

Reading: Psalm 139:1-24

Theme: Nowhere to hide from God.

The storming of the US Capitol on January 6th left five people dead, over 100 police officers injured and caused millions of dollars in damage. It took security forces by surprise - they were understaffed and overwhelmed. So far security forces have identified 400 suspects, more than 140 people have been charged and more than 170 cases had been opened - a number likely to grow much more. Many have been identified by people they knew, by video identification and photographs taken! Many participants willingly and quite happily posed for photos and videos at the scene, or boasted of their exploits on social media!!! We have to wonder at their common sense!!!

So far in Psalm 139 we have had a big view of God - He knows all things about all things and people (His omniscience), about everything, at all times and every actual and possible action there has or ever will be. David applied this to 3 areas of his own life - his activity and inactivity; his ways; his words and thoughts. We noted God knows all about us, also how we react. How do we feel about that? Are we pleased or dismayed? Would such be a challenge or comfort? David found it amazing, thrilling even and says **v6**, doing so with a sense of admiration, praise and thankfulness that such a One is his God.

David moves on from the consideration of God's omniscience and focuses his and our attention on another great attribute of God - His omnipresence = God is everywhere at the one and the same time in the fullness of His being. Here David is moving us on from the truth of God knowing all about us to

the truth that God is everywhere in v7-12. Here he works this out with a series of questions - questions that are not intended to indicate he wanted to get away from God, but rhetorical questions, surmises, a set of ‘what if...’ questions! Just suppose David wanted to get away from God, it’s almost as if he’s asking himself, “*Now then where could I go?*” We will look at these questions and note David’s response under 2 main headings:

1. Nowhere to hide.

David’s thoughts turn to the greatness of God, His immensity - that He is infinite in His person and Being. This means He cannot be confined to any space or place. Yes, we say God is in heaven, but that refers in particular to the fullest manifestation of His glorious presence. The heaven of heavens cannot contain or restrict God. He is not only immense and infinite, but He is not confined by any place or time. Incredibly, at the same time He fills every place with His entire Being.

This does not mean God is in Creation and therefore Creation = God; that is an error called Pantheism. Neither is He only present in all Creation by His influence. We are to realise God is present in all Creation in His Being and in His Person. Here we need to take a step back and see that while God is present in Creation, He and Creation are never intermixed or confused and He is with living organic matter in a different way than inorganic; also, He is with people in a different way than animals and He is with His people in a different way than with those who are still in their sin. God is present, the word is immanent – ingrained, existing or operating within Creation

and yet He is far above Creation and we use the term He is transcendent.

God being omnipresent means He is with all creation in His being and essence. This is an awesome thought. We say God knows all things - by this we mean He not only notes at a distance, or has it told to Him, but all that is said, done and thought goes on in **His very presence!!** He is not a God “out there”, but the God who is nearer than our hand or the breath in our mouth. All we say, think or do by those who want God or want nothing to do with God, occurs in His actual presence and those things are not hidden away and He finds out sometime later, but actually said, thought or done in His presence. This is the situation we all do our wrong and sinful things in.

Imagine for a moment, a great warrior king with absolute power and he is a superb swordsman. He and his wife and their young child are out for a walk, but someone taunts their child, or attacks their child! It is an offence against one this great warrior king loves, imagine the offence he'd feel at such an attack, I personally wouldn't want to be in the attacker's shoes or sandals! Now see sin as an offence of the highest degree against that which characterises God in every area of his Being - His holiness. If to offend such a great warrior king was a great offence, how much more is it to offend the infinitely great God and His infinite precious holiness and to do so in His very presence and at the foot of His throne?

God sees and is present when **we** commit sin, but He is not polluted by such knowledge or by being present. God's omnipresence is an awesome consideration. Some people ask

“Where is God?” When we really need to ask “Where isn’t He?” As David thought on it, he saw 3 main areas in which he recognised there was nowhere to hide or go away from God’s presence:

A. Impossible to hide high or low (v8): Where could we go from God’s presence or Spirit? (*Modern versions might have Spirit with a capital S - as it speaks of God the Holy Spirit.*) The teaching and idea of God as more than one person is present in OT and can be traced throughout the OT - David knew there was nowhere to go to hide from God - as God was everywhere.

David raised the question about high or low places - here in v8 translated as heavens or Sheol, hell or depths. Our interpretation of v8 hangs on what we take the word Sheol to mean - NIV takes one of the meanings, translating it “depths”. Heavens then means the heights and so whether we go to the Everest places or journey, go to the centre of the earth, go to the deepest mine, or into the deepest trenches in the oceans, we cannot get away from God.

Another meaning of Sheol is “the grave” - if we were removed out of the sight of the living or go to the highest places of worship, then God will still see us and be there. Or Sheol may be taken as *the place of the damned - hell*. Matthew Henry, using the KJV comments “*If I make my bed in hell (an uncomfortable place to make a bed in, where there is no rest day or night, yet thousands will make their bed for ever in those flames)*” Here the contrast would be heaven as the place of God’s dwelling and obviously God will be there. The question needs to be asked “*Is God’s presence really in*

hell?” I feel the Bible says “*Yes, it is!*” God’s presence is felt and known in heaven and hell. Yet in those 2 separate places, God’s presence produces very different reactions. In heaven it produces bliss, joy, peace and delight; while in hell it produces terror, fear, pain and agony. The cause of these very different reactions in both places is the same - God’s holiness. In heaven, the ones there will have been made holy and righteous in Christ and they will delight in God’s presence for all eternity. Yet the same holiness will cause those still in their sin to know agony, a burning, gnawing pain for all eternity.

The Being and Presence of God will be an eternal joy to those who, by God’s grace, have come to own and trust the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, but for those who are not bothered, ignore, neglect or reject this so great salvation, that same Being and Presence will be eternally and awesomely agonising.

Whichever view we take of the meaning of the word “Sheol”, David is here telling us that we can go nowhere up or down, high or low to get out of God’s presence. Now we see:

B. Impossible to hide near or far (v9): this verse can be put in our terms as “*If I caught the fastest plane and went to the far side of America*” - to David’s mind he questioned about going as quick as the light and as far, far away as he can imagine, but he realised that God could not be outrun, nor could he put any distance between him and God.

I wonder if anyone listening or watching this evening is trying to run away from God? Perhaps it is running from His call on our lives to trust Him as our Saviour in Jesus, or to live for

Him in a God glorifying way, perhaps it is a step of obedience or trust; perhaps not to run away to do our own pleasure or abandon the things of God. I pray we would all learn from David here and recognise what he recognised and knew. We also learn this from Jonah as he tried to run from God's presence and service, but God wouldn't let him! God had to deal dramatically with him in bringing back to that place of obedience, to the place and work he tried to run away from. God will not necessarily deal with us in such a dramatic way as He did the runaway prophet Jonah, but be sure we will not be able to outrun or run away from God and His presence.

C. Impossible to hide in the light or the dark (v11-12): a lot of crime goes on at night. People through the ages felt more secure in their crimes if committed in the dark, as they could hide away or slip away more easily under cover of darkness. Nowadays with night vision and heat sensitive cameras, people can be seen and tracked very easily, but many still feel darkness hides them and allows them to do things unnoticed.

David recognised that to God, the God who made the light and separated it from the darkness, that whether night or day, pitch black or bright sunshine, that these were alike and God was not only there, but He saw everything that went on. God is not fooled or duped by our masks; or by our hiding away in or behind anything. He not only knows, but is present wherever we are and whatever we do.

This truth and Bible teaching of God's omnipresence is another big matter and yet it is not to confuse or alarm us if

we are a Christian, but it is to be as it was for David, for we see:

2. The comfort this is.

David knew the presence of God with him at all times was not a threat, a spoiling of fun, or a curtailing of his life, but an immense comfort - as we see in v10 “*even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*” David was aware of the presence, the guiding and the care of God wherever he went. He realised he was being led and kept by this God. He knew that his God was with him wherever he went, no matter the situations his God led him into or allowed into his life. This is the same Lord that David wrote of who led him by still waters, in green pastures, who would be with him in the darkest of the dark valleys of life or death, who would even prepare a table in the midst of his enemies and anoint his head with oil.

He knew his God would be with him wherever – for his God was always there wherever he was. This God doesn’t need any creature to tell Him how any child of His is. He knows the very hairs on our heads, He’s touched with the feelings of our infirmities, He is there with us and has promised many times in His word never to leave or forsake any of His people - whether in Covid times, rough times, hurting times, even if we feel we like the 3 in the fiery furnace or everything seems helpless, we are to realise He is there with us.

We are not only in good hands, but in good company with this God as our God. It does not mean that we or our loved ones will be isolated or insulated from trouble, pain, hurt, grief, sickness, poverty or death, but He will be with us in it and He

knows why He has allowed such. He will continue to lead, guide and keep us with His right hand and will hold us up and strengthen us.

Is the presence of God in all His being with us a challenge or a comfort as Christians? Yes, it should be a challenge for us to live our lives in a holy and clean way, for we live as it were at the foot of His royal throne, in His presence and as believers it should be a real comfort to us in times of trouble.

We may not grasp the fullness of this truth in all its enormity, but where we cannot fully understand, then let us adore and realise that this God is a wonder working God who can do far more amazingly than we could ever ask, think or imagine. We are to recognise He will be with us all our days and even in death's dark valley He will be there with us to bring us safely home to heaven. Then we will ever be with the Lord and we will not have glimpses and limited understandings ever again. There we will know the ecstasy of the fullness of joy in His presence and pleasures forevermore at His right hand (Psalm 16:11). May we think long and hard on what David has so far focused our attention on and rejoice if we know that such a God is ours and we are able to get to know and love Him more and more.