

Who am I and how does God see me?

Psalm 139

Over the next four weeks we are going to delve into the psalms and seek to touch and receive the genuine transformative relationship with the Living God the psalmist had. We will see that the psalms (75% of which are laments) are incredibly honest and intimate transactions with Father God. The Psalmist so often comes with questions and even complaints, but once at the Throne of Grace sees things differently, getting as it were the God perspective and the response of faith. Today's psalm is about who we are and how God sees us. Can I suggest to you all that unless you are totally secure in your Christ centred identity then the Christian Life is pretty much impossible to live. You see our identity as God's Children, Sons and Daughters of the King of Kings, is absolutely central to our Salvation Journey.

Here is a profoundly personal psalm: David (yes the David who was an adulterer and murderer, yet God still used Him) confesses his wonder at His all-knowing, all-powerful and ever present Lord and God. This is not supposed to be neat theology: it depicts a pure faith in the Living God on the part of a frail human being, pursuing and being pursued by the God of infinite patience and grace. Here is an invitation to intimacy, as the Lord comes to dwell in us; to be near; to hear us breathing; to feel our pulse; to stand alongside us in our loneliness. But this is not some spiritual 'cosiness' that shelters us from reality, but a hint of the miracle of a God 'out there' whose greatest desire is to be 'in here'.

The first six verses begin to describe the most intimate of relationships: one that can only be of a family kind. How would it be if you allowed someone to investigate your life in the most forensic of detail? Ideally that's the goal of one flesh in marriage but that has human limitation. Here we are seeking to throw open every last page of the book of our life to God so that nothing is hidden from Him (as if we could do this anyway!). God

who knows what I am thinking and he is with me and sees me wherever I am. God who knows what I am going to say before I even utter the sentence. He's behind me and before me, His reassuring presence whether I am coming or going. David at this point is overwhelmed in worship: it's too wonderful, my finite mind, my tiny heart, can't take it all in. Would you like such an intimacy with God and His Son Jesus? Well it's the normal Christian Life and its yours if you want it.

So to the next six verses that in essence tells me that it's all or nothing. No halfway house in our relationship with Jesus. Remember what the Lord had to say about lukewarm Christians in Laodecia: needless to say, He was not impressed! So here we are reminded that we can't get away from God. If God seems far away, guess who's moved! So we can't avoid His Holy Spirit, there's nowhere to go where He can't see us. A 747 at 38,000 feet or the deepest potholing caves, or the far horizons: He is there. David pictures His God who goes ahead of him and is available 24/7. Darkness no problem to the Light of the World, who overcame darkness once and for all on Calvary's Tree. Would you love to have such access to the Father's presence, the Throne of Grace, to your Jesus? Well it's the normal Christian Life and its yours if you want it.

Verses 13-16 are perhaps the pinnacle of this intimate testimony of David: it's probably the bit we know the best: knit me together in my mother's womb, fearfully and wonderfully made, woven together in the depths of the earth, all the days ordained for me. Wow! My name: David means "Beloved of God": my Christian parents choose it especially. Yes there was a time in my life where I did a Jonah and tried to run away from God, but He was ever on my case winsomely drawing me back to himself, bringing me back to who I truly was, and into the potential of who I had it in me to be. I began to realise that His hand had been upon me from the moment of my conception or earlier (before I formed

you in the womb I knew you: Jeremiah 1:5). Now if the Creator of Heaven and Earth created my inmost being then surely He is the best person to care for me. The human body is the most amazing thing and every part of it is according to the maker's instructions, and whilst medical staff can do some amazing and miraculous things, ultimately it is God who alone numbers our days aright (Psalm 90:12), no-one else. You see it was the Lord who decided to call Janet home and whilst we rightly grieve the loss of a friend and a dear sister in Christ it is not for us to question His will. As our reading reminded us: we are shaped first inside then out. Character comes before Charisma, secret place transactions at the throne of grace before public harvest, family and marriage renewal before Church leadership. Physically our bodies have been sculpted from nothing into something: from conception to birth, all the stages of my life are spread out before the Lord. The NT of course reminds us that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit. We need to look after our amazing bodies, through exercise, proper diet, and using our entire God-given faculties (all our senses and our amazing brains). But the reading also tells us that God made us Body and Soul. Our souls are the God-shaped part that is in each and every human being that only He can feel: mind will and emotions, so that we journey towards the having the mind of Jesus, living in the centre of the Father's will for us, and begin to feel with the Holy Spirit's help as Jesus felt in every situation. Then we can sing: Jesus Lover of my Soul and know the reality in Psalm 23 of He who restores my soul.

This particular part of the psalm, and other scriptures are probably the clearest teaching on the absolute value and rights of the unborn child: it's why many Christians will not consider abortion, and why much of the selective gene therapy and conception techniques today are difficult to embrace wholeheartedly. However unless you have been in that situation personally it's rather easy to judge from the sidelines.

Here is God who is not only the Author of Life but also the one whose plan for our life is at its absolute best when we follow His prepared plan. Sometimes we don't understand the plan, sometimes we don't like the plan, but ultimately we choose to trust Him alone. Does this intimacy sit at the heart of your relationship with Jesus? Because that's the normal Christian Life and it's yours if you want it.

The next six verses are David's honest bit. God you are amazing, your thoughts, your ways, how rare, how beautiful. Sand on the sea shore (like the promise of God to Abraham about his descendants) is here an analogy for the impossibility of summing God up! David would almost like to take up the monastic life and live always intimately in a safe holy haven but apart from those he specifically calls in that way, for the majority of us that's not His will. As Jesus later comments: we are in the world but not of the world. So David laments wickedness (can't you do away with it Lord): even then he realised that the sacrificial system was not enough. Even then he looked forward to Jesus who would defeat evil once and for all & one day we will have the privilege of His return where time will run out for those who love evil more than God. David's tirade against sin is clear and we can say amen: murder (taking away that life God has so clearly created) & False Gods/Idol Worship (Godless arrogance, belittling God with cheap imitations). Apart from Blasphemy there is however no such thing as an unforgivable sin, so we must be careful and graceful to hate the sin but to love the Sinner. One of my key prayers now for some five years has been the conversion of Richard Dawkins and I will continue to plead before the throne for him till he surrenders to the God he doesn't recognise but who is on his case.

So David finishes his psalm as a God-chaser of the first order: his longing for intimacy is real and heart-felt. Do whatever you need to do with my life because ultimately the only road I desire to travel is the road to Eternal Life. He has recognised how God

comes to embrace and empower us again and again. And it was our Jesus, who searches and hems in his creatures, knows them intimately which of course brought astonishment to the Samaritan Women (John 4:29) and the Emmaus Road Disciples (Luke 24:13-32).

Who am I: I am a child of God, created and sustained by my Daddy Almighty, desiring to live my short life on Planet Earth according to His Plan and to His Honour and Glory alone. How does God see me? Well here we have an advantage over David: His name is JESUS and His cross says it all. Because the moment I accept His perfect death and sacrifice on the cross and bow the knee to Him seeking His forgiving grace and empowering Holy Spirit, the Father sees not me but Jesus and declares all believers forgiven loved and free. My identity is JESUS and JESUS is my identity, and my life in all its Holy Spirit fulness can be a blessing to my spouse, family, friends, and enemies, in fact absolutely everyone. I begin to wear the robes of His righteousness and its amazing! That's the dynamic Christian Life so don't settle for a religious half way house. And don't settle for self-righteousness, which is the greatest enemy of the gospel of grace.

We may attempt to live as if we could banish God from our unworthy thoughts, our prized bank-balances, our tangled relationships but we kid ourselves. Do we really believe that God, being the gentlemen he is, has calmly backed out of our lives? No, to do so would be to turn his back on his beautiful creation. He stands at the door of every heart and seeks entry: maybe you need to say come in for the first time this morning or maybe you need to reaffirm the invitation and once again live in His manifest presence which is your inheritance as a Child of God.

And Jesus continues to come, in the form of the Body of Christ, into the dark places of our city, into the human scene with all its hypocrisies and false values, its dirt and confusion, and bring His

transforming grace. So sure in our identity individually as holy channels of His very presence and together as the Body of Jesus lets acknowledge and allow Him entry to all the dark corners of our lives, and be ambassadors of that access to every human soul the Lord gives us to care for.

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