, our Bibles. And perhaps even to this psalm that we have read together.

Do you want to experience clarity, peace and freedom, even in the midst of challenging circumstances? Then welcome to the space where miracles happen.

Are you ready to begin? Let's look at this psalm together. What is it telling us that can be life transforming, that can really help us, even in the most challenging of circumstances, to know peace and freedom and clarity?

The first thing is that God knows me. That God knows me. The psalmist begins saying, Lord, you have searched me and you know me.

[5 : 38] You know when I sit down, you know when I rise, you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways before a word is in my tongue.

You know it completely, O Lord. He knows who I am. When you look at the Bible, you'll come across all these characters, like in the Old Testament, say Moses.

Moses or Samuel. And these characters needed to be, well, they needed to have God introduced to them. They didn't know God.

And they needed to have God introduced to them. But they did not need to be introduced to God. God knew all about Moses.

And God knew all about Samuel. You come into the New Testament and you look at the person of Jesus, you see the same thing happening. Think of somebody like Nathaniel.

[6 : 41] Or perhaps the woman at the well in Samaria. These were people who needed to have Jesus introduced to them. But Jesus didn't need to have them introduced to him.

He knew everything about them. He knew every detail of their lives. So he knows who I am. And he knows who you are.

He also knows where you are. We're told here that the psalmist says, you know where I am. You know when I rise.

You know everything. So the idea is that, you know, he knows our exact location. So right now, you know, he knows that I'm here in my sitting room in Patree.

He knows that you are wherever you are at the moment. That is not some kind of news to him. He is familiar with that.

[7 : 40] And we're told that it doesn't matter where you go. He knows that you are there. Again, we'll come back to that later. He also knows what you do.

When I sit, when I rise, you perceive my thoughts from afar. He knows your every action. He knows your every thought. He knows your every feeling.

The Bible speaks of us being naked and laid bare before the eyes of God with whom we have to do. And that's the idea is that he is seeing everything that's happening in our lives.

He knows what we say. Speaking with the younger folk earlier about what we say and why we say it and so on. God, we're told, knows every word before it even comes out of our mouths.

What is it that the psalmist is trying to tell us here? He is saying this God, he knows you thoroughly, completely, inside out.

[8 : 40] There is nothing that he is not aware of that is going on in your life at this precise moment. He knows you completely. But the second thing that the psalmist is telling us is that he is with us.

In the Bible, we read about some people who just want to get away from God. So like Jonah trying to run away. You get those who hate the thought of going anywhere or doing anything without God.

So we mentioned Moses. Unless you go with me, don't let me take another step, he says. And then there are those also who would seek to almost banish God out of their lives.

They're the ones that are kind of referred to at the end of this psalm. But we see it also when you think of the cry of the crowd when Jesus was in trial. Crucify him, crucify him. That is what they were trying to do.

Banish Jesus from their lives. Banish Jesus from their lives.

[10 : 12] Some kind of interview about the meaning of life. And he was being asked about God. And in that interview, he spoke about his very kind of strong atheism.

His antagonism against God. And mainly it's because he's saying as he looks around the world and he sees all the suffering that's going on. All the terrible things and horrible things that are going on. He's saying, how can there be a God?

And he said, if there is, then the God who created this universe, if he created it like this, that he's quite clearly, he describes as being a maniac and totally selfish.

And this is what he goes on to say. He says, atheism is not just about not believing there's a God. On the assumption there is one, what kind of God is he?

It's perfectly apparent that he's monstrous, utterly monstrous and deserves no respect. He says, the moment you banish him, your life becomes simpler, purer, cleaner, more worth living, in my opinion.

[11 : 17] So that's what he's saying. The moment you banish him, your life becomes simpler, purer, cleaner. In some ways, what I find sad about that is that he is missing the point completely that this God, this God is always with us, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

And that is what the psalmist is saying here. He's saying that there is nowhere that I can go where God is not. If I go up to the heavens, he's there.

If I go to the depth, he is there. If I go to the uttermost ends of the sea, he is there. And his right hand is there holding me and leading me and will not let me go. So whatever Stephen Fry was saying, what the psalmist is saying is this, that, you know, if you're at work, God is there with you.

And whatever problems you're facing in work, God is there with you. If you're at home and there are difficulties at home, whatever difficulties they are, God is there with you.

If you're at school and you're facing all sorts of anxiety or problems or difficulties in school, then God is there with you in all of these things.

[12 : 37] He's saying not just is he with you in all these places, but in all your circumstances. Throughout the kind of highs and lows of life, throughout the happy moments and the sad moments, throughout the good times and the difficult times, he is always there.

In fact, he is saying even in the darkest of moments, when it feels that everything around you is just black and you cannot see and you cannot understand.

Even then, he is saying God is still with you. This is why we sang in Psalm 23. Even when I walk through the valley of the shadows, I don't need to fear evil because God is with me.

Goodness and mercy, God's goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. He is always with me. When Paul wrote to the church in Rome and they were going through difficult and dark times.

And he's saying, do you know what? There is nothing that can separate you from God and the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord.

[13 : 42] So he is saying, this God, he absolutely, he knows you thoroughly and he is with you always. The next thing he says in this psalm is this, that God made me.

He's saying God made us. You and I, we're all made by God. And there's this beautiful kind of description here. Now, I know it's poetic.

This is not a kind of scientific manual here, but it is very poetic, the way that he puts the way in which we have been made by God. We're created.

You created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful.

I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depth of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.

[14 : 41] And all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. We have been handcrafted by God. Uniquely made by him.

Now, that has huge significance and implications, especially when we think of the issue of the sanctity of life. If we look at this teaching, it's got a lot to tell us about abortion, about euthanasia, about disability.

There's so many things that we could focus on in this particular passage of scripture. But forgive me if I go off on a wee bit of a tangent here.

I saw a report this week that said twins peak with more born than ever before. So this was in the news and saying that across the world, there's more twins born than ever before at the moment.

I think it's come to a peak now and will start to decline. But maybe it's partly why I'm doing this sermon today, because it reminded me of something that was doing the rounds online at one point about two babies that were in the mother's womb.

[15 : 56] And it kind of connects to this point, but also to the previous point about atheism and so on. So this is how it goes. This is about two babies.

In a mother's womb, there were two babies. One asked the other, do you believe in life after delivery? The other replied, why, of course, there has to be something after delivery.

Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what will be later. Nonsense said the first. There's no life after delivery. What kind of life would that be? The second said, I don't know, but there'll be more light than here.

Maybe we'll walk with our legs and eat from our mouths. Maybe we'll have other senses that we can't understand now. The first replied, that's absurd.

Walking is impossible. And eating with our mouths, ridiculous. The umbilical cord supplies nutrition and everything we need. But the umbilical cord is so short, life after delivery is to be logically excluded.

[16 : 58] The second insisted, well, I think there's something. And maybe it's different than it is here. Maybe we won't need this physical cord anymore. The first replied, nonsense.

And moreover, if there is life, then why has no one ever come back from there? Delivery is the end of life. And in the after delivery, there's nothing but darkness and silence and oblivion.

It takes us nowhere. Well, I don't know, said the second. But currently, but certainly we will meet mother and she will take care of us. The first replied, mother, you actually believe in mother?

That's laughable. If mother exists, then where is she now? The second said, she's all around us. We're surrounded by her. We're aware of her. It is in her that we live.

Without her, this world would not and could not exist, said the first. Well, I don't see her. So it's only logical that she doesn't exist. To which the second replied, sometimes when you're in silence and you focus and you really listen, you can perceive her presence and you can hear her loving voice calling down from above.

[18 : 12] Again, remember, this is not a theological document, but you see the point that is being made. Well, the psalmist here, when he thinks about us being made by God, he is not really focusing on the sanctity of life.

The point that he is trying to make is this, that God is there at the very beginning of our existence, that he pieces us together, that we are uniquely made by him.

But then there is this purpose and plan for us. There is this purpose and plan where he has designed for us, if you like, a path for us to walk in our lives.

And he has ordained every single day that we live in our lives. There is nothing that is accidental or random or chaotic or by mistake.

And we're being told that throughout every single part of our lives, as that plan unfolds, that God is ever present. He's in every breath.

[19 : 19] He's in every step. He is here. He is always, always here with us. That's the point the psalmist is making. I'm seeing the time, so we'll need to come to the last part.

This was the difficult part I said to you. When the psalmist is saying some harsh words, difficult words for us to read and us to hear. But to try and understand them, you need to almost think of maybe, again, a kind of modern day context.

Again, I was reading in the news this week about things that were happening in Nigeria. And there are these groups, these almost gangs of men going around, and they are attacking particularly places where students are at the moment, whether it be schools or colleges or whatever.

And they are abducting, they're capturing a number of these students, and they are doing some horrendous and untalked things to them. They're kind of godless, bloodthirsty men.

And that's what the psalmist is speaking about here. He is saying some people have so rejected God, have so turned away from God, that they've lost all kind of feeling and compassion, and they have become bloodthirsty men, and they're doing the most awful and atrocious things.

[20 : 32] And he is saying, I really distance myself from these men. I hate what they do. I hate what they represent. I hate the rejection of God that has turned them into these kind of people.

So that is what he is saying here. But then he goes on to say something else. He says, Lord, what I want you to do is to search me.

I want you to search my life, to search my heart. And I want you to show me your ways so that I will walk in your paths.

Last week, I had the great joy of going for a scan. It was an ultrasound scan. And it's amazing because the ultrasound scan can see not just what's on the outside, but can actually see what's in the inside.

And the idea is that they were looking to see if there was anything there that shouldn't be there. And lo and behold, I was told, Mr. MacDonald, you are the proud owner of some gallstones. Great. So probably they will have to be removed at some point.

[21 : 39] So the psalmist is saying this. He's saying, search me. Scan me. To see if there's anything in me that needs to be removed, to be taken away from my life.

Any kind of wrong thoughts, wrong feelings, wrong attitudes, all these things. Take that away from me. Because I reckon all that's in there. And I want that to be removed.

And then I want you to lead me, to guide me in the everlasting way. It's another way of saying, in your way. And he's already recognised in the psalm that this is what God does.

Remember earlier in the psalm, he's saying, wherever I go, you're there and your right hand leads me, guides me in what I do. So he has this prayer, as well as this confidence, that God would guide him and lead him as his life and the purpose of his life unfolds before him.

Forgive me, I know that today I've not been exactly very articulate in presenting this sermon to you. But what I'm trying to say is this, as you recognise just now the difficulty of the situation that we're in, everything that has gone on in the past year and perhaps even before then.

[22 : 57] As perhaps, even as you look forward to this week, and maybe your attitude to the week is a bit like this, with this woman hiding. You know, it's like, I don't want to face it. When I think of what's going on at work, I don't want to face it.

When I think of going back to school, I don't want to face it. When I think of another week in isolation, I don't want to face it. When I think about everything else that's happening, there's just things that are difficult and hard and I'm struggling with it.

Well, these are the truths I think that can transform that situation to give you that greater sense of peace. It is the fact that God knows you and he knows everything about you.

There is nothing that is hidden from him. Whatever you're thinking, whatever you're feeling, whatever you're going through, he knows. He knows you.

This psalm is telling us that God is with you always and everywhere. You may feel kind of isolated in your own home. God is with you always and everywhere.

[24 : 01] You may feel anxious about going back to school or work or whatever else. Remember, God is with you always and everywhere. You are not alone.

This psalm is telling us that God has a purpose and plan for you. Even when everything seems so chaotic just now and upside down, even when you feel like everything is out of control and that you have lost control of all the situations and circumstances in your life, remember that God has a purpose and a plan for you.

And even in everything that's happening just now, there is a purpose and a plan for you in your life. And then the last thing, God will guide you.

You're not just left to get on with it. He is leading you, directing you all the time as you look to him. So as you enter into this week, whatever your fears and concerns are, please remind yourself of these things.

God knows you. God is with you. God has a purpose for you and in everything that you're going through and that God will guide you.

[25 : 13] He will lead you in the ways that are everlasting. We pray that God would bless to us then just these few thoughts on his own holy word.