

From Psalm 139  
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07 August 2022

[SLIDE 2]

**I. Preparation**

- A. Greeting and Self-Introduction
- B. Text and Title

[SLIDE 3]

C. Survey of Series:

1. Dominant strands: seeing Christ both present and promised throughout the Psalter and using psalms as models and molds to shape our prayers
  - a) Psalm 88 (Tony), Psalm 90 (Bobby), Psalm 51 (Dave), Psalm 27 (Scott), Psalm 8 (Simeon), Psalm 102 (me), Psalm 34 (Bobby), Psalm 46 (Simeon), Psalm 72 (Tony), Psalm 142 (Dave), Psalm 62 (Scott), now Psalm 139
2. Psalm 139 will stretch both strands second strand to their limits: In what way is Christ present and promised in Psalm 139? To what extent and in what way can Christians in the new covenant make Psalm 139 our prayer?

**II. The Text of Psalm 139 (ESV)**

[SLIDES 4-7]

<sup>0</sup> To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, you have searched me and known me! <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. <sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. <sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. <sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. <sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.

<sup>7</sup> Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? <sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, <sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. <sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," <sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

<sup>13</sup> For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. <sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. <sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. <sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

<sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! <sup>18</sup> If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

<sup>19</sup> Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! <sup>20</sup> They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. <sup>21</sup> Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? <sup>22</sup> I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.

<sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! <sup>24</sup> And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

### III. Overview

#### [SLIDE 8]

- A. One goal of the sermon is to lay down to “rumble strips” to help you interpret the hidden “speed bump” of Ps 139:19–22.
  - 1. Verses 1–18 are not abstract theologizing about God’s omniscience and omnipresence, and verses 19–22 are not “out of nowhere.” The whole psalm revolves around David’s concern for his relationship to God and status in his reckoning. Our commitment to hold Psalm 139 together as a whole—not ignoring verses 19–22—is key to understanding its meaning and application. (Removing pieces of Scripture that we don’t understand or like is self-defeating, dangerous, even life-threatening.)
- B. Taken as a whole, Psalm 139 is about our relationship with God and our status in his reckoning. We have either a status that leads to perdition and destruction or a status that leads to the “way everlasting.”

#### [SLIDE 9]

- C. **The Big Idea: Repentance.** *The “way everlasting” is opened only to those who are tested and known by God. In other words, God works salvation for those who in faith turn away from their sins and turn to rely on God’s mercy in Jesus Christ.*
  - 1. Side Note: Because all of Scripture has Jesus Christ as its center and end, every psalm in the Bible is “messianic.” Therefore, I don’t like to save Christ for a surprise ending. Up front, Psalm 139 is inspired by the Spirit of Christ (see 1 Pet 1:10–12), points to the incarnate work of Christ in redemption (see Luke 24:44–47), and contains a relevant message that Christ is teaching to his disciples (see Matt 23:10). Still, we must look closely at the psalm in its covenantal context to know how exactly it points to Christ’s work and what exactly Christ is teaching his church here and now.

### IV. Exposition of Psalm 139

#### [SLIDE 10]

- A. Verse 0 (Superscription)
  - 1. David composed Psalm 139 (though some scholars deny this fact). Compare 2 Samuel 7:20.
  - 2. David’s composition was collected by the inspired editors of the Psalter for God’s people to use in worship.
  - 3. **Rumble Strip 1:** Psalm 139 is about David’s relationship with God (and ours by extension).
- B. Verses 1–6

1. God knows *David*. Cf. 2 Sam 7.18–20; Ps 139.1–3. It is not an abstract, impersonal knowledge.
2. At vv. 5–6 we start to see that there is a doubleness or ambiguity to God’s complete knowledge of David.
3. The whole stanza has this double-edged language.
4. **Rumble Strip 2:** God’s complete knowledge of everything that David does can be either comforting or terrifying.

[SLIDE 11]

#### C. Verses 7–12

1. The doubleness of language explains why David talks about fleeing from God in v. 7.
2. Verses 7–12 has the same doubleness as vv. 1–6: there’s no place to hide, yet even being pursued and hunted down by God has grace in it.
3. **Rumble Strip 3:** God is everywhere, and that’s a comfort to some and a terror to others.
  - a) “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9.10).

[SLIDE 12]

#### D. Verse 13–18

1. Prayer is “conversation with God.” See BRCC Catechism 84.
2. God is Creator and Master in the most intimate personal way.
3. God foreordains everything.
4. Identity is what God made you to be and who you are in his eyes.
5. There is doubleness in this stanza, too.
6. **Rumble Strip 4:** God’s control over creation and providence—his intimate and total control over David’s life—is both delightful and sobering.

[SLIDE 13]

#### E. Verses 19–24

1. Review of the Four Rumble Strips

[SLIDE 14]

2. Verse 19a: David is aware of God’s (ultimate) judgment against the wicked.
3. Verse 19b: David commands the “men of blood” to depart because he does not want to be lumped in with them or to become like them.
4. David hates sin and anything that would lead him astray.
5. The shift: he does not ask God to kill the wicked right here, right now. He asks God to search his own heart!
6. **The Hard Brake/Horrible Jolt → the Smooth Ride:** Either we take vv. 19–22 as a sinful expression of a man who does not understand God, or we take it as a fundamentally good petition of a man who understands God’s holiness. The second option is right.

[SLIDE 15]

## V. The Good News of God’s Son, Jesus Christ

### A. Jesus is the true Singer of Psalm 139.

1. At several points in his ministry of humiliation, he submitted himself to the Father’s searching and testing, as when the Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matt 4.1//Mark 1.12//Luke 4.1). He was searched

and known by his Father, who declared at his baptism (Matt 3.17//Mark 1.11// Luke 3.22//John 1.34) and at his transfiguration (Matt 17.5//Mark 9.7//Luke 9.35) and all the more climactically in his resurrection (Matt 28.18–20) that he knew him, knew him through and through to be his tested and proven Son, perfectly obedient and faithful. At all times, Jesus worked and rested in the Father's complete knowledge (cf. **Ps 139.2–6**) in the Father's presence all around him (cf. **vv. 7–12**). His mind was wholly shaped by his Father's word, and he was led by his Father's Spirit. And if David was sure that God formed him in the womb (cf. **vv. 13–16a**), how much more was this true of the incarnate Christ, whose human conception was an immediate miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, as we are told quite clearly in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matt 1.18–23; Luke 1.31, 35)! And if David knew that God had foreordained his days, how much more was this true of the incarnate Christ! According to Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2, even Jesus's crucifixion came about "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (v. 23; cf. Luke 22.22; 1 Pet 1.2, 20). The Father ordained every one of the Jesus's steps, and Jesus willingly walked them, holding his Father's thoughts in the highest esteem (cf. **Ps 139.17**).

2. *But would Jesus really say what David says in Ps 139.19–22? Do those verses really fit with who he is and what he does?*

**[SLIDES 16–17]**

3. On the final day, Jesus will say what David said in vv. 19–22. See Matt 7.21–23; 25.41, 46.
- B. The work of Jesus Christ is "good news" because he took the place of the wicked one and the men of blood in Ps 139—our place. Instead of wreaking vengeance upon us, he took that vengeance upon himself for all who trust in him.
1. Everything in the old covenant was leaning forward toward his appearing in the flesh, and when he came, many things that were unclear to David and the other saints became clearer. What all the saints in the OT were hoping for was the coming of the promised Offspring—the one promised to the first women in Gen 3.15 and to Abraham and to David (cf. Matt 1.1–17; Luke 3.23–38)—the one who would bring God's kingdom to earth, overthrow the tyranny of the serpent and his offspring, reign with eternal shalom over all creation, and enjoy eternal Sabbath-rest with his chosen people. Now, when David and the prophets by the help of the Spirit looked to the future, they saw all these things wrapped up in one event, sometimes called the "day of the Lord." They saw judgment and salvation happening all at once. And we know now that if the Son of God had come right away as the righteous Judge, without the incarnation, without his life of humiliation and perfect obedience, without his atoning death, without his resurrection and ascension—if he had simply come to bring God's kingdom to earth in order to sweep away Satan and all those under Satan's dominion, then he would have utterly swept away every single person (cf. Ps 143.2; Isa 57.1; Rom 3.10). It would be like a flood story where God never called Noah to build the ark: total destruction, not a soul spared, no survivors.

2. But praise be to God, the Son didn't come first as Judge (cf. John 12.46–48). He came first to bind the strong man Satan (cf. Matt 12.29//Mark 3.27//Luke 11.21–22), to end Satan's dominion (John 12.31; 16.11; Col 2.15; Heb 2.14; 1 John 3.8), to transfer God's chosen people out of the kingdom of darkness into his own kingdom (Col 1.13). The Son of God did this first so that when he comes again as Judge, there would be a righteous remnant on the earth—people made righteous through faith in him (Rom 3.30; Gal 3.8), his church, his bride. In his humiliation, though he never abandoned his perfect holiness, he became a friend of sinners (Matt 11.19//Luke 7.34), a lover of people who hated him. He put himself in the place of those who had hated God and were hated by God. He entered our place. He was crucified between two men of blood, where we belonged. He experienced the hatred and wrath of God against sin as he suffered and died on the cross in order to remove from us the cause of God's righteous hatred. The good news is that we were God's enemies, and it would have been right for Jesus to loathe us, but he didn't and doesn't; in his sovereign, free choice from before the foundation of the world, he has instead loved us with an everlasting love (cf. Jer 31.3; Rom 5.6–10; Eph 1.4–5) and made for us an “everlasting way” to glory.

[SLIDE 18]

## VI. Questions for Application

- A. Have you invited this all-knowing, everywhere-present Creator and Master of the universe to search you and know you and lead you in the way everlasting?
  1. If you have not repented of your sins and embraced Jesus Christ in faith, then the prospect of inviting God to search you is terrifying. But he already knows about you and your sins. So come to him, and his knowledge will become a comfort. He will know you and rejoice over you. You will be delivered from the death owed to God's enemies, enjoy the wonder of a conscience purified from dead works to serve the living God (cf. Heb 9.14), and walk with confidence in the “way everlasting.”
  2. If you are already a Christian, you are still being called to repentance, because repentance is lifelong. See 1 John 1.5–10.
- B. Can you, being in the new covenant, pray Psalm 139? Can all of it inform your prayers, or do you have to skip parts of it?
  1. We can pray Psalm 139—as long as we know that vv. 19–22 look forward to God's judgment.
  2. There are four consequences:
    - a) We cannot pray for the death of personal, political, or national enemies. We are instead to pray for their conversion and for peace.
    - b) We can pray for justice to be done to those who remain unrepentant. We can pour out our lament before God (cf. Ps 102.0).
    - c) We can pray that God would help us put the “old self” to death (cf. Rom 6.6; Eph 4.22; Col 3.9).
    - d) We can pray that God would destroy Satan and undermine his works.

## VII. Closing Prayer