

Psalm 139:1-10

Dear Friends in Christ,

Martin Luther considered *The Small Catechism* and *The Bondage of the Will* his most important works. A number of you are familiar with *The Bondage of the Will*. In the *Historical And Theological Introduction* of the Packer/Johnston edition the translators write the following:

To the Reformers, the crucial question was not simply, whether God justifies believers without works of law. It was the broader question, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin...whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith; whether in the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self reliance and self effort. (Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1957, pp. 58,59)

Our text from the 139th Psalm is filled with comfort and underscores what Luther taught: "Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it." The fact is, this great Psalm puts us . . .

RIGHT WHERE WE WANT TO BE

I. No Secrets from God.

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. (vv. 1-4)

At the outset, these first four verses of our text are not implying that God might quickly reject us in our struggles with our unnumbered sins. Old Testament commentator H. C. Leupold notes: "(The psalmist) is recording that, as far as his own experience goes, God has let the full force of His Omniscience play upon every thought and activity of the psalmist and therefore has always known him more intimately than he knows himself. (H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of The Psalms*, Baker Book House, 1974, p. 943)

Well, dear friends, the same holds true for us. I would imagine you have thought to yourself, "Does God really know what I'm feeling? Does He hear the depth and agony of my thoughts? Is He there?" And the answer to these questions is a most definite "Yes"!

At the same time, for those times when we ignore God or rationalize our sin we must remember these words of Scripture: "If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart." (Ps. 44:20,21) God echos the same truth 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)

And you're thinking, "Sometimes my thoughts and words and actions are horrifying." They are, aren't they - for you and me? I was recalling an incident from 18 years ago, a discussion with a physician. Knowing that I was a pastor, in our conversation he made the statement, "Well, people are basically good." I responded to that worn cliché with, "Would you be willing for people to read your thoughts about them for just one day? Would you be willing to discuss the things you think about them to their face?" He chuckled, sort of, and said in low tone, "Well, I still think people are basically good."

The One who knows what we think, say and do before we think, say and do it lays upon the hearts of His people, "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Ps. 103:12) And that because as Scriptures say, "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

(I Jn. 1:7b) He knows our deepest pain and sorrow, our sinful messes. The comfort is knowing that His love in Christ is always there. It's where we want to be. Consequently, we must say with David . . .

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.

II. Beyond Understanding.

So we make our plans, put everything in order, set our goals. Have you ever spent a little time examining how often the plans you made were altered or cancelled? Have you ever spent a little time examining how disorderly life can become? Have you ever spent time evaluating your goals?

Many of you are quite familiar with the Proverb: "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." (Prov. 16:9) The truth of that supercedes our plans. Again, "You hem me in, behind and before...". In fact, God moved his enemy Balaam to acknowledge, "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind." (Num. 23:19)

When David exclaims in our text, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.", he is obviously not bemoaning God's actions and activities, but acknowledging the loving and merciful hand of God in the lives of His people. Our plans and goals are often not what God wants for us. What God wants for us meets with us at Calvary and an empty Tomb. Christ was born into this world to do all things necessary to assure us of the forgiveness of sin; to assure us of everlasting life! In turn, we want nothing and no-one to get in the way of that. Nothing! No-one! Ever!

And when you say, or when I say, "I just don't understand why God is doing this or that, allowing this or that, or won't do this or that!" - when we say and think things that way we must - absolutely must! - hear this Word of God: "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) Doesn't that echo our text: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; I cannot attain it." And that brings us to verses 7-10 . . .

III. Leads and Holds.

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or 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 wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

Walter Rohrs, a Lutheran commentator, wrote:

The questions in this verse are not motivated by a desire to get beyond God's control (to get away from God). As the...verses make clear, His omnipresence gives assurance to the suppliant that he is always and everywhere in easy reach of God's helping "right hand." (vv. 7-10)

It was the prophet Nahum who was sent to call Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, to repentance. God said through Nahum, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him." (Nahum 1:7). That's us - those who take refuge in Him. I would encourage us to connect to that this comfort from the Psalmist: "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes." (Ps. 118:8-9) Makes sense. **God** establishes our steps!

No matter where we are this morning, no matter what our struggles might be or the guilt we might carry, for the sake of Jesus, God is there, forgives and loves us, claims us as His dear children through faith in Christ.

I'm reasonably sure that most everyone here is quite familiar with the 23rd Psalm, and specifically these words: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (v. 4) As has been stated so many, many times, this is where we live: "In the valley of the shadow of death." That shadow reminds us of what this sinful, fallen world is - what it faces: Death and all the hardship, suffering, tragedy, crying that leads up to death. Left to ourselves, this is all we travel - without God's love in Christ it's all we have - a shadowy valley full of dying and death.

But in Christ, we fear no evil. His Word and Sacrament comfort us. His Word pours out promise upon promise of forgiveness and heaven through Jesus. His Sacraments - the visible Word - reaches into our lives with Good News of Pardon and Heaven.

Praise God for this great 139th Psalm of David! Praise God that we can say, "your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me." (v. 10) We can positively echo the words from the Bondage of the Will: "Christianity **is** a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it...". It is that which leads to the Only True God and to the glorious confession: "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Ps. 23:6b) And that is Right Where We Want To Be.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

January 14, 2018

Psalm 139:1-10: **“Right Where We Want to Be”**

I. No Secrets from God.

II. Beyond Understanding.

III. Leads and Holds.

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