

The Greatness of God

Text: Psalm 139:1-17

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

“I can’t!” Those are probably words we find ourselves mumbling more often than we would like. Picture a man working in his garage, one evening, trying to fix the family car. It’s been having a few problems lately. The check engine light has popped up on the dashboard, and it just doesn’t seem to have the get up and go it’s supposed to have. He has a garage full of tools and is mechanically inclined, so he decides to open up the hood and take a look. In his mind there is a mental checklist to work through. Examine the belts to see if any are loose or worn. Inspect the hoses to make sure there aren’t any leaks. Open the electric panel to see if any fuses have been blown. Make sure the oil and radiator fluid are at the appropriate levels. Holding the flashlight in his hand, he reaches inside to complete each task, but after an hour he is sweaty, covered in grease, and getting nowhere. He can’t figure out what the problem is. Everything seems to check out okay. There are a couple of other components he would like to inspect, but they are located in awkward, difficult-to-reach places, and no matter what angle he twists or contorts his arm he can’t quite get there. Finally, he tosses his wrench back into the toolbox in frustration and groans, “I give up!” About that time his wife comes in to see how it’s going. “Hey honey, do you know the gas cap isn’t fastened? You don’t think that could be causing the check engine light to come on, do you?”

Maybe you have found yourself crying out in frustration, “I can’t!” Whatever the situation may have been, it was clear that you had exhausted the limits of your ability. Maybe you didn’t have the skill or expertise that was required to solve a problem. Maybe you were lacking the muscles that were needed to lift something heavy from one place to another. Maybe you simply didn’t have enough time to get everything on your to do list accomplished. It happens to all of us.

Human beings are finite creatures. No matter how determined we are, or how much effort we might exert, sooner or later we reach our limitations. Because of this, life can seem overwhelming. We often feel small, or inadequate, or alone. In those moments it is comforting to know that we worship an infinite God. He is not bound by the same weakness or limitations that plague us. He is greater than our greatest struggles. His wisdom is deeper than our deepest concerns. He is awesome, immeasurable, beyond our comprehension. There is no one in all the universe who compares. That should bring us a tremendous amount of comfort. There is no problem we could find ourselves in which is beyond his ability to help. When we are weak, he is strong.

Sometimes we lose sight of this, and take our eyes off of him. We are so focused on what we cannot do that we forget what he can do. Scripture reminds us of who God is and gives us the assurance we need to face whatever challenge has come against us.

Psalm 139 is one of those passages. It was written by David, and the context is similar to passage we looked at last week. Toward the end of the psalm he spoke of wicked men who had risen up against him, men of bloodshed who not only hated David but also the God he

worshiped. We can imagine how frustrating this must have been. No matter what he did, they wouldn't leave him alone. This was a problem he couldn't solve. And yet the psalm is filled with praise, because he found comfort knowing that no matter how great his problems were, God is greater.

The passage beautifully describes the attributes of God, specifically his omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. He is all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful. If this is the God who stands beside us, whom do we have to fear?

We're going to explore these attributes this morning, and I hope they are not abstract theological ideas, but the psalm makes them personal to us and demonstrates what it means for our lives.

First of all, the psalm tells us he is the all-knowing God.

Look at verses 1-4.

¹ O Lord, You have searched me and known me. ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. ³ You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all.

As the passage opens, David didn't allow himself to dwell on his problems. Instead he focused on the character of the Lord. There are so many questions we cannot answer, and things we will never understand. But God knows all things and his wisdom is infinite. He is never stumped by any problem. He already has the solution before the situation comes.

God knows every detail about our lives. He knows our actions: when you sit down on the couch to rest in the afternoon, or when you stand on your feet to work. He knows the thoughts that rattle around in our minds, which is why we can pray silently without saying a word and he still hears us, and also why the Holy Spirit brings conviction when our attitude isn't what it should be. He knows our inner motives, discerning why we do the things that we do. He knows our joys and sorrows and the concerns that weigh on our hearts. He sees into the depths of our soul. In another passage we are told that he has even numbered the hairs on our head, that's how thorough his knowledge of us is. He knows us better than we know ourselves. It is not just dry information: facts and statistics about us, as if we were only a number to him. God has taken an active interest in our lives, and is familiar with all our ways.

It is extraordinary to consider how the God of the universe, who created entire solar systems and galaxies, could take a personal interest in someone so small and insignificant as me. I'm just tiny speck in the universe, not even that, but I'm important to him. He knows us. He knows your name. He knows everything there is to know about us, including our failures and imperfections, and he still loves us. You don't take the time to get to know someone unless you care about them.

It felt special, when I was a student in college, to learn that the president of the school knew all about me. He knew my name, and the town where I had grown up. He had been to my home church. He knew several members of my family, my grandparents, and some of my aunts and uncles. Years before he was pastoring a church in Washington and my uncle Steve served with him as the associate pastor. It made sense that he would know a lot about me, but I wasn't the only student he called by name. He also took an interest in all of the students at the college, because he cared. And God knows us, which tells us that we must be special to him. You don't have to wonder if he knows what you're going through. He does. You don't have to wonder if he understands your struggles. He does. God cares.

He also knows the future. Verse 4 says, "Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold O Lord, you know it all." He is never surprised or startled. There is nothing that catches him off guard. He sees the past, present, and future with equal clarity. We don't even know things that are going to happen tomorrow, let alone a year from now: the challenges we will face, the blessings we will experience, the opportunities we will have to serve him. But God knows what is waiting for us this week and beyond. Even before we were born, he knew the precise number of days we would spend on this earth. He knew the moment we would arrive in the delivery room, and he knows the day we will depart.

He is aware of every event that unfolds over the course of history. We wonder who will win the next election, but he doesn't have to guess. He knows, just as he has known what kingdoms would rise and fall on the earth, and what conflicts would come, before time began. He understands how all things will work together to accomplish his purpose.

So many times we find ourselves worrying about the future, asking ourselves "what if?" "What if this happens?" "What if that happens?" There is always some potential problem lurking out there that could cause us anxiety. How comforting to realize that God holds the future in his hands and we can rest secure in him. We may not know what tomorrow will bring but God knows.

God knows what he's doing. His ways are perfect. That may not always be easy for us to accept. Sometimes things don't make sense, from our earthly perspective. We might wonder why God chooses to answer our prayer in a different way than we had asked, and sometimes we find ourselves thinking that we know better, but we need to remember that his thoughts are higher than our thoughts and his ways are higher than our ways. He sees the whole picture when we can only see a small part.

Isaiah 40:13-14 (NASB) asks "*Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, Or as His counselor has informed Him? ¹⁴ With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge And informed Him of the way of understanding?*"

The answer, of course, is that God doesn't need anyone to advise him. His understanding is perfect and his wisdom is infinite. We can place ourselves in his hands, even in the moments when we don't understand.

Charles Ryrie writes,

When faced with inexplicable circumstances in life, we invariably take refuge and find solace in the omniscience of God. Not only does He know what actually happened, but He knows what might have happened. He always knows what ultimate good and glory will come from events we cannot understand.¹

I am constantly reminded that I don't have all the answers. There are things that don't make sense to me, problems I can't figure out. But that's okay, because God understands all things, and I can trust him with my life.

The psalm also reminds us that he is the all-present God

Look at verses 139:7-10

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. ⁹ If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, ¹⁰ Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me.

David wasn't trying to escape the Lord. He realized that even if we ran from him, there is no place we could go in this universe where God's presence is not already there.

It reminds us of the prophet Jonah, who did run from God. The Lord was sending him to the city of Nineveh to deliver a message. The people of Nineveh were the enemies of Israel, and so Jonah did not want to go. He decided to jump aboard the next boat, sailing the opposite direction, but he soon realized you cannot escape God's presence. Even when he found himself sinking to the depths of the sea, and ended up in the belly of whale, the Lord was still with him.

David looked out across the horizon, as far as his eyes could see and says: "if I were to fly away on the wings of the dawn..." Every morning the sun rises in the east, so if it were possible to ride on a beam of light, traveling hundreds of miles to some distant land, wherever your feet eventually hit the ground the Lord is already there waiting for you. David turned in the opposite direction, towards the west and says, "if I were to settle down on the other side of the sea, even there your hand would guide me." He was thinking about the great Mediterranean which formed the western border of Israel, stretching thousands of miles. Even if he were sail all the way to the others side, God would be waiting for him on those distant shores.

What about beyond this world? David says, "If I were to ascend to heaven, you would be there." We think of passages in Scripture that describe the throne room of heaven, where angels surround him with praises. We shouldn't think of God as being more present in heaven than he is on earth, but it is certainly true that his glory is more fully revealed in that place. One day, as we stand before his throne, we will see the fulness of his splendor.

Even in the lowest depths, God is there. David says, "If I make my bed in Sheol, behold you

are there.” That word is used in several ways, in the Bible. It can mean the grave, the place where the dead are buried. The word can also be translated hell. Is it true that God’s presence is there, as well? In a sense, it is. God is there to judge. This is a terrifying thought, but even there, in eternity, the wicked are not able to escape his wrath.

These comparisons are meant to show us that God is everywhere. No matter where we find ourselves, in life or in death, we are never alone. Whether you climb to the highest mountain, or dive to ocean floor, the Lord is with you, always. Whether the sun is shining, or when we are hidden in the darkness of night, he is beside you. When you wake up in the morning and head to the office, but also when return home and go to sleep at night, God is near.

That’s difficult for us to comprehend. Human beings can only be in one place at a time. It might feel like you are being pulled in many different directions, but in any given moment your feet are planted in only one location.

A truck driver might travel hundreds of miles in a day. He has driven from Detroit, to Toledo, to Dayton, to Cincinnati, to Lexington. When he pulls over at night it feels like he is still moving. Someone asks him where he has been, and he answers, “I’ve been everywhere today.” We understand what he means, but that’s not really the case. He hasn’t been everywhere. As far as he has gone, this is just one small corner of the world. And he wasn’t in each of those places at the same time. He only spent a short time in each city, before moving on. He has traveled up and down the highway, but at this moment he is only in that particular place.

If you are traveling out west there is a place you can stop at a place called Four Corners Monument. It marks the point where the states of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah meet. It is the only point in the US where the border of four states meet. If you wanted, you could place one foot in Arizona and the other in Colorado. You could stretch one hand into new Mexico and the other into Utah. You could shout, “Look everyone, I’m in four different places at the same time. But you know that’s not really true. Parts of you are in different states, but you are still standing in one place.

But God’s isn’t like us. He is a spiritual being, and so it is possible for him to be in different places at the same time because he is not bound by the same physical limitations that we experience. He is here, listening to our praise, in Ada. At the same time, he is watching over his people in the Philippines, on the other side of the world. He is with you, when you call out to him in your home. But he is also with me, listening to my prayer. His attention is not divided, but he is fully present, in all places, at once.

That’s one of the things that set the God of Israel, the one true God, apart from the gods of the nations. The pagans believed in many gods, who operated in different domains. There was a god of the mountains and a god of the valley. There was a god of the fields and a god of the sea. They prayed to a different god depending on where they found themselves. But the one true God rules over heaven and earth. His presence reaches all parts of the universe, and no matter where you are, he hears and is ready to answer. We should never think we have to journey to some special place to meet with God. You don’t have to stand in a fancy cathedral or bow on some sacred mountain. Wherever you are, you can experience God’s presence in your life.

Solomon expressed this when they finished building the temple in Jerusalem. In 1 Kings 8:27 he offered a prayer of dedication, asking for the Lord to bless those courtyards where the people would gather to bring him praise. He knew this would be sacred ground, in their worship of the Lord. God had chosen to make his presence known among the people in this place. And yet, God's presence cannot be contained in any one location. Solomon prayed, *"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!"* He understood what while this was a sacred place for God's people, when they left those courtyards and returned to their homes, they were not walking away from God's presence. If they journeyed to another land he was not far away from them. He is everywhere. Not even heaven can contain him, how much less this temple built by hands. Whether you're standing in a church or driving across the country, God is there.

The psalm also reminds us that he is the almighty God

Go back to Psalm 139:13-15

For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. 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. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

David turns his attention to the mighty words of God, particularly his work of creation. If anyone isn't convinced of the Lord's ability to do wonders, all they have to do is consider the miracle of life. Not only did he bring forth the planets and the stars, with his creative power, he also formed us. Like a skilled artist, he knit us together while we were in our mother's womb, working on a microscopic level, encoding our cells with DNA, shaping tiny hands and feet, stringing together arteries and veins, causing our heart to beat. The human body is intricately designed, and demonstrates the glory of God. The more we learn about how our bodies work, the more we realize that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. If God could accomplish something as marvelous as this, he can surely do anything.

Throughout the Bible he is called the Almighty God. Job 11:7–8 (NIV84) asks, *"Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know?"* Jeremiah 32:17 (NASB95) declares, *"Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You."* There are a lot of things that are too difficult for me. In a couple of weeks Jordan has the pinewood derby in Cub Scouts. They gave us a block of wood and some wheels, and we're supposed to transform it into a race car. I don't have a lot of skill when it comes to building things with my hands so I'm not sure how we're to pull that off. It may not be much to look at, when we're finished. But on the positive side, he is the only one in his grade level who will be competing that day, so there's a pretty a good chance he's going to come away with first place in his den.

We are constantly faced with circumstances that are too much for us to handle on our own.

There are burdens too heavy for us to carry, and problems too big for us to solve. How comforting is for us to know, that even though we might reach the limits of our ability there is nothing too difficult for the Lord. Even the impossible becomes possible when we place our trust in him.

We call this attribute the omnipotence of God. It means that “God is all-powerful and able to do anything consistent with His own nature.”ⁱⁱⁱ But there are some things the Bible tells us God will never do. He cannot lie. He cannot sin. He cannot deny himself. He cannot make evil good. He cannot cease to be God. These are self-imposed limitations. But God is more than able to accomplish his good will. No purpose of the Lord will be overturned. None of his plans will ever fail.

The omnipotence of God raises a lot of questions for us. Sometimes we wonder why there is so much evil in this world if God is almighty. Charles Baker responds to that question in his theology. He writes....

People often ask such questions as: Wasn't God able to create a world in which there would be no sin? or, Can't God put a stop to war? ...In dealing with questions like these two things must be remembered. First, omnipotence is not the only attribute of God. God exercises His omnipotence in conformity with His wisdom, knowledge, holiness and justice... Second, omnipotence does not mean that God wills to use all of His power... He could have created a race of automatons without the power of choice, without minds of their own, without the ability to obey or disobey, without the possibility of loving or hating... but He did not choose to do so. He chose rather to create man in His own image, and apparently such a creation involved self-limitation in the delegation of certain powers to His creatures. God has provided mankind with the materials to make this world a Utopia, but it is man, not God who has been guilty of malfeasance... At the present we see a mighty demonstration of the power of God in restraining Himself from bringing judgment upon a world that more and more openly defies Him... However, [one day the Lord] will return to earth to take the power into His hands and He will put down all unrighteousness and will rule the earth with justice and peace.ⁱⁱⁱ

God is all-powerful, so no matter problems you might be facing, you can rest in his mighty hands. He gives us the strength we need to endure every trial, and empowers us accomplish his purpose. Ephesians 3:20–21 (NASB95) tells us,

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Conclusion –

As David wrote the words of Psalm 139, his tone could have been very different. He was facing challenges that were too great for him to handle, but instead of focusing on these things he chose to focus on the character of the Lord. Our problems are great, but our God is greater.

The next time you find yourself wrestling with questions you don't understand, rest in the one whose knowledge is perfect and whose wisdom is infinite. In moments when you feel alone, remember that there is no where in this universe you could go where God's presence is not with you. When you reach the end of your strength, as we often do, look to the Lord who is all powerful and seek his strength.

ⁱ Ryrie, Charles C. "Ryrie's Basic Theology"

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Baker, Charles F. "A Dispensational Theology" (p.135-136)