

Written Copy: Psalm 139:1-7 “Never Out of His Grasp”

2nd Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, January 14th, 2024

Text: Psalm 139:1-7

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

Exegetical Statement

The LORD knows me thoroughly and has examined my heart: my thoughts and intentions. He knows every action and knows what I'm planning before I actually do it, knows every word before I utter it. He knows and has planned for every path I head down in life. His secure and guiding hand is upon me, guiding my past, present, and future. His knowledge and control over my life is too wonderful for me, it's beyond my comprehension. I can never go so high up in the heavens, or so deep into the depths of the earth, I can never travel so far away from my home that I have left the presence of His Spirit. No matter where I go His hand is guiding me and His right hand of power has a hold of me to guide and protect me.

Focus Statement:

This God who knows me so intimately is the One who called me to be His own precious child. Despite His intimate knowledge of my sin He sent His Son to be my sacrifice of atonement for sin. He sends His Spirit and points out my sins not to condemn me, but to keep me trusting in Christ alone, and keep me in an intimate relationship with Him now and into eternity.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We all put on a front before others, but there is not putting on a front before the LORD. We can never escape His watchful eye, and knows not just what we say and do, but our intentions. When we consider the product of our sinful nature, this can be a disheartening thought. As He shows us our sin, is He disgusted or angry enough with us to turn away from us?

What the hearer should do as a result:

Instead of hiding my sins from Him readily confess them, trusting that He loves me despite my sinfulness, and is at work to keep me washed clean in baptism, growing in faith unto life everlasting.

Subject Sentence: His Loving Hand is Always Upon Me

Introduction

Have you ever done this? You see someone approaching and the words that come out of your mouth are: “Hey great to see you! How have you been?” While what’s going on in your brain is “Oh no! That person again! If I knew they’d be here I wouldn’t have come! How can I sneak away before they drone on and bore me to death!” Truth be told, all of us have this discontinuity between what we say and what we are thinking. We try not to let it show through our words and actions. Most times we are successful. But have you ever had a reaction from the other person that makes you suspect that maybe you’ve tipped them off as to how you really feel? Maybe it was the tone of your voice, or an expression, or something you let slip. All of sudden they turn cold and walk away. And even though this is what you wanted; you now feel guilty.

As a manager at Hilliers there were customers that I enjoyed talking to. There were also plenty of customers that I tried to avoid, especially at the 10 Mile and Greenfield Store. It had more than its share of problem customers that always had something to complain about. It was a smaller store, and older store than the rest of our chain. And it definitely didn’t stack up to the Kroger store a half mile down the road.

The all too frequent complaint was that we were out of stock on something, which I already knew because the customer before them had made me aware of it. Then would come the request that made me grit my teeth. “Go see if you have any in the back”. Contrary to popular opinion no store has a backroom big enough to have extra stock on everything they carry. And especially not the 10 and Greenfield Store. Now I knew for sure there wasn’t any back there; not now, not 30 minutes ago, and wouldn’t be any until tomorrow afternoon. But I learned that if I didn’t go “check” in the back room, they would assume I didn’t care or want to help them. They would then complain to the main office. And then followed a visit from the General Manager, or if I was so lucky, the owner himself. He would make sure that I “cared” next time. So, I would go to the backroom, talk to the receiver or the bread drivers, then come back out and announce what I already knew, “We’re out.” Then smile through the complaint I knew would come even before I headed back there, “You’re always out of everything I want. I should just go and shop at Kroger’s.” I would say, “Please don’t. We value your business. We should have more tomorrow. All the while I’m thinking, “Just begone! Good riddance to you. Go be a pain in the rear at Kroger.”

There was one elderly gentleman that I would try to hide from. He always had a list. Not a shopping list per se. But a list of all the things we were out of, even those he wasn't really looking to buy. Also on that list were all the ways we didn't stack up to Kroger's down the road. "Your store is dirty. I have to wait too long at the Fish Department. You never have enough cashiers. And you are a poor excuse for a manager." Now I don't have to tell you what was running through my head as he was going through his spiel. Thankfully I could hide those thoughts pretty well. But what if they all of a sudden slipped out? What if not only that customer heard what I was thinking, but my supervisor? Or even worse the owner?

The God Who Knows My Every Thought and Action

With that in mind, consider **Psalm 139:1-4** **10 LORD, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.** The unspoken thoughts we may have in our heads might be hidden from each other, but they are not hidden from God.

And not just the thoughts, but those words that do sometimes slip out when we are tired or angry. Those times when we not only have sinful thoughts and careless words, but the sin in our hearts manifests itself in our actions. In the privacy of our homes the witnesses to these things are limited. But our LORD sees them all. He knows all of our careless words, our unloving actions, even our sinful thoughts. Nothing is hidden from Him.

And what does He require of us? That in all we say, do, and think, we should love and honor Him first and foremost. That in everything we say do and think we glorify Him, and share His love with our fellow man, even those we might find undeserving of it. That's a standard that none of us can live up to.

With that in mind, when I read these verses, I was left feeling pretty uncomfortable. The LORD God who created me and has every right to tell me how to live my life is always watching me. I can fool other people most of the time. Like you I can put on our "Church face" and act like there is nothing wrong, nothing bothering us. But I can't hide anything from Him. Wherever I go, whatever I do, He knows my thoughts, words, and actions. And if I were Him, I would judge myself as being unworthy of His time or efforts in my life.

The God Who Loves Me and Called Me Despite Who I Am

But is that the reaction I should have to these verses? Is that the reaction you should have? Is that why King David was moved to write this Psalm?

Listen to **Psalm 139:5-6** **⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.** David writes that this revelation of how intimately the LORD knows Him is not awful, not scary, not depressing. He calls it “wonderful”! How can this be?

The God who knows all these things about you and me, who knows what we are really like and knows what we really think is the God who has called us to faith. He is the One who chose you to be His own before you were born. He is the God who chose you even though He knew all of the good, the bad, and the ugly that would unfold in your life. He is the God who guided you from birth to bring you under the waters of baptism. He is the One who continues to strengthen your faith through the Gospel Message of Jesus Christ. He chose you because He loves you and wants you to be His own precious child, despite the things that you and I say and do and think.

He knows that you and I are not worthy to be called His precious children. So God the Father sent His Only Son to take care of that problem. God the Son, the divine nature joined with the human nature in that baby conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb. God became man to do all that was necessary to make you good enough, to declare you good enough to be a member of His family. He did that by living the perfect life you never could. Not only did Jesus never commit a sinful act, or say a sinful or disparaging word, He never had a sinful thought. All that He did and said and thought always pleased the Heavenly Father. Because all He did and said and thought honored His Heavenly Father and showed love and care to others. All that He did, said, and thought was out of love for you.

And then, in the greatest act of love, He took upon Himself all those times you fail to honor God and show love for others in your thoughts, words, and actions; He took them all to the cross and suffered our just-deserved punishment for them. All of our sins from the past, present, and future have been dealt with, taken care of, suffered and died for by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And this wonderful gift of grace earned for you by Jesus has been given to you, and keeps being given in this Gospel Message, the very words that I’ve been preaching. The Holy Spirit is at work so that you can believe and hold fast that the forgiveness Christ won on the cross is “for you”.

The God who has searched you and known you, who knows what you are doing, saying, and thinking at any and all times during the day, is the God who gave His life to forgive you. And rose again so that you might know you are right with Him now by faith. Through that faith in Christ, He declares you to be good enough to be His precious child. And He loves you as such, now and all the way unto eternity.

The Comfort of Knowing He Always Sees You

Psalms 139:7 ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

Rather than feeling uncomfortable and unworthy, you and I can instead be comforted by this truth the Holy Spirit reveals through David. Where can you go where you are hidden from the LORD? The answer is you can never escape His watchful loving gaze. He is always thinking about you, always caring for you. He loves you through your best moments and worst moments. He convicts you of your sinful thoughts, words, and actions not because He is mad at you, but because He loves you. He wants you to always be looking to and trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior.

He is always watching over you not to yell at you or keep a record of all your failures to bring to your attention when He is mad at you. He and His angels watch over you moved by the greatest kind of love. He watches over you to protect you from harm by the forces of nature, from other people around you, and from yourself. He watches over you as any loving parent would watch over their precious child.

You think about how a loving parent always keeps their eyes on their child at the playground. The parent watches so that their child doesn't do anything dangerous, such as playing on equipment they aren't old enough to be on. The loving parent is on the lookout for shady people who might try to approach their child with ill intentions. And is on the lookout for other older kids that might try to bully their child. That parent has their eyes on their child just like a hawk. And why do they do that? Out of a great love for the child. How much more so does our Heavenly Father?

In an even greater way, He is always watching over you. Unlike the parent He knows what you are thinking and proposing. He knows when what you are considering is dangerous for you in body, soul, and spirit. He doesn't just watch over you passively but is actively protecting you from physical and spiritual harm. And He is always at work doing this, day, and night, He never sleeps, and never gets tired. He never gets angry and turns away but continues to love you and forgive you and protect you because of your faith in Jesus Christ. With all this in mind, this knowledge, care, compassion, and concern our Heavenly Father has for you, His beloved baptized child, truly is altogether wonderful!

A Knowledge That Changes You

Psalms 139:6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is too high—I cannot grasp it.

David is right. While His knowledge and His continued love for us may be beyond our complete grasping of it, it is not beyond our meditating on it. And when we do, it can change you. It changed me.

The fact that my LORD knew the good, the bad, and the ugly of my life, yet still loved me, still gave His life to forgive me, and was still at work to keep me in a faith relationship with Him, made me reassess how I felt and dealt with that grumpy old man with the list. Just as the LORD loved me, the LORD loved him too. Instead of hiding from him, or letting myself get angry with him, I began to talk with him. It started slowly. I asked him for his advice, what would he do if he was in my shoes. I then progressed to get him to talk about what he used to do for a living, which was a foreman in a shop that made parts for cars. Finally, he revealed the source of his bitterness: he had lost his wife of 40 years, the love of his life five years ago. He told me, "There's not a day goes by that I don't wake up missing her and crying for her. He let me pray with him. He had begun to ask me about the Church I attended and was serving as a Deacon. And then, suddenly, he stopped coming in. Shortly thereafter I was moved to a different store. I never found out what became of him. But this I know, no matter where he went on this earth, the LORD was watching over him. And if there is any way he could be brought to faith, the LORD God who knew him intimately could and would make it happen.

Conclusion

While there will always be those moments in your life and my life that we dishonor our LORD in what we think, say, and do, we need not be troubled by His constant watching over us. He keeps a constant eye on you not to dress you down out of anger, not to grind your face in your sins just for the fun of it. He knows all your shortcomings yet loves you so much He gave His life to save you from eternal condemnation, and to save you for a life lived with Him now and for eternity. He brings your sins to your attention not in anger, but because He wants you to continue to trust every day in salvation through Jesus Christ alone. He wants you to keep calling upon Him, knowing that He will guide your life and protect you from falling away and being lost. He watches over you night and day, wherever you go, with the greatest love a Father can have for His precious child. And He wants you to share this wonderful knowledge with those around you who need to hear it. just as badly as you do. Amen.