

August 9, 2015

Psalm 139:1-6: **“Hemmed In!”**

- I. God’s “Before.”
- II. Hemmed In.
- III. Too High to Attain.

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Psalm 139:1-6

Dear Friends in Christ,

Samuel M. Shoemaker said, "Every Christian, sooner or later, must choose one of two pains: the pain of a crucified heart, or the pain of a divided mind." So, where do you stand? Where do I? A heart that belongs to God? Or, a mind imprisoned with divided loyalties?

W. R. Inge wrote, "We are losing our Christianity because Christianity is a creed for heroes while we are mainly harmless, good natured people who want everybody to have a good time." Inge, by the way, died in 1954. What would he think of the church in this moment of time?

It appears to me that the church is essentially everywhere, yet no-where in particular; oblivious to who really controls what; oblivious to the Scriptures warnings and admonitions. Or, how about just oblivious to the whole Word? Think of it: God, Who hides His glory from sinful human, pierces the darkness of human sin with His Word and most either run from or excuse themselves from it! It happens right here all the time. It's the Adam and Eve Syndrome: Run and hide! So, here we go. Here is what must be considered by us, individually and collectively, as God's people in Christ. Our direction . . .

HEMMED IN!

I. God's "Before."

O 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, O Lord, you know it altogether. (vss. 1-4)

I'm calling this part of the sermon "God's 'Before.'" God already knew everything about us *before* we were conceived and born into this world. And that fits nicely with Paul's words, "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world". (Eph. 1:4b) If He chose us before the foundation of the world to be His, then He knew us and everything about us before our birth day.

He knows when we sit down and rise up before we sit down and rise up. Well, again, our text says it: "You know when I sit down and when I rise up." He knows what we're thinking before we think it: "you discern my thoughts from afar." He knows the steps we're going to take before we take them: "You search out my path...". He knows when we're going to rest before we rest and our ways before we get to them: "You search out...my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways." He knows what we're going to say before we say it and He knows it completely: "Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether."

Have you ever had those moments when you've wondered, or asked God, "Do you know what's going on here?" Have you ever cried out to God, "Do you understand what's happening to me?" Have you ever wondered, "Well, I wonder what God thinks of this, now?" The answers to those and other questions about our unknowns are right in front of us, aren't they? They always have been.

But it's that "he chose us in him before the creation of the world" that really gets our attention. *Chose us*. For what? For eternal life! That's what. To be His though we didn't deserve anything but His wrath because of our sin. Chose us to be brought to the Cross of Jesus, the blood spilled to cover our sin; His victory over the grave that would be our victory over the grave.

Concerning these Scriptures, the Old Testament Commentator, H. C. Leupold notes, "God has let the full force of His Omniscience (His knowing of all things before they happen) play upon every thought and activity of the psalmist and therefore has always known him more intimately than he knows himself." (Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, Baker Book House, third printing, 1974, p. 943) He knows us in the same light; better than we know ourselves.

Well, my friends, God says through the prophet Jeremiah:

“Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.” (Jer. 23:23,24)

Really, that’s quite comforting, isn’t it? Let’s take a look.

II. Hemmed In.

“You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.” Leupold says, “God has closed him in; wherever he turns he is in God’s power.” (Leupold, p. 944)

Our thinking is quite revealing, isn’t it? At times we like to think we’re setting the course for life; we’re making all decisions independent of any outside influence. At other times, we cry out to God, wondering where He is and why he doesn’t do something. We feel lonely and adrift.

But now we know: “You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.” If He knows everything about us before we are conceived and born, if He hems us in, ***behind and before***, then we’re not setting life’s course and we are never alone, regardless of what we feel; regardless of what we think. We are never adrift, though everything at the moment might make us think differently.

How significant that in this same Psalm David writes for us: “...in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” (vs. 16) How significant, then, are the words of Jesus:

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the souls. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from (the will of) your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. (Matt. 10:28-31)

What blessing! What comfort! Even in the midst of the greatest isolation from others, the Living God is there. The Christ Who gave Himself for our eternal well being is there. As God promised Joshua regarding his enemies and struggles so he has promised us: “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” (Deut. 31:6)

III. Too High To Attain.

And so, with all that in front of us, we can say with David: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.” (vs. 6)

I would say, one of the most pitiful and perverted aspects of humans is the constant process of applying human reasoning to Who God is; why He does what He does and what the human thinks God ought to do. And the last verse of our text is ever so clear, but largely ignored; again: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot (cannot!) attain it!” I must cite Leupold one last time:

In this verse the emphasis is chiefly on the fact that a God who has all of man’s doings and thinking so completely in His power is so far above the finite comprehension of the small being called man that man must admit that this is “too wonderful” and utterly “lofty.” Our little mind just cannot begin to fathom the depth of the mind of God, to put it mildly. (Leupold, p. 944)

Listen, it is the Scriptures themselves that teach us: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Rom. 11:33)

Look! If His judgments are unsearchable, then they are not - ever - subject to our conclusions. If His ways are inscrutable then what business have we scrutinizing them?

And just in case that's lost on anyone here, there's this: "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" Who has known the mind of the Lord? No one! What human has counseled Him? None!

And if that's lost on anyone, then try to fathom the depth of why Christ - God in the flesh would enter His creation as one of us - would allow Himself to be murdered by sinful humans in order to pay for every human sin - yours and mine included - so we would have the assurance of eternal life. And you might say, "Well, God is love!" And I must say, yes, but can you fathom that?

We're hemmed in. And that's a good thing.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott