

## Introduction

I enjoy visiting places that strike awe in me. Over the years such places that stand out are Niagra Falls, the Grand Canyon, the Canadian Rockies, Acadia National Park, the Apostle Islands Lakeshore, and the Ocean. But none of these can come close to the awe of the unveiled presence of God. Nothing can compare with what you see and know when you behold God. It is the one view that surpasses all others. David said, "One thing have I asked of the Lord that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in his temple." Another psalmist speaks with similar conviction, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God . . . For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere."

In Psalm 139 David has taken us to the courts of the Lord; he has treated us to a gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. We have been led to glory in his omniscience, his omnipresence, and his omnipotence as it relates to us personally. And yet David is not done. As he concludes the psalm he responds to the glorious contemplation of who God is.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

So in this astounding Psalm, we have seen that God is all-knowing, everywhere-present, and almighty over all creation. To concentrate on these aspects of God is to come face-to-face with the fact that he is infinite. He is transcendent. He goes beyond our ability to conceive. In a word it puts us, or it certainly should put us, in a state of being awestruck.

To be awestruck means to be captivated with wonder and amazement. Illusionists seek to create this kind of experience by performing tricks that leave you without an explanation for how they could have accomplished it. They are skilled in deception. It is all about what they make it look like. It is not reality but an illusion. But God is not an illusion. He is as real as real can be. There is an important question facing those who begin to recognize God for who he is. We should be awestruck at God because he is truly mind-boggling, but what does "being awestruck" look like? How should we respond to so great a God as is the one true God? In Psalm 139, not only does David show us something of how big and wonderful God is, he also shows us how to respond to the greatness of God.

This is the big idea in this morning's text. The Big Idea or central point of the text is how to respond to the greatness of God. David shows us how we should respond to the greatness of God. In a word David is awestruck. He is amazed. But there are three ways in which his awe is expressed. He responds in an expression of exultation, a desire for separation, and a prayer for sanctification. Here are three marks of being struck with awe at the majesty of God.

First, there is . . .

**I. Exultation.** A more common word for exultation would be celebration.

Exultation is a word that describes the act of lively celebration. What are some things we celebrate? Birthdays and anniversaries. Christmas, New Year's Day, July 4<sup>th</sup>. Graduations. Retirement. Weddings. And in this sports-crazed culture we celebrate touchdowns, holes-in one, and slam-dunks. We delight in these things so we celebrate them.

One of the great examples of exultation in scripture took place the day that David led the return of the ark of the covenant back to his city. The ark signified God's presence with the people. It had been captured by the Philistines and later located in a Judean town. At last David determined to return it to its rightful place. The procession to the city was marked by shouts of delight and the sound of the horn, and David went leaping and dancing with delight. He was celebrating with joy before the Lord and delighting in his goodness.

As we arrive at verses 17-18 in Psalm 139, we arrive at another expression of exultation by David. He is exulting in the transcendence of God. Having pondered God's majesty in relation to him, he can't keep himself from exploding spontaneously in a word of celebratory praise to God. His soul just sings out!

"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake and I am still with you."

As great and mighty as God is, as infinite as he is, as incomprehensible as he is in his knowledge, in his presence, and in his power and involvement in making David who he is, yet the Lord is there with him and the Lord knows him completely. David is rehearsing the number of ways in which the Lord knows him and is involved in his life. He starts counting those thoughts one-by-one and realizes he will never get to the end. Those thoughts are vast like the grains of sand in the desert. It seems as though David keeps counting until he falls asleep and when he wakes up again, his soul thrills yet again that the Lord is with him. This is a humble celebration. He realizes he is small in comparison to the whole of what God has created and yet how thrilling it is to his soul that the Lord thinks of him and will never leave him.

Every follower of Christ has this same assurance. It is bedrock to our joyful celebration. God is everywhere and there is nowhere you can go where he is not, but more than that he has promised his presence to always be with his people. Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and make disciples and then promised them with a word of wonder, BEHOLD, I am with you always, to the end of the age." The writer of Hebrews reminds us of this truth which is far more valuable than any earthly possession ever could be. It is the assurance of the Lord, "for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

It is precious to ponder God's thoughts of us and to ponder the presence of God with us. When you think about it, the assurances of this psalm of the knowledge and presence and power of God are central to being able to trust Him. We can rest in the Lord at all times because he knows us. He knows what we need. He knows what is best. And he has the power to do what is best. Add to that the desire and determination that is his to do what is best. We know that because he did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us. This is love. If God has the knowledge, the power, and the will to do what is good, you can trust that he will do what is good even when it doesn't necessarily look like good to you. And that is a solid basis upon which to exult in God. How precious to me are your thoughts O God!

The hymn, "How Great Thou Art" is a song of exultation. Think of this verse: And when I think that God his son not sparing sent him to die,  
I scarce can take it in, that on the cross my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin  
Then sings my soul, my savior God to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou Art!

The soul that is awestruck with the person of God should exult in praise to him! Thinking much on the greatness of God is good for you. When you are captivated with God's glory, you overflow with a good theme. Your mind is filled with truth and excellence and goodness. You are blessed and God is glorified.

A second mark of being awestruck at the Lord is a desire for . . .

## **II. Separation**

Those who are awestruck at the greatness of God have no desire for fellowship with those who rise against him. They want a separation between them.

Verses 19-22 are quite severe. David speaks with resolved contempt toward the wicked. "O that you would slay the wicked, O God!" "Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?" "Do I not loathe those who rise up against you?" "I hate them with complete hatred."

How are these words to be reconciled with New Testament commands like when Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . . For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" The key is to pick up on a couple things. First, these wicked to whom David refers are not first and foremost David's enemies. No, first and foremost they are God's enemies. They speak against God. They take his name in vain. They hate the Lord and rise up against him. And it is these that David counts as his enemies. They are enemies to David because in the first instance they are enemies of God. David's focus is not on what they have done to David but how they hate God. David's is not a personal vendetta but a concern for God's glory being disregarded and repudiated.

The second key here is to notice that David himself is not the one enacting the judgment. He is calling for divine justice. He says in verse 19, "Oh that YOU would slay the wicked, O God!" Paul calls for the same thing in Romans when he tells us to "repay no one evil for evil" . . . but "live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but to leave it to the wrath of God." David is completely satisfied with the fact of God taking vengeance. He calls for the Lord to slay the wicked, but he is leaving vengeance to God.

The third key is to see David's hatred not as a personal disposition of self-righteousness. It is not as though David is justifying himself to treat these wicked with cruelty. He is not haughtily and self-righteously sticking his nose in the air. Rather he is seeking a separation from that which is repugnant to God and therefore to him. He hates their hatred of God. He does not want to have fellowship with those who rise up against God. It is abhorrent to him that they might have an influence upon him. So he says, "O men of blood depart from me." This is separation.

David is so captivated with the greatness of God he cannot imagine how it is there could actually be those to speak against the Lord, to take his glorious name in vain, to rise up against him. It is abhorrent. These enemies of God deserve to be slain by God. And he will not stand for them to have an impact upon him. The importance of separation from the ungodly also stands out in the very first psalm, David declared, "How blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers." The New Testament teaches us not to love the world nor the things in the world. It tells us NOT to be conformed to this world but to be transformed. It tells us to ABHOR what is evil and cling to that which is good. James asks, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy with God." This is the heart of David's scathing words here in Psalm 139—separation from a world which hates God, rises up against

God, commits wickedness against God, takes the name of God in vain. He cannot be friends with people like this. They are his enemies.

When we consider the mind-boggling greatness, the transcendence, the wonder of God and his thoughts toward us, how could we stomach those who would reject him, speak against him, and refuse to love him, who refuse to bow down and worship him? David cannot. And neither can we if we really love him. Beware, brothers and sisters. The world is a tool of seduction. Material goods, worldly status, human esteem, all of them wage war with God and they wage war with our souls. We need to keep company with brothers and sisters who love God. And the more we recognize the greatness of the Lord, the more eagerly we will repudiate the world—its outlook, its pursuits, its values, and its ethics. Furthermore, the more we are captivated with the majesty of the nature and character of God, the more intensely will we long for godly fellowship and the corporate worship of the living God. If we love God our closest relationships will be with those who also love him and we will seek those relationships and that fellowship rather than what will fail to reinforce our worship.

Another practical point here is this. Don't just attempt to keep be unspotted by the world and resist its pressure to mold you in its image. Seek God. Know God. Deepen your grasp of who he is. Think much on his infinity in relation to you. And as your thirst for him is being satisfied, the bitter taste of the world will grow more and more objectionable and repulsive to you. There is no substitute for knowing God. There is joy in knowing him, but there is a transforming result in your life as well.

A third mark of being awestruck at the Lord is a prayer for . . .

### **III. Sanctification**

The third way in which David responds to the omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of God is that he calls upon this mighty, majestic, and holy God to examine him and lead him to holiness. Because he stands in such awe and admiration of God, David desires to be separated from those who hate God and he desires to be separated in his heart from any way which is objectionable to God.

Paul cries out at the culmination of Romans 7, "wretched man that I am! Who will free me from this body of death?" The life of the children of God is marked by this cry. Our confidence in Christ is that He will do just that. He will set us free not only from past sins but also from the pattern of sin in our daily living.

Our sin separates us from God. The stain of our sin calls out for God to slay us, just as David said in verse 19. All we like sheep have gone astray, and the wages of sin is death. It is because of sin that the wrath of God is coming. Salvation, the saving work of God, involves a number of aspects. One is justification. Justification is the gracious act of God in which he declares sinners not guilty of sin but credited with righteousness. It is in this way that hell-deserving sinners are granted right standing before God. It is on this basis that those who actually committed sin are counted as having only done the righteous works of God.

God accomplished this work in his own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He who committed no sin became sin in the place of sinners so that sinners might be counted righteous in Christ. Christ satisfied the legal demands of the law in his life and in his death. And all who are joined with him in his work are the saved, are the justified, are the forgiven. And the way to be joined with Christ is through faith. Seeing your sin and the wrath that you deserve, turn from that sin and stake your hope in the work of Christ. Trust him to save you. To everyone in this room this morning who has

not yet turned from your sin to trust in and follow Christ, I warn you that your sins deserve God's eternal judgment. I urge you today to turn to Christ. Believe in him. Follow him. For whoever believes in the Son of God HAS eternal life.

But there is more to the saving work of God than merely forgiveness and justification. Another component is sanctification. God sets apart those who trust in Christ to himself and he works out the salvation he has brought by working in us to make us in the likeness of his Son. His design is that our hearts and our living increase from glory to glory in reflecting the image of Jesus. Paul says to the Romans that "whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."

How this transformation works out is that God brings to light more and more of our former life our former patterns of sin. And as he exposes them, he supplies power to enable his people to overcome those old patterns and replace them with increasing obedience to him. And as we keep in step with the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh but will radiate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

It is this transformation for which David appeals in the last two verses of the psalm. "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" He wants a holy life because he loves and worships a Holy and glorious God. He wants to worship with his heart and his life.

There are two basic parts to David's cry for sanctification. First, we see a cry for exposure. And then there is a cry for eradication. First, David asks for exposure. The God who knows everything there is to know and knows David completely knows what needs to be exposed. He knows his every grievous way. He knows our every grievous way as well. This plea is a sobering one. God already knows everything, but David says to him "Search me." Make a careful and diligent investigation into me, Lord. Leave no stone unturned, no detail overlooked. Down to the finest detail of who I am, Lord, check me out! Expose the sin!

Then David says "Try me and know my thoughts." You know how God tries us don't you? Testing! James says, "Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, knowing that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." Everyday life is how God tries us and exposes our sins. Life shakes us and what is inside spills out, and in this way God exposes what is there. This is a serious almost fearful prayer. David is saying to the Lord, look me over; put me to the test to expose the things that remain in me that are out of step with who you are. Reveal my sin. Expose my blemishes, weaknesses, and flaws. This is a prayer for pain. It is never pleasant to have your flaws exposed! It is shameful. It is hurtful. It is humbling.

You know when life happens and God does what David is asking for here, what do we do? Typically we are shocked aren't we. As quickly as possible we want the test and the trial to pass. We need to come back again and again to David's cry here in the psalm. Life is God's tool for completing the request of the heart that is in awe of God. So don't despise the tests. Be like David and ask for them. And when they come, give thanks. God is doing part of what he pledges to do in salvation, to declare us righteous and make us gradually more and more so.

The second part of David's cry is for eradication. Of course that means to do away with, to wipe out. These grievous ways that God exposes, David asks that he also do away with them in his life. He does so by appealing that the Lord lead him in the way everlasting. The way everlasting is the way

of holiness, the way where what is grievous to the Lord is wiped out. To say to the Lord, "lead me," is to imply "I will follow." And that is the way of sanctification. In the midst of our lives, God boils to the top the grievous ways and one by one we repent and follow the Spirit as he leads us from one day to the next. But here is the heart and longing of those who love the Lord. They want their lives to put the greatness of God on display. They want to shine in his likeness. They hunger for holiness. So they cry to the one who is able to bring it about in them. "Search me, try me, lead me, and I will follow."

Stop being surprised at the tension and the troubles and the testing in your life. Stop asking, "Why do these things keep happening to me?" Instead keep asking the Lord to search you, to try you, and to lead you, and Follow.

### **Conclusion**

This amazing Psalm ties together the looking to the glory of God and the living for the glory of God. He is omniscient. He is omnipresent. He is omnipotent. And he is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all we ask or think according to the power at work within us. And as we look to God's glorious nature and character, we long for transformation to reflect that glory. Paul said it this way to the Corinthians: "And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." So keep beholding the glory and keep seeking it.