

Prestonwood Connection

Living In The Shadow Of The Almighty #6

Providence

Psalm 139

Wednesday, October 1, 2003 • Dr. David McKinley

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Thank you Chris and Diane, I love their music and a..., Chris, you did write that is that correct? I mean not the words, all of them, obviously, it's Psalm 139, but a..., you took the heart of that and put it into our hearts and I'm so thankful for that and a..., the words of that song as it was sung, a..., enlarging and illuminating the passage of Scripture from 139 is there in you're a..., worship guide tonight and I hope that you'll take time to look at that. And I hope right now you'll take time to take a Bible and open it to Psalm 139 because that's where we're going to be reading and studying tonight in the Word of God on this all important subject of providence.

Let me ask you a question tonight. How many of you have ever been to a Block Buster Video Store? [slight audience laughter] All right, I just wanted to see how good their market share is and it's pretty strong, even here at Prestonwood and a..., so most of us have been there. You know if you've ever been in a Block Buster Video store that a..., today with increasing regularity you can go and not only find the a..., movies that are there to rent, but there is an entire section of movies that are there to buy and they all have a big red or yellow sticker on them and they simply say previewed movies. Previewed movies and of course you know that you can buy those movies at a discounted price and can take them and own them and add them to your personal movie collection and a..., the thing that distinguishes them in the store is simply that sticker, that label that says, previewed. But what...in the realm of theology, when you think of the subject of something being previewed, a..., it literally takes on the theological term, providence. Providence, the word providence is literally translated from the idea of pro-video, to see or to view before and theologically the Bible teaches that God has previewed my life. There are no limits to His knowledge. God is not limited by time or by space, but everything in my life is ultimately previewed, it is under the providence of God. There is no surprise story that unfolds. There is no surprise ending that is disclosed. My life, from beginning to end is ultimately a part of the providence of God and while I may not fully understand some of the moments and some of the script of my life as I live it today, I can ultimately trust God with the outcome of my life because it is a part of His unfolding plan and purpose for me and the Bible teaches that in Psalm

139. So if you're there with me let's begin to read this wonderful Psalm together a..., tonight and to let this Psalm begin to ring deeply into our heart, a sense of confidence and of strength regardless of the circumstance that you may be facing today. Psalm 139, verse 1 begins with these words:

¹O LORD, You have searched me and known me. ²You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. ³You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. ⁵You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain to it.

In the opening verses of this Psalm, immediately we are captivated by the thought that God is revealing something about Himself to us. We immediately see that the psalmist was, as though it were, awestruck as he contemplated the wonder of who God is and how God works and, and a thought about the person and the nature of God was so overwhelming to him that the only way that he could begin the Psalm was simply to say:

O LORD,...

It was awesome, there was a sense of wonder, there was an overwhelming understanding that God and who God is is something that was greater than he could really grasp or ultimately ~~expres~~...explain and so the words that he used to express his understanding of what God had revealed about who he was, was simply:

O LORD,...

And as we begin this study tonight, as we embrace this text of Scripture, I believe that it invites us to contemplate the wonder of God's providence. From the very beginning we are invited to contemplate the wonder of God's providence. He said there in verse 6,

...it is so wonderful to me;...

And so tonight we begin with the wonder of what the Bible teaches us about who God is and what God is like. It has been said, the greatest need in peoples lives today is to discover the true identity of God, the true identity of God. The sad thing is, is that many people have heard things about God, but many of them do not know the truth of God and the Bible presents to us the true identity of the true and living God and the greatest need that every lost person has in this world today is to discover the true identity of the God who made them, but it is also the greatest need that every believer has, to discover and to know and to embrace the true identity of the God whom you know and you call your heavenly Father. And so with this statement of expression, this:

O LORD,...

It's as though he's preparing us for the big, "O" words, that we use to describe God. We read this Psalm and we find that God is **omniscient** and that God is **omnipresent** and God is **omnipotent**, the omni's the o's, omniscient, He knows everything; omnipotent, He can do anything; omnipresent, He is everywhere and what we see here is the...

WONDER OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD being revealed in an understanding of who He is and what He is like.

I love the way that Warren Weirsbe takes the concepts that are seen in this Psalm and just condenses them together, he literally says:

God knows everything don't try to fool Him. Heh, don't try to fool Him. Don't think that you can pull something over the eyes of God. I love the fact that it says in verse 2:

You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thoughts from afar.

God knows every thought. Don't try to fool Him. But then he also says, **God is everywhere, don't try to flee from Him.** When I think of fleeing from God I immediately think of a prophet in the Old Testament by the name of Jonah. Jonah, who decided he was gonna run from the presence of God and yet here we read in this Psalm, Psalm 139, verse 7:

⁷Where can I go from Your Spirit? And where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I go to heaven, You're there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. ⁹If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰From there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will take hold of me.

Boy, that was Jonah's experience wasn't it? He thought he could go his own way. Speaking of Jonah and fleeing from God, there was a little girl in a science class at school and she was having a discussion with her teacher and they were studying whales and the teacher in the process of this discussion was describing the whale and the, all the different aspects of the whale and she said, you know, there have been these reports, some people try to say that maybe whales have swallowed people, she said, but it's just not possible because the actual throat of the whale and the ultimate digestive system would simply not allow for it. And the little girl raised her hand and said, teacher, you know I heard that Jonah, somebody that long ago was swallowed by a whale and the teacher listened to her and said, you know what that is just not possible. I'm telling you that the a..., the esophagus, the throat of the whale is of such size that it could not swallow a human being. The little girl said, well I believe Jonah was swallowed by a whale and when I get to heaven I'm going to ask him about it. The teacher said, well what if he's not there? She said, well then you ask him about it. Heh! [pause for congregation laughter] Don't flee from [pause for more laughter] His presence. God knows everything, don't try to fool Him. God is everywhere, don't try to flee from Him

God can do anything, don't try to fight Him. Your hands or your arms are too short to box with God. Don't try to fight Him. And with the simplicity and the clarity with which a..., Dr. Weirsbe has made this observation about this passage of Scripture. I simply find myself understanding that while it is very simple, it is incredibly profound and I need to spend a great deal of time in my mind and in my life contemplating the wonder of God's providence because of what the Bible teaches me about Him. It is absolutely true in it's application, this is what God is like.

But just as much as this Psalm tells us something very wonderful about God it is also a very personal Psalm. In fact in the opening 6 verses, 13 times you find a reference to a personal pronoun, I, me, my and the psalmist was very a..., caught up, not only in the sense of wonder of what God was like, but what that meant to him personally and that it was a very individual truth for him to take and to embrace and so not only does he eea...he challenge us to contemplate the wonder of God's pre...providence but then he encourages us to consider the...

WISDOM OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE. What does it mean to me? I know what it tells me about God and what it therefore implies to me about life, but specifically what does it mean to me when I understand the wisdom of God's providence in my life? And I'd like to give you several thoughts tonight, some implications that we cannot dismiss or avoid as we look at this Psalm tonight. If you have a pen you might wanna write them down. The Bible tells us here that the wisdom of God's providence is such that:

NUMBER 1: GOD KNOWS THE SECRETS OF YOUR MIND. That's a very important thing for you and I to see and to embrace tonight, that He knows the secrets of our mind. I would suppose that in the human being there is not any place that is truly a more private place then the thought life. Nobody knows what you're really thinking. I can look at you right now, you can smile at me, you can even act like you're taking notes but your thoughts can be a thousand miles away from here. The fact of the matter is, is that I can be talking to you can be carrying on a conversation to me, but you may not at all be thinking about what we're talking about if we're one on one. Because you see the thought life is the ultimate domain of privacy in the human soul and in the human spirit and deep within my thoughts I am what I really am. Now, this is a very terrifying thought as well. That means that all the things that are flashing through the screen of my mind God sees them and God knows them all; every thought of fear, every thought of lust, every thought of greed, every thought of pride, every thought of envy, every thought of anxiety, God knows the secrets. The Bible says that, as we've already looked at in 139 verse 2 a...:

...You understand my thought afar off.

It says it again in verse 4 you have:

Before there's even a word on my tongue...Lord, You know it altogether.

My thoughts shape my words and before I ever say anything God knows what I've been thinking. But it's not only something we find true here in the Old Testament, we find it in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews chapter 4, where it says in a very specific and a very a..., as though it were, a very searing fashion, verse 13:

...there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

He sees it all. But just as much as that is a terrifying thought there's a comfort in that thought, because just as much as God knows the evil things that go through my mind, God knows the intentions and the concerns and the needs that go through my mind and so great is His grace that even though His Word tells us that:

...there's no creature hidden from His sight, that all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

It immediately goes on in that same passage of Scripture to say:

¹⁴Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who's passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.

And while God knows the secret things in my mind, He cares about me and He cares about my concerns. He knows the secret things of your mind.

The Bible also tells me here and this is another personal thing that we find in Psalm 139, I'd look down say beginning in verse 11 and 12, it says:

¹¹..."Surely the darkness shall fall on me," And the night shall be light about me; ¹²Indeed, the darkness shall not hide me from You when the light shines in the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

Do you ever have dark experiences in your life? Do you ever have moments in your life where you feel like you're wandering in the darkness? You just don't know what to do, you don't feel like you're clear in your direction in life and sometimes you think, has God forgotten me? There's some comfort in this and that is no only that God knows the secrets of your mind, but listen:

GOD KNOWS THE SUFFERINGS OF YOUR HEART. God knows the suffering of your heart. The thing that no one else sees, the thing that no one else knows, the pains, the scars, the things that are hidden in secret, God knows all these things and the great thing is, is that He cares. In fact so great is His care for us that the Bible tells us again in the New Testament in the book of 2nd Corinthians chapter 1 that this God seeing and knowing that we

are a people who bear pain and hurt and injury in this life has committed Himself to our comfort and to our strength when we hurt and when we struggle. Not only does it tell us there in Hebrews that we can bring our needs to Him but in 2nd Corinthians chapter 1 and beginning in verse 3, the Bible says:

³Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ~~the God~~, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are ~~in an~~...in any trouble, with the comfort which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also our consolation abounds through Christ.

One of the most amazing thoughts in all the world is that God identified with us in our pain. God chose to send His Son and to make Him one of us in order that we may not only understand who God is and what God is like but that God in turn may share in what sin had done to us and that was to bear the impact of pain. And tonight if you're walking through a journey of pain in your life I want you to know that God knows the suffering of your heart and though you're steps may be dark and though you may be wandering if anyone knows or anyone cares; there is a grace that is available to you. The same writer who wrote 2nd Corinthians 1 verses 3 thru 5 by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul, later in that same book talked about his own suffering and his own struggle and how that he had had a sickness that he had asked the Lord to deliver him from. But ultimately he came to the understanding that God's strength was made perfect in his weakness and wherever your life has been imprinted by pain God in His grace can take that point of pain and in His providence can make that a platform of ministry to your life and through your life to others. So, God knows the sufferings of your heart; God knows the secrets of your mind but there's something else that the Bible teaches us here and that is that:

GOD KNOWS THE STRUGGLES OF OUR FEET. Heh, you know it's not always easy to walk is it. It's easy to get caught up wandering in the darkness, it's easy to take a misstep in life and the psalmist talks about our steps and our walk and just as true as it is that He knows the secrets of the mind and the suffering of the heart, he knows the struggle of our feet. The song writer said it so well when he said:

*Prone to wander Lord I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.*

And as much as I may have a desire to walk with God, God in His providence knows that I have feet that are prone to stray. Interestingly enough it says here in Psalm 139 and verse 15:

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest places of the earth. ¹⁶You saw my substance being unformed. And in Your book all my members were written.

He talks about my life as its being shaped in the womb, but I remind you tonight, that the same David who talked about the wonder of God shaping him in the womb was the same David who cried out in Psalm 51, just a few pages earlier when he talked about his own wickedness and his sin and he said:

⁵...I was brought forth in iniquity, in sin my mother de...conceived me. ⁶You desire truth in my inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

David knew that there was something in him, that while he was made and created of God, that there was something not of God's creation but something destroyed and marred in the creation of God and it was what sin had done and sin is what causes us to want to walk away from God. And so tonight in the providence of God I would remind you that though you may struggle with the temptations of life and with balance in life and with guidance in life and with confidence in life, that this same God who made you and knows you and loves you is a God who understands the struggles of your feet and He's therefore the God who can deliver. So He knows the secrets of your mind, He knows the sufferings of your heart; He knows the struggles of your feet. There's something else that He knows

HE KNOWS THE SERVICE OF YOUR HANDS. One of the great comforts in the providence of God is that while not everyone will affirm and applaud your service to God; God never misses your service unto Him. What you render to the Lord will never be forgotten. I love that verse, we talked about it last week. Jim Cymbala preached from it and then our pastor talked about it and shared it again, 1st Corinthians 15:58:

Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

It doesn't miss His eye. He sees it. He knows it and while no one else may see or know the service of your hand, God sees and God knows and there's never a deed that is done to His honor and glory that goes unnoticed in His presence. That's one of the great affirmations of the providence of God. In fact if that truth ever really gets hold, takes hold in your heart, you'll actually find yourself beginning to live your life every day lookin for that one place, that one time where you can do something that no one else sees or knows but you do it privately, personally and you do it in praise to God so that you can simply say Lord, I just want You to be the beneficiary of a heart that's in tune with You. And then there's one final implication personally not only that He knows the secrets of your mind, that He knows the sufferings of your heart, that He knows the struggles of your feet, that He knows the service of your hands but verse 16 tells us something very, very important:

You say my substance, being yet unformed. In Your book they were all written. The days fashioned for me, When there was not yet one of them.

What does that mean? It means that...

GOD KNOWS THE SCHEDULE OF YOUR DAYS from beginning to end, from birth to death God already knows the schedule. We spend so much time in our life fretting and stirring and fighting and struggling over our schedule...

TURN TAPE:

...all the things we want to put in it and all the things we need to get out of it, all the things that consume us. But ultimately God knows the schedule of your life and your days He already knows. That's something that I've given more and more thought to in life, that no matter what I do I'm not gonna add days to my life and I've not going to take days away necessarily from my life. God knows the days and therefore I'm going to trust Him with the schedule of my days. I love the way that it's said in the New Living Translation. I read it to you out of the New King James, but it simply says:

You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in Your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

That's it, He knows the schedule of your days and that's why it's so important that every day begins with an, "Oh Lord" with the wonder of His providence of this day and with trusting the wisdom of His providence as I step through life day by day, circumstance by circumstance, opportunity by opportunity, adversity by adversity, because I'm trusting in the wisdom of God.

Well there's more that I could say but let me just a..., take us to the end of this Psalm tonight and that is not only that we need to contemplate the wonder of God's providence and to consider the wisdom of God's providence to you and to me, but tonight I want us to close by understanding that he calls us to...

COMMIT TO WORSHIP THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE, not just to know these things about God but to respond to these things about God. And the psalmist is so personal in his response beginning down in verse 23, he says:

²³*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, Lord, and know my thoughts;*
²⁴*And see if there be any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.*

That was his response. Once he understood that God sees everything, knows everything and can do anything, that he couldn't fool Him, that he couldn't flee from Him and he certainly couldn't fight Him. Once he understood that personally the wisdom of God was applied to his life then he ultimately said, there's only one way to respond and that's in complete and total worship of this God who is the God of providence and that commitment of his heart was amplified through 3 words that we read in these closing verses. Search me, try me, lead me; search me what does it mean to search, to be searched of God? Well, the word search that's used

here is literally a word that means to dig out, like a hidden treasure or like a lost object. It's something that's dug from deep within and it's as though the psalmist said, well Lord, if You know and You understand then I ask You to dig down deep within me; but God search my heart, not so that You can see what's there, but Lord so that you can bring out what's there. God, when you open your life to Him, will dig out the greatest potential of what He intends for you to be in life. Instead of you having to strive and try and achieve to be all these things that you wanna be and search for significance in your life, here's the key. Open your heart for God to search and He will bring out the significance of what He wants you to be. It's not a self search, it's God's search. Search me oh God.

But then he also says try me Lord. The word try that is used there is specifically a word that is used to speak of refining metal in a fire, to test or to try that metal, to purify it and that means that there may be a struggle to burn off the dross and the impurities and the imperfections and to be tried of God is to go through the experiences of life that we don't always understand but that we trust are a part of His refinement for a holy purpose. Frankly it's a lot easier to accept and to believe God's Word when I read print on paper then it is to accept God's ways when He's working in my life. I can read His Word and say okay I see that, but when the ways of God are being turned through my life, when the heat is going up, when the dross is burning off, when God is using instruments that I wouldn't choose and circumstances that I don't enjoy, it's hard for me to trust, but the psalmist said, try me Lord. Because I ultimately am gonna trust you I believe what Hosea said:

...the ways of the Lord are right;...

Heh, isn't it interesting that Hosea, of all people, in Hosea 14:9 would have said:

...the ways of the Lord are right;...

There was no man's life in the Bible that seemed more wrong in what happen to Hosea and unfaithful mate, a wayward partner, rejection, shame, guilt, but he said:

...the ways of the Lord are right;...

And then the last thing that he said was lead me.

...lead me in the way everlasting.

Literally it means, God shepherd my life. Lord be my shepherd, this is the same David who said:

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name sake...

And so David was crying out for God to lead him and that he would be

surrendered to the guidance of God and the direction of God, so that all of his life could be lived to the glory of God. That's what it is to commit your worship to the God of providence.

And tonight as I thought about this message and I thought about the providence of God I thought about the life of a man that I know and love and work with on a regular basis, who's life is a daily expression of God's providence and of God's grace. And so I'm gonna ask him to come and tonight and to just lead us in a time of prayer, to take these truths that we've talked about and to pray them into our hearts and lives tonight before we go to community at the commons and his name is Neal Jeffrey. So Neal I want you to come up here, thanking God for you and your life and simply ask that you take these moments and help us together to embrace God's grace and providence in our lives.