

Psalm 139 - Fully Known

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Preacher: John Malunga

[0:00] Thank you, Chris. Okay.

Okay. So, hi, good morning. Just move this out.

! Our pastor is away at the moment, so we're just taking a brief hiatus through our current study series in 2 Timothy.

But actually, I think this psalm really goes alongside what we've been learning, as we'll actually come to find out. Now, I have to caveat this, that I've been way too optimistic about how much ground I would cover.

However, and I was just telling Rachel, my wife here. Initially, I thought, you know, we could do an overview of this whole psalm. And then I was like, no, it's too huge.

[1:07] Went to 12 verses, too huge. Went to 6 verses, still too many. And dwindled down to 3. And would you believe it or not, that was still too many.

And so, actually, we've come to just one, and it's actually just the first one. Technically, two verses, because that's kind of like repeated again.

You'll see in the psalm that it's bookended by this thought of being searched by the Lord. So, yeah, as we were going through our sermon series in 2 Timothy, this psalm, like I said, has been jumping out at me.

And it's this overarching idea of knowing who we are and walking in our identity in Christ. Now, Simon helpfully defined identity as who you are before God because of God.

And breaking that down even further, if you recall, in the first chapter of 2 Timothy, he said, you know, we can define biblical identity as the three following things.

[2:24] Status, belonging, and calling. Our status, how God legally regards you, i.e. righteous, justified. Our belonging, whose you are, i.e. we belong to God.

And our calling, what is your life now? i.e. it is the response to the grace that we have received. And I have found that really helpful.

I don't know about you, but that's been super helpful for me. Now, we've been speaking about how we as Christians must first come to know and rest in who we are because of what God has done.

Namely, how he has saved us through Jesus Christ for himself to be a people for his purposes. As we learned last week, that we are now vessels for honourable use.

If you've missed any of those sermons, I would really highly recommend you to go back and have a listen. It'll be a fruitful use of your time. But to our text today, so Psalm 139, and it's the first verse.

[3:34] But I'm actually just going to read the entire verse, if you forgive me for that, because I think context is key. So it should come up on screen, so read with me. So it begins to the choir master, a psalm of David.

Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from afar.

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, oh Lord, you know it's all together.

Father, you hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from your spirit? Where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me.

[4 : 43] And your right hand shall hold me. And if I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night. Even the darkness is not dark to you.

The night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. For you formed my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works. My soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret.

Intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 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.

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.

[5 : 47] O that you would slay the wicked, O God. O men of blood, depart from me. They speak against you with malicious intent. Your enemies take your name in vain.

Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred. I count them my enemies.

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. Amen, indeed. Lord God, may you just bless our time together in this psalm. And just illuminate what you want us to learn.

Transform us. Thank you for your gracious kindness to us, Lord. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So I was watching a show a couple of weeks back.

[6 : 48] And as this is a spoiler, I'm not going to say what that show was. But I was struck by a sense where there was this scene where there's this man.

And his whole life, he was adopted. But he doesn't know. And it's only seasons later that he eventually finds out. And he confronts his biological father after doing some searching.

And he said this line. And this is what I was really struck by. I have never known myself. I need to know you. Oh, I'll never know myself.

I have never known myself. I need to know you. Oh, I'll never know myself. And I thought to myself, is this not the plight of the whole mankind?

Groping around life, always trying to answer that question. Who are you? Who am I? And unfortunately, a lot of us resort to this typical CV-like answer.

[7 : 53] And usually, you know, our job is the first thing that we rattle off, right? We're defined by what we do. It's one of the first questions we seem to ask one another when we meet each other.

Oh, so what do you do? And I was thinking how we often lay our masks in life, hence the image there, where we are, who we are in life, our public status, our reputation, wealth or lack of, all of this constantly bombard us, basically, to create this masked identity.

That is a part of who we are, yes. But it's not our entirety. Now, you don't need to search too long online before you're pounced upon.

Advert after advert. You need this thing. You need this course, that course. You need to be successful. You want the best in life. You need to do A, B, C and B, X, Y, Z. And it's no wonder if you look at the most popular nonfiction books, you will find that self-help books and self-development are consistently the top ones.

I don't want to knock that down because I tried a few audiobooks last year. Didn't get far. But isn't it funny how the world repeatedly says you can be anything that you want to be, you can believe anything you want to believe, but you just can't be the person God made you to be.

[9 : 22] And as Christians, I think the detriment worsens because we either believe what God says and live out the life that we've been called to live, or we fail to believe God and thus live a lie where we're constantly comparing one another, constantly trying to be something we are not.

A song I like, the lyrics go something like this. We are becoming what we are not. But what we are is inescapable.

You're a masterpiece fighting to be a silly selfie with a hideous filter. You are heaven's handmade calligraphy, slumping it among papyrus fonts.

Propaganda. But by this, he means we're trying to be a tacky imitation of the real thing. So then the question becomes, how do we live out in reality of the truth?

How do we live out the Christian life? Well, the answer, I think, is in this psalm. And I think 1 John really succinctly sums it up.

[10 : 36] Be honest. Stop pretending. Take off the masks. Come to be known. Come to be searched.

I think one of the saddest verses in the Bible is actually in John 1, verses 10 to 11.

And it's talking about Jesus coming, right? And it says, I'll come back to this verse later.

But isn't this one of the reasons why so many go through life afraid? Afraid. We're afraid. We're searching for approval. If people really knew who we were, they would reject us.

Crippled by shame, we mask up. And quite often, we come to God this way as well, even as Christians. We live in a celebrity-obsessed culture where many want to be famous, but no one wants to be known.

[12 : 00] At least not in the way that this psalm suggests. We see it on the news every day, don't we? And recently, it's been a case of, I wonder who is going to be exposed today.

Yet, for the Christian, the call to a living relationship with a living God is a call to put away all masks and live in the light of God's truth.

And that means living in the light of his ever-present gaze, exposed, fully known. And yes, that does mean spots, blemishes, warts and all.

So, as we come to this passage, I just pray that the Lord would grant us honesty and humility just to draw near to him, as Chris already prayed earlier.

To hear his heart and just trust in his character and who he says he is. But we need to do a bit of groundwork here. So, please bear with me as we're only covering the first verse, really.

[13 : 03] But this psalm is probably one of those psalms we probably know it for its fridge magnet verse. You know, verse 14, I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

And I'm sure we've probably seen that on a coaster or something. But when you look at it as a whole, it's not long before you encounter that. This psalm is a very deep and personal psalm.

In fact, it is so theologically rich, I think there is a whole sermon series here. There is lots of good truths to meditate and chew on.

As you're reading it, you will probably notice something else, that there's a lot of I's and there's a lot of me's here. But if you notice with me, that in as much as it's talking about the psalmist throughout, he writes a lot about who God is.

In other words, he sees himself through the lens of God's character. What he has done, what he is going to do and what he is doing.

[14:12] I need to know you or I'll never know myself. So I've got this outline as I was reading it.

And I think I, you know, to me, this is how it's helpful to break it down. But it will come up on the screen. But you can kind of see in verses 1 to 6 that the psalmist says about God, that God is all-knowing.

Yeah, you saw that with me. In verses 7 to 12, God is ever-present. 13 to 16, God creates, creates a God.

Verses 17 to 18, God cares and provides. Verses 19 to 22, God who is merciful and gracious. And I'll explain why I think that is.

And verses 23 to 24, God who hears prayers. And as I was thinking about this structure, you can sort of phrase this as propositional statements.

[15:23] If X is true, then surely equals Y. So the same outline, verses 1 to 6. Therefore, if God is all-knowing, then surely he knows you.

So you don't have to pretend or lie to him. Verses 7 to 12, if God is ever-present, then surely he is with you wherever you are.

You don't have to be afraid. Verses 13 to 16, if God created you, then surely he must know what's best for you and how you function best.

He knows what you need. Which leads me to verse 17 to 18. If God cares and he thinks of you, then surely you're not forgotten, even when you think you are.

19 to 22. If God is merciful and gracious, even to his enemies, then surely how much more will he be to his children.

[16:40] And lastly, verses 23 to 24. If God hears your prayers, then surely you can trust him to answer. I would love to unpack all of these fully, but we would be here all week.

So we're just looking at that first one. God who is all-knowing. So I should probably mention that the subheading to the choir master, Psalm of David.

It's helpful to see these subheadings themselves as a trailer of the content of the psalm. And the subheadings themselves just tell us what kind of psalm it is.

You know, there is, for instance, you might come across a miktam, it's called, which is a lamentation. Or if it's a masculine, it can be said to be a contemplative psalm.

So you can expect intellectual, lots of intellectual wisdom. But here in our Bibles, the word we read as psalm is a word that means a melody or song, mismal.

[17:47] Suggesting that it was written to be accompanied by a musical instrument, hence to the choir master or music director or conductor.

So it was a song for public worship. It is a song for believers. And if you're a believer today, it is a song for you too. But I do think we do lose out quite a lot on the psalms because we don't sing them, do we?

But it says to me that they were meant to be memorable. They were meant to be memorized. You know, particularly the ones which have got, you know, the melody to them. Which we often read in sort of like this monotone way, right?

They were meant to be catchy songs. And it says this psalm is said to be written by David, right? King David. The man God himself said was a man after God's own heart.

Acts 13, verse 22. Remember how he was chosen by God. There in 1 Samuel 16, 6 to 7. And God looked at the heart.

[19:03] The heart. Not the appearance. The heart. That's what God was interested in. This same David would go on to pen 73 of the 150 psalms in our Bible.

And I think it is safe to say that David knew the Lord. He taught the talk. And he walked the walk too.

Hence the intro. Oh, Lord, you have searched me and known me. The capitalized Oh Lord there. Oh, Yahweh.

Yahweh. The personal relational name of God as given by himself. Yahweh. Revealed to Moses.

And if you remember there, God calling Moses to go and set his people free. And Moses essentially says, I don't know who you are. And your people will ask what your name is.

[20:02] And God replies, I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel. Exodus 3, 13 to 15. The Lord, Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.

This is my name forever. And thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Later on, God would tell Moses that he only revealed himself as God Almighty to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But as Yahweh, he did not make himself known to them. Exodus 6, verse 2 to 5. The name of the Lord being more than just the utterance of sounds.

In that culture, we're told over and over how a name signifies the character of that person, their whole being. And in God's case, it revealed his nature, his character of who he is.

The ever active, ever present, eternal, covenant-keeping God who is mighty to save. In that sense, God hadn't revealed himself to the patriarchs.

[21:22] By David's time, of course, the people knew a lot more about who God had revealed himself to be. More than Moses, shall we say. Moses never got to enter the promised land.

He never experienced God's faithfulness in removing one by one Israel's enemies and giving them that milk of flowing milk and honey. And equally, we can say that for ourselves.

That actually, despite all of David's revelation, and indeed all the prophets, they never got to read what God had revealed himself as in Jesus Christ.

Yes, they looked forward. But they still didn't. They looked forward. They didn't see that. So how incredible is it that we get to live in the age that we're in, where God has revealed himself fully to us through Jesus, and we can come to know him in a way that even Abraham, Moses, David didn't.

From Genesis to Revelation. If we only knew what we held in our hands.

[22:40] If you recall the saddest verse I mentioned there in John 1, 10 to 11, how he was in the world and the world was made through him, but the world did not know him.

Yet carry on. You read the sweetest verses in the Bible. Verses 12 to 13. Who are those that become children of God?

Who are those that become children of God? They who believe.

They who receive. They who accept Jesus as who he is. Who he is.

He is who he says he is. Savior God. Come to make him known. Come to bring salvation. He, the image of the invisible God. Colossians 1, 15.

[23 : 48] He, the radiance of God. Hebrews 1, 3. He, God made flesh. Yahweh. And the relationship that is birthed from knowing him, we become a part of his family.

And not just some distant, extended relative either, although that would be enough. No, we become his children. And he becomes our father.

Status. Belonging. So who are you? Who are you? Is God your father?

Are you a child of God? Where David said, Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me. We get to say, Father, you have searched me and known me.

I don't know about you, but being searched and known sounds like a very terrifying thing. Being searched and known by God.

[25 : 02] That's terrifying. And it is if you're outside his family. We've talked about how status is how God legally sees you.

To not know God. To not know God. As your savior. That's terrifying. That's terrifying. Hebrews 4, 13 tells us that no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him whom we must give account.

It is as Isaiah in chapter 6, where he sees the image of the Lord.

He sees not just the image. He sees the Lord actual. And he says, I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips. And I dwell among a people of unclean lips.

Scripture tells us over and over that the Lord knows the heart of every man. Jeremiah 17, 10. I, the Lord, search the heart and test the mind to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.

[26 : 17] And the idea of being searched here is, if you imagine digging, digging for precious metal. I'm not a miner. Never have tried it.

Doesn't appeal to me. But I can't imagine that one does that half-heartedly. It's a, no rock gets left unturned. It is exposition.

I'm not sure I'll say excavation. There's no mask that you can put on to hide from this. There's no place, as the psalm goes on, to say you can hide from this all-seeing, ever-present God.

This level of scrutiny into our very thought life itself. But like I alluded to earlier, look how this psalm is bookended there in verses 1 to 2.

Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me. You discern my thoughts from afar. And then skip down to verse 23. Search me, O God, I know my heart.

[27 : 29] Try me and know my thoughts. One makes a statement of already having been searched. And the other makes a request and a prayer to be searched and known fully.

Which suggests to me that this is a continual process. It's a living relationship that consists of coming back time and time again to the Lord.

Asking him to show us who we are so that we might live in light of the truth. His truth. The way everlasting. And I think as scary as it is, it really speaks volumes of the comfort and the confidence that exists for the believer who is already known by God.

To be searched continually by the Lord and then to be led in the way of everlasting. That's comfort. That's comforting. He doesn't leave us.

He leads us in the way everlasting. There seems to be no fear, no hesitation on David's part in this request. There is only that confidence, assurance of coming face to face with a merciful and gracious God.

[28 : 55] And David knew the Lord was gracious and merciful, didn't he? You read the story of his life. Surely he knew the Lord to be merciful and gracious.

I mean, if you even like, if you read down Psalm 139 and you come across the, Oh Lord, that you would slay the wicked.

You know that part where it feels like it's like a different Psalm sometimes. You know, you're reading, you're reading. Nice, nice, nice. And then suddenly it switches. You think, what on earth is going on here?

But I think the fact that God allows such men and women who live offensively, offensively to him, and yet he gives them another day.

He gives them another sunrise. Like there in Matthew 4, 44 to 46, chapter 5. He makes his sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

[30 : 04] I've alluded it to earlier. If that's what he does, and if that's how gracious he is to his enemies, how much more to his children? I was thinking about this.

If God answered that prayer about the wicked being slain straight away, if the Lord sent a lightning bolt every time a wicked person did wickedly, I dare say heaven would be filled just with angels.

Because we've all been there. We've all been enemies, the Bible tells us. We've all acted in rebellion. And yet, because of Christ, because of what he has done, we're no longer enemies, but sons and daughters.

Jesus has gone before us. He has torn that veil of separation.

Where we struggle to know God and one another. And now, we get to come to him in confident assurance that he hears us.

[31 : 31] Where once we hid as Adam and Eve there in the garden, naked and exposed. Now, we get to run to him to be clothed by the robes of Jesus.

We get to run to him. Because he cares for us, we get to cast our anxieties on him.

We can trust him to save us to the very uttermost. Because throughout all scripture, all scripture, he has proved himself over and over and over again to be true to his name.

The ever active, ever present, eternal, covenant-keeping God who is mighty to save.

So, I just pray.

[32 : 36] And just to conclude this whole time. Just that. We can be confident, guys. We can come before God to be known, to be searched.

Intimately. Now, what I'm not saying, hear me out, is that we suddenly start, you know, unraveling all our secrets before one another.

No. Before you and the Lord, we get to be honest. Do that first. Do that first. Come to be known.

Know him. And you will know yourself. As you are intended. So, I pray by his grace, through his spirit, to the praise of his son, Jesus.

That we would, indeed, adhere to that initial verse. Lord, you have searched me. And you have known me.

[33 : 40] And that we can continue to say, Lord, please search me. Please know me. Please know me. Know my thoughts. I love Galatians 4 verse 9.

I love Galatians, to be honest. But Paul says, essentially, you know, now you have come to know God. And then he says this, or rather, to be known by God.

How can you turn back to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world? Who slaves you once, you want to be once more, sorry.

Now you have come to know God. Now you have come to know God. Or rather, to be known by God. Now this is where we are. This is our status now. Our status, we're legally seen by God.

As righteous. Just as if we had never sinned because of Jesus. How can you turn back again to the mask?

[34:50] It is my prayer for you that if maybe you don't know the Lord. It is my prayer that today would be that day the mask falls off.

And as Christians, it is my prayer, it is my heartfelt prayer, that we would live in the freedom that has been purchased for us.

So shall we close in prayer? Thank you, Lord, for this time that we have just spent.

Just in your word, Lord. There is so much here. There's so much in this psalm. There is, we've just barely scratched the surface, Lord. But I felt a real sense that, Father, you just want to speak to us regarding this.

Regarding us being honest with you. With one another, Lord. Quite often, Father, we feel the pressure, Father.

[36:06] The pressure that we need to be something we're not. Or we try to be further on than we are actually, Lord. And your word is simple. Your word says, come and be honest.

Come and be honest. Lord, help us to cry out to you as David. Lord, search me. Search me, Lord.

It is a scary, scary prayer. But let's remember who it is who we pray to. When we pray that prayer. The God who has already adopted us as his children.

We don't have to fear approaching you if we have come to know you, Lord. Fear is for the one that doesn't know you, Lord.

That's real fear, Lord. That's terrifying, Father. But as Christians, as those who have come to know Christ. As those who have been redeemed by his blood.

[37:10] As those who have been covered by his robes. As those who are being made perfect. Day by day, being transformed into the image of Christ. And one day, as those who will worship freely.

Seeing you face to face. Fully known. And knowing you fully. Help us, Lord.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.