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Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

Psalm 139

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Video - Child singing "Jesus Loves Me"

All right, little Noah Stelzer there. Chip off the old block! (laughter)

Karl Barth, the great Swiss theologian, was once asked by one of his students, "What is the most profound theology you have ever learned?" He thought for a moment and he said, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." His students began to laugh, thinking he was joking and then they looked into his eyes and realized he was very serious. Why is it that when a child sings that song we have no problem believing that's true but somewhere along the way we begin to question whether Jesus could really love us like that?

One of the necessary conclusions, if you're going to buy into the theory of natural evolution, is that life has no meaning; life has no purpose. If it's true that we're simply here by chance through a series of mutations, then we can pretend that life has meaning and significance but, at the end of the day, something deep down in our hearts knows that there's no meaning to life. But what if that isn't true? What if you were actually created on purpose, for a purpose? Wouldn't that change everything? That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Psalm 139. A very familiar psalm, it's a psalm of David. He's talking to God and he's just overwhelmed with how much God loves him and knows him. Verse one says:

> **O LORD, You have searched me and known me.** (*NASB, Psalm 139:1)

LORD is capital LORD. We always know that's the English way of translating the Hebrew *Yahweh*. That's the personal God; that's the covenant making, covenant keeping God. That's the God of Genesis, Chapter 2—the God that's very intimate. There's a lot of correlation between the language of Psalm 139 and the language of Genesis, Chapter 2. **You have searched me** (you have examined me) **and known me**. The word **known** doesn't just mean you *know about me* or you *know my name*. It's the same Hebrew word that's used to describe sexual relations between a husband and wife; it's a term filled with intimacy—God, you have known me as a husband knows his wife. Then he goes on to say how intimate that is.

> **You know when I sit down and when I rise up;** (Vs. 2a)

Now just think about it. This is poetic language to make a point but what the psalmist is saying is, "God, you are so aware of me; you are so aware of everything I do; you notice me; you pay so much attention to me; you actually know how many times I stood up and sat down yesterday." I'm going to guess there isn't a single person in this auditorium this morning that you, yourself, aren't aware of how many times you stood up and sat down yesterday—but God knows! God knows you better than you know yourself. God is so aware of you, so focused on you; you matter so much to Him that He notices the most ordinary, everyday, mundane tasks to the degree that He could tell you how many times yesterday you stood up and you sat down. Now just think about that for a minute. How many people feel like a face in the crowd, feel like just another number. Even in a relationship you can feel lonely; you can feel like nobody really knows, nobody really cares, that I really don't matter. It's a big problem in our culture.

People feel such a degree of loneliness and yet the God of the Universe who sits enthroned forever, who created the universe with a spoken word, is so attentive to you that he could actually tell you how many times yesterday you stood up and sat down. That's a remarkable thought. He says:

You understand my thought from afar. (v. 2b)

It doesn't mean that God is far off but that He still understands. It means that He understands my thought when my thought is still far off. It's kind of like sitting at a picnic and you hear the thunder in the distance and it's working its way toward you. That's kind of like a thought that is out there and it's starting to crystallize, but before I even know my own thought, God knows my thought. He knows my thought before I know my thought.

You scrutinize my path and my lying down, (v. 3a)

The word scrutinize tends to have a kind of negative connotation in our English vocabulary but it's not what the Hebrew word means at all. It carries the idea that God goes ahead and examines our path. You have to remember that in the ancient world travel was very difficult; it was very dangerous. When they traveled, they literally took their lives into their own hands and so there was great concern. So what the text is saying is that God goes ahead and examines. He wants to look behind the boulder and make sure there's not a robber hiding there; He wants to look in the bush and make sure there's not a snake there. He wants to look up ahead and make sure there isn't a boulder getting ready to fall. It's the idea that God goes ahead and scrutinizes my path and leads me along the way. The most dangerous part of traveling was at night. You see this actually a lot in the psalms where there's some reference to God being a refuge or a protection when you lay down to sleep, because that was the moment when you were the most vulnerable. In the ancient culture, dark was really dark and you were very vulnerable either to robbers or to wild animals and that's what he's saying there—that God is aware. **He scrutinizes my path and my lying down—t**hat God becomes my place of refuge, my place of protection.

And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.
Even before there is a word on my tongue,
Behold, O LORD, You know it all. (Vs. 3b-4)

Even before I say something, God is so aware of me He knows what I'm going to say before I say it. I think it'd be very helpful from time to time if God would put His hand over my mouth. (laughter) If he knows what I'm going to say before I say it, that'd really be helpful! "Okay, Bryan, don't say that one!" Even before I speak, God knows what I'm going to say.

You have enclosed me behind and before,
[Basically meaning God is behind me; He's before me; He's protecting me.]
And laid Your hand upon me.
[Which is a statement of blessing.]
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is too high, I cannot attain to it. (Vs. 5-6)

David is overwhelmed by this fact that God knows him better than he knows himself. God knows how many times he's stood up and how many times he's sat down; he knows what he's

going to think before he even thinks it; he knows what he's going to say even before he says it. He goes before him and behind him and scrutinizes his path and David is overwhelmed that the God of the Universe would be so attentive to him.

Now there's nowhere in the Bible, including this passage, where God promises that means that nothing bad will ever happen. We accept the fact that bad things do happen to good people and there's a mystery to that that only God fully understands. But it's not because God's unaware; it's not because God doesn't care; it's not because God isn't in that moment. Somehow, even in the midst of our worst moments, God is there and is aware of our pain and our struggle and our sorrows. I think this level of awareness both terrifies David and it comforts him. He starts with the terror.

Verse 7:

Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. (Vs. 7-8)

Sheol is like either the grave or kind of life after the grave; it's a bit of a vague term. I think at this point David is thinking, "If that's true, there's nowhere to hide". You know, there's this sense where *I can run but I can't hide,* God knows my most private moments; God knows my most public moments. One of the reasons I think we sometimes kind of live this double life—we'll have our church face and then our face we put on when we leave church—is because we don't really believe the psalm is true. We think we can have this other life—this secret life—and who's going to know? But God says, "I know every moment of every day; I know every thought; I know every word." Think of it this way: What if, for the next week, I as your pastor am going to spend every moment of every day right by your side and I'm going to notice every word that comes out of your mouth; I going to notice how you treat your spouse; I'm going to notice how you treat your kids; I'm going to notice how you treat your parents; I'm going to notice how you act at work; I'm going to notice what movies you go to; I'm going to notice what you watch on the computer; I'm going to notice what music you listen to; I'm going to notice every detail of your life. Would you be even the slightest degree more thoughtful about what you do, what you say, what you watch, what you listen to? And the answer is, "Of course you would be!" I'd be the same way if you shadowed me for a week. I'd be much more aware of how I talked to my wife and what I watch on television and what movies I go to and what jokes I laugh at and what I watch on the computer and how I conduct my life. What the psalm is saying is that actually is true. God is so intimately aware of you every moment of every day, He knows every thought; He knows every word; He goes with you to every movie; He watches every television show with you; He watches everything you watch on the computer; He listens to every word that comes out of your mouth; He is with you every moment of every day. And David at first finds that a terrifying thought! There's nowhere to run; there's nowhere to hide. But then he begins to find comfort in the same thought. Verse 9:

If I take the wings of the dawn,
[The wings of the morning, we maybe today would say, if I ride into the sunset.]
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,
Even there Your hand will lead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of me.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,
And the light around me will be night,"
Even the darkness is not dark to You,
And the night is as bright as the day.
Darkness and light are alike to You. (Vs. 9-12)

It's metaphoric language understanding again, in the ancient world, darkness was really dark. We get spoiled in a modern culture; we don't really get light and darkness. Anytime there's darkness, we have a hundred different ways to make it light. But in the ancient world, that just simply wasn't true. Dark was really dark and they had to be very thoughtful about what they did during the light because once it became dark, it was really dark. And so often in the Scriptures you have this contrast between the light and the dark. Darkness is kind of an imagery. It's a metaphor for despair and for depression and for struggle and for those painful, hurtful moments of life—sometimes they are even seasons of life. But what David is saying is, even in my darkest hour, even when it's so dark I can't find my way, God, You're there and when You're there, the darkness isn't even dark because, for God, darkness and light are the same. God is light and for God, even darkness is light. So he's saying, "God, in those moments You're there and You understand and You're aware and You will lead me and You will guide me through the darkness back into the light. The logical question at this point in the psalm would be, "Why? Why is God so aware? Why does God seem to be so attentive to me?"

Verse 13:

For... *[That's a really important word, he's going to say this is why God is so attentive.]*
For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb

Why is God so aware of my standing up and sitting down? Why is He so aware of every moment of every day? Answer: Because I am His creation! He formed me; He made me; He wove me. The term **form** there is the same word that's used in Genesis 2. It's a great Hebrew word; it's a very artsy term that talks about a potter working a piece of clay into some sort of a sculpture. You have this imagery of God rolling up His sleeves and getting His hands in the clay, forming and shaping like an artist. The word **wove** there is the Hebrew word that, again, is very artsy and it talks about a weaver on a loom, working a piece of fabric and you just imagine God working in the fabric and the colors and the design. So both *form* and *weave* are very artsy terms where God is involved in creating you and making you exactly the way he wants you.

Verse 14:

I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.

Very interesting verse—do we believe that's true? How many of us look in the mirror in the morning and say, "Whoa, **fearfully and wonderfully made**?" (laughter) I don't. Sometimes it's really hard to believe that God tells the truth. But what He says is that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made". You are exactly the way that I wanted you. One of the reasons we struggle with this is because we are so affected by the artificial, external, superficial standard of the world. We buy into the operating system of the world that is driven by competition and comparison and, based on that, we are always dissatisfied with ourselves. I wish I was taller; I

wish I was shorter; I wish I was skinnier; I wish I was stronger; I wish I was smarter; I wish I was a better athlete; I wish I was better at music—I wish this; I wish that! There are a hundred ways we can be dissatisfied if we use the system of the world, which is superficial and external. But if we buy into the value system of God and we believe by faith that God says, "You are fearfully and wonderfully made; you're exactly the way I wanted you! You're perfectly equipped to fulfill the purpose for which I created you." In God's eyes you're a work of art! You've been formed by the Master; you've been woven into this beautiful piece of fabric by the Master and you're exactly the way He wants you. When we as a culture look at a special-needs child we say, "That's a tragedy." God says, "...fearfully and wonderfully made," exactly the way I wanted that child to perfectly fulfill the purpose for which he or she was created. As a matter of fact, most of the special-needs children that I have known are so oblivious to this ridiculous external standard of the world that they seem so much happier! They seem so much more comfortable in their own skin; they seem so much more dialed in to the purpose for which they were created and, in many ways, probably live life to a fuller degree than most of us. Can I believe that I have been fearfully and wonderfully made, perfectly equipped to fulfill the purpose for which I was created? —**That my soul would know it very well**.

> **My frame was not hidden from You,**
> **When I was made in secret,**
> **And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;** (Vs. 15)

He's talking about the child in the womb of his or her mother and God's skillfully shaping and making and creating.

> **Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;**
> **And in Your book were all written**
> **The days that were ordained for me,**
> **When as yet there was not one of them.** (Vs. 16)

God is busy. Even before I was conceived, I existed in the mind of God. I was conceived and God has been shaping me like an artist and forming me, making me on purpose, for a purpose, exactly the way He wants me. But even before I drew a single breath, **all my days were ordained for me**. Now I know there are people that dismiss that, saying that just isn't what it means, but you really need to pay attention to the text. It doesn't say God, in His omniscience, knows how many days I will live. It says God *ordains* how many days I will live. The Bible says this in many different places. In the Gospels Jesus says, "No amount of worry can add a single day to your life." James talks about this, that ultimately, "Every day is a gift from God and God is in charge of how long I live." No matter how many days a week I work out at the gym, I cannot extend my life one single day beyond what God ordained.

Now there's some mystery in this. It doesn't mean that we don't take care of ourselves. Somehow we have to mix together the choices we make with God's sovereign plan and nobody really understands how all that works. But there is a reality to the fact that God has given me life on purpose, for a purpose. In some cases, that may be only for a matter of weeks. For those of you ladies who have gone through a miscarriage: to understand that isn't an accident or a tragedy in God's economy. That child who was conceived, fearfully and wonderfully made, fulfilled whatever purpose God intended and God takes that child home. Whether it's in the womb, whether it's six months, whether it's a year, ten years, fifty years, ninety years, God

ultimately is the author of life and death. He ordains the days, created on purpose, for a purpose and even though we don't always understand that, we have to trust Him with that reality.

Verse 17:

> **How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!**
> **How vast is the sum of them!**
> **If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand**
> **When I awake, I am still with You.** (Vs. 17-18)

Again David is marveling that God would be so aware of him, that God thinks about him so often, that God thinks about him more times than you can possibly count even the grains of sand on the seashore. Now, as we go through this part of the Psalm, we have to understand how fundamental this is to the value of life—to understand God is the author of life; God created us on purpose, for a purpose. God ordains our days; He's like an artist. He's forming us and He's weaving us and He's masterfully and skillfully making us exactly the way He wants us and God is aware of us every moment of every day. That's what gives life value.

I doubt there would be much argument that we live in a culture that more and more is de-valuing life. My personal opinion is, when the baby boomers get into the retirement system and we bust the system, there's going to be a lot of very difficult discussions on who lives and who dies. Unless something dramatically changes in our culture, that could be a very dark chapter in our history. This text also is a primary text in thinking through and understanding the issue of abortion. Now I understand that abortion continues to be a very hot potato politically but it's not ultimately a political issue. It's an issue of life and death. One of the reasons we struggle, as a culture, to make progress is because we don't talk about the *issue*. We deflect onto subjects that aren't really the issue at all. We talk about things like *right to privacy* and *right to choose*. Those are not the issue; those are deflections. I don't even know what that means exactly. What do we mean when we say, "right to choose"? Are we saying that there's some God-given right we have to make any choice we want? Nobody believes that! Every single criminal law, every single civil law, every single moral code is saying people are not free. They don't have a right to choose any behavior they wish. People will often say you can't legislate morality. Of course you can! That's what every law in the book is for! Show me one law that isn't an attempt to legislate morality! The fact of the matter is: because we live in a sinful, fallen world we have to legislate morality or the world would be out of control. That's all it is!

So the issue is really not an issue of choice. Are we saying that a mother has the right to choose to kill a three year old child? I'm going to guess there isn't a single person in this auditorium that would say a mother has that right to choose. Okay, let's back up a little bit. Then are you saying she has the right to choose to kill a six month old child? I doubt anybody would agree with that. So then, let's just back it up about eight inches up the birth canal, what makes it right now? Isn't the question whether or not this embryo is a child? And that's what the discussion needs to be about. Can't we agree that if it's a child, that child cannot be killed? There is no right to kill a child.

Now we can argue this two different ways. We can argue it scientifically and we can argue it theologically. Now I'm not a scientist; I'm not a medical doctor; but this information is easily accessible in today's world. The more advanced we become scientifically, the more overwhelming the evidence is that of course that embryo is a child. What else would that be?

Are we saying that just because that embryo in a mother's womb is some sort of a blob and then it goes eight inches and becomes a child? What sense does that make? Of course it's a child; what else is it? But when we argue it theologically we understand that, as the people of God, we are in submission to the Word of God and God has spoken very clearly that, from the moment of conception, God is the artist and He's forming and He's shaping and He's weaving and He's creating a masterpiece that He considers to be fearfully and wonderfully made. And no one—no one!—has the right to choose to destroy God's masterpiece.

I'm sure there are women here this morning who have suffered the pain of abortion and I would be the first one to tell you that God is in the business of forgiving and healing and we celebrate that. But we also understand that as the people of God we take our stand on this issue. God has said, without question, from the moment of conception I'm the artist and I'm forming and I'm weaving and I'm skillfully, fearfully and wonderfully making this creation on purpose, for a purpose and no person has the right choose to destroy that creation. On this issue this is where we must take our stand. Starting in verse 19, the psalm takes a most unpleasant turn. He says:

> **O that You would slay the wicked, O God;**
> **Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed.**
> **For they speak against You wickedly,**
> **And 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 the utmost hatred;**
> **They have become my enemies.** (Vs. 19-22)

You say, "Whoa, like where did that come from?" It's interesting how many people are familiar with most of Psalm 139, but aren't so familiar with this paragraph. As a matter of fact, it's left off of a lot of videos and recitations of the psalm. We like to say, "Hate the sin; love the sinner," but it's not exactly what he's saying here. So what is going on? You have to understand the terms of love and hate, often times in the Bible, are terms of contrast. They're not typically terms of emotion; they're terms of contrast. So when God wants to contrast two different spectrums, there's *love* and *hate*; they're kind of these opposites. So then, in each particular text you have to ask, "What's the point in this text? I think, in this particular text, what David is saying is because God loves him so much, because God has created him, because he's fearfully and wonderfully made, because God knows every detail of his life, because God leads and directs him, he's so overwhelmed with how much God loves him and pays attention to him that he's in essence saying, "God, because I love You so much, whatever offends You, offends me; whatever wounds You, wounds me; whatever grieves You, grieves me." It's his way of saying, "God, I love you so much that I'm going to stand with You and if somebody's fighting You, they're fighting me; if somebody hates You, they hate me."

Think of it this way: Let's imagine there's somebody in the church and they make it their mission to absolutely destroy my wife, Patti. Every moment of every day is committed to trying to destroy this woman. So I live everyday with that reality. I see her grief; I see her pain; I see her confusion day after day, week after week; month after month I feel her pain. Would it be possible for me to be neutral on this subject and to actually become friends with that person who is bent on destroying her? That we could go fishing together; we could have coffee together? I would say, "You know that's really between you and Patti but we can be friends." That would be impossible! If I love her, I feel her pain; I feel her offense; I would enter into

that. I could not have a relationship with this person!

In the same way David is saying, “This is a world that’s bent against God; this isn’t just someone who’s struggling.” Notice what the text says, "This is someone who is at war with God; this is someone who hates God; this is someone who wants to destroy God." And what David is saying is, “God, I’m offended by that which offends You and I hate those who hate You! You know I’m in this with You.”

This is a really important text to think about. Jesus said that we are to be "in the world but not of the world". I find that to be very, very hard. And when I say hard, I mean emotionally hard. If you don’t think it’s hard, you’re probably on one extreme or the other. One extreme would be that all I have are Christian friends and my Christian family and we just kind of gather everybody and we just kind of pull back in our little place of refuge and we hide in our little fortress and you would say, "I don’t think it’s hard at all." I’d say, "Well I don’t think it’s hard either because you’re just hiding." But you’re being disobedient to the call to be "in the world". You’ve misunderstood the mission.

The other extreme would be those people who, under the umbrella of evangelism—under the umbrella of mission—have simply used that to become a friend of the world. They laugh at the world’s jokes; they participate in the world’s activities; they enjoy the world’s sense of humor; they have become friends with the world. That which offends God doesn’t offend them at all; that which breaks the heart of God doesn’t break their heart at all—and so we’ve become friends with the world. If we truly love God, if we have a sense in which how much God loves us and cares about us and notices every thought and every deed and every word and He’s with us every step along the way, the only right response would be, “God, I want to be offended by that which offends you. I want my heart broken over the things that break your heart. I want to grieve over the things that grieve you.” To be *in the world but not of the world* is really hard—because we’re in the midst of people that hate God; we’re in the midst of people that offend God; we’re in the midst of people that break God’s heart in so many ways every day. And if it breaks the heart of God, shouldn’t it break our heart and if it offends God, shouldn’t it offend us? We can’t, under the umbrella of evangelism, somehow just become friends with the world and lose sight of what really offends and grieves and breaks the heart of God.

The only response you could have to this psalm is in verses 23 and 24:

> **Search me, O God, and know my heart**;
> *[In other words, don’t let me be one of those.]*
> **Try me and know my anxious thoughts;**
> **And see if there be any hurtful way in me,**
> **And lead me in the everlasting way.**

If it’s true that I can run but I can’t hide, if it’s true that God knows me in my most private moments as well as my most public moments, if it’s true that God is so focused, so aware; if it’s true that God has made me fearfully and wonderfully, made like a potter and like a weaver and God has skillfully made me exactly the way He wants me and goes before me and behind me and blesses me, if all of that is true, the only right response would be, “God, I want to be your guy! I want to walk pleasing to You." **Search me**! If there’s anything in my life that’s offensive to you, anything that’s hurtful to You, I’m asking You to show me and I want to get rid of it and I want to walk in Your way. God, if You have made me on purpose, for a purpose,

then I want to live that way and I want You to lead me in the way that leads to life. May that be so for every one of us.

Our Father, we're thankful this morning that You do love us. Lord, You're aware of how many times I sat down and stood up yesterday. Lord, You know every detail of my life better than I know. Lord, in some ways that's just like David; that seems terrifying. But, Lord, in that there's also great comfort that there's never a moment when I'm out of Your care, when I'm out of Your eye. Lord, I pray that we would grieve over the things that grieve You, that we'd be offended by the things that offend You, Lord, that you would search our own hearts and see if there would be any wicked way, Lord, that we would stand upright before You and You would lead us in the way that leads to life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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