

The Infinite and Intimate God

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[0 : 0 0] theology matters and theology is really important theology after all is the study of God it literally means God knowledge theo coming from theos meaning God and ology meaning branch of knowledge and the reason it matters is because in the bible God's people are called to know God and to make God known everything we do in life is directly informed by our knowledge of God your knowledge of God or lack thereof will shape the course of your life now there is there are different kinds of knowledge in life isn't there there's empirical knowledge that is facts based knowledge there is theoretical knowledge and there is experiential knowledge empirical knowledge might tell us that a tomato and I'm sure you've heard this although it's disputed scientifically speaking is actually a fruit and not a vegetable contrary to popular belief theoretical knowledge might lead us to assume that we should therefore include it in our fruit salad but experiential knowledge would tell us that's probably not the best idea the older you get the more experiential knowledge you acquire and the wiser you should become theoretically good knowledge is always practical good knowledge is always practical good theology should I say is always practical and transformative it doesn't remain in the intellectual sphere but it affects how you live and what you do so if you're in the body in a bible study and you come out saying that was a good study you were you were considering the holiness of God but then you you fail to act on the implications for your life then actually it probably wasn't that good of a discussion after all at least not theologically speaking and the reason I say all this to you at the outset is in psalm 139 we see David the psalmist engage in some amazing theology as he ponders the the infinite and the intimate God of all creation and David's reasons for doing this are twofold firstly he wants to to separate himself out from all those who deliberately make a practice of evil he doesn't want to separate himself out from all those who are in the world he doesn't want to be like the evil doers and the murderers he curses at the end of this psalm in verses 19 to 22 if they do not repent second he wants God to search him out to to thoroughly purge him of anything that might be offensive to God so that David might walk in the way everlasting he wants to live forever and as Boyce said it's hard to think of a better reason for theology than those

David is is not just a theologian giving us facts about God but he is a songsmith and he is a poet he's telling us about how his heart responds to those facts and this is why this psalm feels so personal it's why it feels so emotionally charged because it is his contemplation of God which we might call an exercise in theology has real life practical implications for his living and for his worship and it packs a sobering punch and as we'll see in this psalm it shakes him to his core so this morning as we look at psalm 139 along with David we're going to consider God's infinite and intimate attributes what God is like beginning with his omniscience looking at his omnipresence and finally his omnipotence now if those words freak you out a little bit because they are big words don't worry I'm going to explain them and unpack them to you as we go along so my aim this morning

God willing is just to encourage you and to help us be motivated by the knowledge of God to examine our lives that we too might walk in the way everlasting and walk with Jesus so firstly God's omniscience verses 1 to verses 6 omni means all science from the Latin scientia meaning knowledge in other words God has all knowledge knowledge God knows everything you have searched me Lord and you know me you know when I sit when I rise you perceive my thoughts from afar what does it mean that God has searched the psalmist well the Hebrew word is hakat and it's the same word that is used of

Joshua and Caleb when they spy out the promised land in numbers in other words God has gone deep down into the hidden recesses of David's being and spied him out done a survey and drawn up a report and God knows his true his true condition now back in February last year before the pandemic hit I told a friend that I was I was buying a new car and he said you know that you're getting ripped off it's just a question of how much now I must confess I know nothing about cars so when I'm going to buy a new car I'm looking at the exterior I'm looking at does it have nice shiny alloy wheels is it in a in a in a color that I like is it a bit sporty and does it have a nice face but my friend

Wilden who is an elder at our church he is a mechanic so when he looks at a car he's thinking about the inside and he would actually be able if he was allowed to to strip down a car and assess its inner condition knowing the condition of its inward parts you might say that Wilden can see into the heart of a car and in the same way God has the ability to see right into the psalmist's heart right into his being and God can see into my heart this morning and he can see into your heart this morning too Spurgeon paraphrases it like this and being Spurgeon he has a way with words he says you have searched me as if you were looking for contraband goods you have ransacked me you have gone down into my heart and I've spread out every secret part of my being the most intricate labyrinths of my spirit are all observed by you your search has been an effective one you have read the secrets of my soul when our friends look at us they see the outside we can put a good show on for our friends but God sees right into the inward person right deep down into the secret corners and we cannot deceive him we cannot hide from him he has all knowledge and David refers to this God as his

[9 : 23] Lord Lord being the English representation of Yahweh the personal covenant name of God as he revealed himself to his people Israel you see God is infinite but he is also intimate and deeply personal and wants to be known by his people he's not a distant and impersonal God but ever present with his people the great I am and David continues in verses 2 to 4 you know when I sit when I rise you perceive my thoughts from afar you discern my going out my lying down you're familiar with all my ways before a word is on my tongue Lord you know it completely the Lord's all powerful knowledge is comprehensive it is absolutely complete it's not lacking in any area there is nothing to know that God does not already know and David says he's acquainted with even the seemingly trivial things about us our standing our sitting our going out our lying down

God knows what we were going to do today before we did as Warren Rearsby says he knows our actions our location our thoughts our words our ways and here's a thought Hebrews chapter 4 verse 13 says nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account the word perceive in verse 2 means to distinguish and to discern with insight David's Lord isn't just gathering raw data about David but he is examining David's motives to determine why

David does the things that David does and you're probably thinking I don't even know why I do the things that I do but God does he knows the hidden secret motivations of our hearts and David says he's familiar with all my ways and he's familiar with all your ways the question is and a question I've asked myself many times is how do you feel about this God does his omniscience that is his complete knowledge of all things does it bring you comfort does it fill you with warm fuzzy feelings that God knows you like that or does it unnerve you a little does it unsettle you a bit that someone could possess that kind of knowledge about you forget cookies forget tracking websites that someone has that knowledge about you because how this knowledge makes you feel will actually color how you interpret the rest of this psalm and I actually think that's possibly intentional by the author

I think it's a poem of literary genius I've been fascinated with how different commentators view some of these words in both a positive light and a negative light he says in verse five you hem me in behind before and you lay your hand upon me have you ever heard of the expression knowledge is power well here God's omniscience means that he has total power power over his created creatures over his finite creatures and such a thought is intimidating because the psalmist says you place your hand over me it gives the image of cupping something in the hand like an insect on the table the psalmist knows that God has complete power over him now to those who walk with

God whose delight is in the law of God who doesn't sit in the counsel of the wicked as psalm 1 says or in the way of sinners or in the company of scoffers then this cupping image could be seen as an image of divine blessing one of God lovingly setting boundaries an image of his protection and guidance and we positively say wow such knowledge it's wonderful it's too wonderful for me and we get lost in awe and wonder at God's loving care and his protection but if evil lurks in our hearts and we know scripturally speaking when we take the whole counsel of God together that evil lurks in every human heart even the tiniest cute little baby yes I've just had a baby daughter she's amazing she smiles she's beautiful but in every human heart sin and evil lurks then the idea of an all knowing holy

[15 : 51] God can become immensely threatening because it's incomprehensible it's supernatural it's extraordinary and the word translated wonderful according to Alan Ross does not necessarily express a happy response the psalmist is saying because God's knowledge is wonderful in this weighty dreadful sense it's too high I cannot prevail over it I cannot ascend over it I have no chance it's too lofty it's like an impenetrable fortress whose walls are too high I cannot control it I cannot climb over it before these walls these hands I stand powerless and in his wonder David is unnerved and he's unsettled and he's looking for a way to flee which takes us to our next attribute omnipresence definition

God's omnipresence simply means that God is everywhere there is nowhere where God is not now in saying that that is not to deny that there are times and places where God manifests his presence in a special way like when he indwells the hearts of believers he has a throne in heaven in times past he dwelt above the mercy seat but nevertheless God is everywhere there is nowhere where God's spirit is not and David says in Psalm 139 where can I go from your spirit where can I flee from your presence if I go to the heavens you are there if I make my bed in the depths you are there if I rise in the wings of the dawn if I settle on the far side of the sea even there your hand will guide me your right hand will hold me fast now in

Hebraic or Jewish thinking heaven was above as far as you could go Sheol or Hades in the Greek was as far below as you could go and so we have a picture of as far up as one could go as far below as one could go He says if I rise in the wings of the dawn it's a way of saying if I travel to the east at the speed of light I can't get away from you and if I settle on the far side of the sea which in that location would have been on the west I can't get rid of you talking about the world which he knows now if like the prophet Jonah say the psalmist is trying to run away from an all powerful omniscient omnipresent God then that's a bit of a problem because he can't shake

God it's like when the bad guys are hiding from Superman well he's got x-ray vision he knows where you are he sees everything but if in the place where you run away to you find yourself in trouble a place of darkness and you need help and you need guidance then the idea of a God whom you can't seem to lose or shake even if you tried well it becomes an invaluable and precious asset to David David says in verse 10 speaking of the ends of the sea even there your hand will guide me your hand your right hand will hold me fast what he's saying there is God's got my back he's got my back the right side was always a place of vulnerability in times of battle if

I say surely darkness will hide me then and the light become as night around me even darkness will not be dark to you the night will shine like the day for darkness is as light to you now in the psalms darkness is a bit thematic it always speaks of danger of disease suffering and the possibility of death as well and as David reflects further on God's omnipresence it's no longer a threat to him but a comfort in times of darkness having a God who relentlessly pursues him means that whenever he encounters darkness whenever he encounters suffering he knows that the darkness cannot withstand the presence of

[21 : 37] God David realizes that if God has him by the hand then even the darkness will become as if it was light and even if he or you or any believer should die it will become resurrection because we can never lose God for those who trust in him and what does David do will he start celebrating a third attribute of God God's omnipotence definition omni meaning all potence meaning power if we say that soup was potent we're saying wow it packs a powerful punch

God has all power over all things at all times in all ways nothing is simply accidental in the sense that it is out with God's sovereign control now remember good theology is always practical David isn't just concerned with the facts of the matter but he reveals what it means in relation to his life he knows that his life is not just the result of indifferent random evolutionary processes he is fearfully and wonderfully made made in such a way that it inspires reverential awe and fear in him for you verse 13 created my inmost being you 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 there's a mind blowing thought here he says my frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place when I was woven together in the depths of the earth your eyes saw my unformed body all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be now there may be someone here this morning or at home online and you don't feel particularly loved or valuable or of much use to anyone or anything and you need to know what the

Lord says about you you're not just molecules in motion you've been created and made for a purpose you're not a mistake you're not an accident brought about by natural processes it doesn't matter the circumstances that brought you into this world whether you were loved by your parents or not because ultimately it was God who lovingly knit you together God who made you into a living soul this is the truth God who created your spirit you are his workmanship created for good works which

God has prepared for you to do in advance and it doesn't matter whether you're young or you're old or you're able bodied or you're disabled in some way God has a purpose in your creation to bring him glory and to be glorified by your joy in him and you need to know as I'm sure many of you already do but we can never hear the gospel enough that God sent his son Jesus into the world to die for our sin to rescue us from the power of Satan sin death and hell and that peace and forgiveness with God is found in Jesus name and here's the amazing thing that this psalm reveals the

[26 : 51] God who sent his son to die for your sins is always thinking of you not because you're the center of the universe he is at the center of all things he transcends the universe but God thinks about you often David says in verse 17 how precious to me are your thoughts God how vast is the sum of them were I to count them they would outnumber the grains of sand when I awake because the psalmist is sleeping when I awake I'm still with you God doesn't slumber God doesn't sleep God thinks about us often this verse is so important because there are some people in this world they believe that if there is a God an all powerful all knowing

God he couldn't possibly take the time to care about me he's got the universe to run he's got big fish to fry he's got the coronavirus pandemic to deal with but God thinks about you often because you have the unique capacity as an image bearer of God to glorify him in a way that the stars and all their brilliance never even could my grandma she's widowed but she has a photo of the day when my granddad met the queen when the queen took notice of my granddad and gave him an award for his architectural work and she's ever so proud of that photo that the monarch took the time to think about and to recognize my granddad's achievement but that's nothing in comparison because almighty

God the king of all that there is the ultimate monarch the king of kings the lord of lords actually thinks of us constantly if I say that he has engraved his people's names on the palms of his hands Isaiah 49 16 as if to show how continually we are before him he delights over his children with singing you know when we worship God on Sundays at least when we were able to sing we sing to God that's right that's proper that's how it ought to be there's also an argument that we should be singing more to one another sing to one another with psalms hymns and spiritual songs as a teaching aid but I digress but I wonder have you ever thought I mean it seems a little bit inappropriate but have you ever thought about God singing with his children singing over his children

Zephaniah 3:17 the Lord your God is with you the mighty warrior who saves he will take great delight in you in his love he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing I thought about this often what must the singing voice of God sound like three part harmony father son holy spirit who knows but I'm looking forward to finding out God thinks of his children often and so we've considered along with David God's omniscience God's omnipresence God's omnipotence but what do these things mean for God's enemies those whom David describes as murderously evil and blasphemous verse 19 if only you

God would slay the wicked away from me you who are blood thirsty they speak of you with evil intent your adversaries misuse your name do I not hate those who hate you Lord and abhor those who are in rebellion against you I have nothing but hatred for them and I count them as my enemies now what David says here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is nothing more than what's called an imprecatory curse on God's enemies and as far as he is concerned God's enemies are his enemies too and in his zeal he wants God to know that he hates them presumably because he believes that God's omniscience must compel God to hate the wicked reminds me a little bit when I was little my dad was a huge Alex Ferguson fan and when Alex Ferguson went from Aberdeen to Man United dad became a

[32 : 32] Man United fan and because dad hated Arsenal I hated Arsenal I didn't really care much for football but I just wanted to be like my dad now we need to deal with that question this morning does God actually hate the wicked and I would just ask for your patience a little bit this morning because it demands a careful answer on one hand the answer from the scriptures is yes psalm psalm psalm psalm psalm There are plenty other verses where this is declared in a number of places.

And because God is perfect love, he must hate and abhor murderous evil. But we need to be extremely careful when talking of God's holy hatred.

Because our experiences of hatred are often infused with sin and unrighteousness.

We can be ignorant and just plain vengeful and ugly. We can wrongly project our experiences and our understanding of hatred onto God's holy hatred.

You see, when God hates, he does so righteously. With perfect judgment, perfect insight, perfect knowledge, perfect power, perfect presence.

[34 : 17] With knowing all things, understanding all things. That said, we must also understand that God, although hating wickedness, makes very clear in Scripture that he does not delight in the destruction of the wicked.

Makes clear in Ezekiel, Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Sovereign Lord. It's rhetorical. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

Yet we must turn to Jesus. Jesus revealed to us God's love towards his enemies in his life, death, and resurrection.

He commanded us in Matthew 5, 43. You've heard that it was said, Love your neighbor, hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies.

Agapeo, pray for those who persecute you. That rules out hating and cursing by the followers of Christ.

[35 : 31] And his reasoning, he says, God causes his son to rise in the wicked and the righteous. And he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

I was most challenged by these verses a number of years ago. I was hearing on the news about a family who were attacked by ISIS, leaving a little girl, an orphan, committing heinous crimes against Christian communities.

And I remember praying, and I'm still unsure what I feel about this at times, but I remember praying, smite them, Lord. Wipe them off the face of the planet. And then I saw a video of this girl whose family had been tortured, raped.

And she said, I don't hate them. They've been something like deluded by the devil. And I pray that God would set them free. And I forgive them.

The conviction that sunk in my heart that day. I still wasn't sure whether I regretted praying to the Lord to smite them, but one thing I did know is that the power of the Holy Spirit was at work in that little girl's life, because I don't know if I could have done it.

[36 : 53] I thought, what are the petty grudges that I hold on to? Why are we to love our enemies and not hate them?

Great question to ask. Because it was while we were God's enemies that we were reconciled to him.

Romans 5.10 While we were sinners. Dead. So far as our relationship to God is concerned.

Dead. In our trespasses and sins. In the Greek it means dead. Dead in our trespasses and sins that Christ died for the ungodly.

That's humbling. That God chose to love us. His enemies. With everlasting love.

[38 : 08] And in his judicial wrath and hatred of our sin. Poured it out upon the person. Upon his one and only beloved son.

Jesus on the cross of Calvary. By this propitiatory sacrifice. God's love for his enemies was being magnified. As he saved us from our sins.

Even Jesus praying for those who hung him on the cross. Father forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. Very rarely will anyone die.

For a righteous person. Perhaps for a good person. Someone might actually dare to die. But God demonstrated his love for us. In this. That while we were still sinners.

Christ died for us. David described God's enemies as murderous. But actually.

[39 : 11] Who was it. That stole another man's wife. And then had her husband murdered. Only to cover things up.

Afterwards. Having studied the context of this psalm. It's not clear to absolutely know when it was written. But I do wonder if it was written after.

Psalms 51. Where David says. Against you. Only you have I sinned. And done what is evil in your sight. So that you are right in your verdict. And justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth. Sinful from the time. My mother conceived me. So we'll wrap. Things up.

What is our response. To be. Remember good theology is always practical. What is our response to be. To the attributes. Of God. God. Well David says.

[40 : 13] Search me. God. Know my heart. Test me. Know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me.

And this is our prayer. Lead me in the way. Everlasting. We began by saying. Good theology affects how we live.

Does the knowledge of the infinite. And intimate God. Bring you joy. And comfort. To know that. Our best friend. And we can call him friend.

He's not our buddy. But he's our friend. That he's never far away. From us. That his guiding hand.

Is never removed. That his eyes. Are never of his people. Or does such thoughts. And settle you. And convict you of sin. And if so. What are you going to do about it today.

[41 : 14] You and I. We can't hide our sin from him. He knows everything. He's omniscient. You and I. We can't run away from him.

He's omnipresent. He is everywhere. We can't outwit him. Or outmaneuver him. He is omnipotent. He will overpower you. But here's what we can do.

We can throw ourselves. At the mercy of Jesus. The Savior. And be reconciled. To God. For that is why Jesus came.

And as you trust him. Like the psalmist does. Be assured. That your sins. Will be forgiven. By the one who loves you.

And pursues you. Endlessly. Let's pray. Gracious Lord.

[42 : 24] Heavenly Father. In life and death. We belong to you. Wherever we go. You are there. And even when we flee from you.

We only flee to you. For you are everywhere. In your presence. We find rest. When we are weary. And we will find eternal rest.

When this life is done. We praise you. And in faith. We look to you. And we cling to you. Our hope.

Hope that does not fade. With pain. Or trouble. Or time. Or darkness. Or eternity. In Jesus name.

We pray. Amen.