

Safety – Psalm 139
Sermon by Associate Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – November 8th, 2015

Today, I'd like to invite the kids to stay with us for the sermon because we're going to do something a little bit different. You may have noticed that the two front rows were marked off as "reserved" today, so I hope I didn't cramp your style if that's where you usually sit. I've prepared a kid-friendly sermon this week and I'd like to invite any kids who are in 8th grade or below to come sit up here if you're brave enough. That way I can keep an eye on you and maybe squirt you with water if you fall asleep or aren't listening!

The message I'm giving today is a re-working of a couple messages I gave at Grande Ronde Academy within the last few weeks. And the reason I'm sharing it here as well is because I truly believe it's something our young people really need to hear, and I also know that the truths we're going to study today will impact anyone with ears to hear, no matter what their age. So if you're an adult, please don't check out, because I guarantee that every one of us here can learn something valuable and encouraging in what I have to share today from God's Word.

As we begin today, I want start by asking you this: Have you ever had a really great plan that just didn't quite work out? Have you ever done something that seemed like a great idea, but then when you did it you realized, "Yikes, I probably shouldn't have done that and now I'm going to have to face some pretty stiff consequences? In fact I may have a date with dad tonight in the woodshed."

Now I've had a few situations like this in my life...Well, probably a little more than a few. One that comes to mind for me was a time when my dad had installed a big new piece of equipment at his radio station. TELL CEMENT STORY.

Now as we grow older, failed plans can have even bigger consequences that go beyond a spanking from Dad. One of these for me was a time after I had finished college and was living back in my hometown in Alaska. TELL CHRISTIAN ROCK BAND STORY.

Well, I have some good news for us today: these kinds of situations don't ever happen with God. God doesn't ever have to go to Plan B when Plan A doesn't work out. God doesn't ever do something and have an, "uh-oh," moment when He sees what the result is. And that's because God is eternal and all-knowing and He has complete and detailed knowledge of everything in the future.

Is there anyone here today who doesn't have a birthday? Well, that means that each of us in this room had a point when we began or when we came into existence. This also means that there was a time when we didn't exist. What about God? Does God have a birthday?

Psalm 90:2 says: ***Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.***

What about Jesus? He has a birthday doesn't He? He definitely has a specific day when He was born as human being, but does that mean that Jesus was created, or that He didn't exist before He was conceived in Mary? What does Scripture say?

John 1:1-3 – ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.***

John 8:58-59 – ***Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.***

Clearly from Scripture, Jesus is eternal and has always existed. The God of the universe does not have a birthday or a day when He was created. He simply is.

Scripture also makes it very clear that God has complete and detailed knowledge of everything now and in the future. He also has complete and detailed knowledge about you and me, inside and out. He knows our thoughts and our weaknesses, our sins and our successes, and He's known it all before time even began.

Now as we think about God knowing everything about us, I want to ask you: how many of you have ever tried to count how many hairs you have on your head? Does anyone want to accept the challenge of doing that over the week and reporting back to us? Now with me it might be a little easier than with some, but I would hate to try it with most of you. Well, I want you to imagine all the hair on all the heads of all the billions of people in the world today...then add in all the people throughout all history who have ever lived and all the strands of hair on their heads. That would be an extremely large number of hairs, wouldn't it? Well, for God it's not that big or hard to calculate. In fact, He knows the exact number without even having to get out a calculator.

In the book of Matthew, we're told by Jesus:

"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Now how many of you ladies or girls leave some hair in the sink when you're brushing your hair in the morning? Well, guess what, God knows how many strands of hair you've pulled out each day without even having to give it a second thought. He also probably thinks you should clean them out of the sink instead of just leaving them there for the next person! But in all seriousness, think about how amazing it is that God knows that much about you and cares about the smallest details of your life. And what we'll see as we continue today is that His knowledge about you goes way beyond how many hairs are on your head.

Now today we're taking a break from Ephesians and studying my favorite psalm: Psalm 139. So for those of you that have your Bibles, you can turn there now.

But before we begin, I want to tell you why Psalm 139 is very special to me. It has to do with a certain experience I had when I was about 10 years old. Now I grew up in Soldotna, Alaska, a small town and area that had about as many people as we have here in the Grande Ronde Valley. I lived in a three-story house that was built on a sloping hillside and my bedroom was on the basement floor of the house. On one side of my room I had a very large picture window that was basically at the outside ground level, so if anyone were to walk by my window outside I would see their feet and they could bend down and look right in. What concerned me most was how easy it would be for someone or something to break in through that gigantic window and come right into my room.

Now I was mostly concerned about dark scary monsters or the bogeyman when I first moved into that room, but when I was about 10 years old something happened in our small town that made my fears get worse about what might come through that window. As you all know from living in a small town, it's not very often that really bad crimes happen. Well when I was about 10 I heard my parents and other people talking about something terrible that had just happened down the street a little ways... Someone had killed another person and whoever had done it had not been caught and was believed to be hiding out somewhere in the woods. Now that's a frightening thought for a 10-year-old with a big picture window looking out into the woods.

So needless to say that night when I went to bed my little mind was very worried and when my mom came to tuck me in, I told her how scared I was and asked her how I could know that something bad like that wasn't going to happen to me. Now I had one of the best moms on the planet and she told me that when she was my age she had the same worries. But what really helped her was when someone showed her Psalm 139 in the Bible. Then she got her Bible and read it to me and explained what it all meant and how helpful it was to read it whenever we get worried about things like these.

So today I want to walk each of you through this beautiful Psalm that has been given to us by God as a special gift to help us know how deeply He cares about us and how we can trust Him in even the darkest and scariest times of our lives.

Let's start by reading verses 1 through 6:

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in — behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

What these first six verses tell us is that God knows everything about us and that He cares about every little detail that goes on in our lives. He knows us like no one else in the world can ever know us.

Have you ever wished that people really knew who you are... What's important to you... What makes you tick... What your biggest fears are... And that they not only knew all this but that they truly cared about it all and loved listening to you and spending time with you?

Well that's how God is toward us. He knows us and loves us way beyond what we can even imagine. And you don't need to try to hide anything from God... He knows it all already... He understands even our thoughts and knows what we're going to say before we even say it. He is intimately acquainted with ALL our ways. Verse 3 tells us that even when we're sleeping we are never out of His sight or off His mind. We're also told here that God has laid his hand upon us. The God of the universes cares so much about you and me that even He touches us and surrounds us with His own loving arms.

Now let's read verses 7 to 12:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

In these verses we learn that there is nowhere we can go in the universe where God's presence leaves us. God is always with us wherever we go...we are never out of His sight... out of His reach... or out of His ability to watch over us and care for us and hold us in His hand. His hand is always there to lead us and guide us and carry us through whatever we face in life.

Verses 11 and 12 tell us that even if we're in the darkest place imaginable and we can't see anything...that darkness will have no effect on God's ability to continue to care for us and guide us... Even the darkness is as bright as day to God. He doesn't need light to be able to see everything with perfect clarity. So if you're ever afraid of the dark, remember that darkness is just like light to God; He can still see perfectly and can continue to take perfect care of you. He can guide you through the darkness and calm your fears as you go.

Now let's read verses 13 to 16:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Here we learn that God is the One who formed us in our mother's womb. He created us and perfectly designed us to be a unique person, unlike anyone else in the world. And since He's the One that created us, He also knows all of our weaknesses, strengths, and special abilities. None of us are here by chance...

We are here by design and as a result of God's choice to create us in our mother's womb and design each of us with a special purpose to fulfill in life. And this design and plan was developed before there was time.

Now verse 16 is one that gave me special comfort when I was a 10-year-old and feeling so afraid and worried. It tells me that all the days of my life have already been numbered by God... He decided how many days I would have before time began. And no amount of worrying is going to change it by even a single second... And no evil person or unforeseen disaster will be able to change what God has already decided for me.

None of us have a guarantee that we're never going to get injured or hurt or have something bad happen to us. But we do know from God's Word that He will never give us more than we can handle, and He will always, always, always be with us to walk us through and carry us through whatever we have to face. His presence and love will be real and strong and powerful as we walk closely with Him through whatever comes our way.

I heard an interesting quote recently that is so true. It said: "...safety is not the absence of danger, but the presence of the Lord." The Lord's presence with us is our strength and comfort and what can bring us peace and the ability to face life even with all its dangers and uncertainties.

Now the next 2 verses in Psalm 139 are among the most amazing verses in the Bible. Let's read them:

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

These verses tell us that God is ALWAYS thinking about you personally...night and day... If you were to count the number of times He thinks about you they would outnumber the grains of sand. How would you like to try to count the grains of sand in all the earth? Even if you counted every last one, God's thoughts toward you would still be greater than that. Notice how the psalmist says, "When I awake I am still with you." God's thoughts never turn away from us even when we're sleeping. And when we awake, we're still with Him and He's still thinking about us. What an amazing God and a friend like no other!

Now the next section in Psalm 139 can be a challenge for some. It talks about those evil people that I was so worried about as a 10 year old. Let's read verses 19 to 22:

If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

As we talk about this section, I first want you to remember the context and think about the experiences that the person who wrote this psalm had faced in his life. This psalm was written by King David. Do you happen to remember some of the challenges David faced in his journey to become king? After he was anointed by Samuel as a young man the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, but it was a very long road for him before he actually became king. If you'll remember, King Saul repeatedly tried to kill David and David eventually had to go on the run to keep from being murdered by Saul. David had done nothing wrong and yet Saul and his army were constantly pursuing him and trying to kill him at every opportunity.

So keep that in mind as you consider what David says here about slaying the wicked and the bloodthirsty men. David is speaking here in Psalm 139 of men who are filled with violence... Who are looking for people to harm... These were the type of people who were constantly pursuing him and trying to kill him...

David also speaks here of people who hate God and whose mission in life is to do everything they can to tear Him down and make Him look bad. In the New Testament we learn that we are to pray for all of these people... We are to pray for our enemies...

And even though we pray for those who are violent and seeking to hurt other people, we also do what we can to see them brought to justice for the crimes they do commit and to protect ourselves and other people from the harm they are trying to bring. But we never forget that even in the worst crimes that people commit, God can still bring healing and forgiveness. No one is beyond the grace and forgiveness of God.

Now let's read the final two verses of Psalm 139, which are a sincere prayer to God that I hope will be the constant prayer of each of us throughout our lives:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

These final two verses are a prayer to our God who loves us so much, knows everything about us, thinks about us constantly, and is always with us wherever we go. It's a prayer that God would lead and guide us and that He would root out any evil that's hiding in our hearts and get rid of any worry that we're holding inside and refusing to give up to Him. It's a prayer that He would lead us on in the way everlasting. And our journey onto the way everlasting is the journey that began at the moment when we placed our faith in Jesus Christ. In that very moment God recreated us at the heart level and brought us to new life and made us His very own children. He gave us His Holy Spirit to live inside us and give us the ability to walk in constant relationship with Him down the road of eternal life...an abundant life that is here and now and will continue for all eternity...when time will become meaningless because we will live forever.

Have you ever thought about how God knew before time began what He would have to go through in order to rescue us from ourselves and put us back on the way everlasting? You see God knew ahead of time that Adam and Eve would disobey Him and bring spiritual and physical death into the world. He wasn't surprised at all when Adam and Eve chose to eat the forbidden fruit. In fact, it's impossible for God to be surprised, isn't it? Think about it: If you know the details of the future, nothing can surprise you.

So God knew not only that Adam and Eve would sin and bring death to mankind, but before the beginning of time He also developed His beautiful plan to bring salvation and new life to conquer the death He knew would come. This plan would involve His only begotten Son and was hinted at in the Bible as early as Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, where Satan was told that his head would eventually be crushed by the seed of the woman, while Satan would only be able to bruise the heel of this coming person.

A couple of weeks ago in my Sunday School class, we went through Scripture and looked at some of the many verses in the Old Testament that predicted the coming Savior. These began with the Genesis 3:15 verse and little by little throughout Genesis, 1st Chronicles, 2nd Samuel and many other books of the Bible, more and more details are given about Him. We filled out a worksheet called, "From the Seed to the Lamb," and looked at the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and David regarding the coming Savior and how they all were fulfilled in Jesus, the Lamb who came to take away the sins of the world. It was amazing to see again so clearly how God's plan of salvation has been in place since before time began.

Think about it...Before God created human beings, the Father knew that He would one day have to offer up His one and only Son to die in order to rescue them. Do you think you would create something if you knew that's what it was going to cost you?...That you would one day have to offer up your only son to die? And what about Jesus? He knew that in creating human beings, He Himself was one day going to have to endure the worst possible suffering to rescue them and demonstrate His unfailing love. And yet He still created us. Our God is unlike any other and His love is beyond what we can even comprehend.

Acts chapter 2, verses 22 to 24, gives us a beautiful picture of how this was God's plan from before the beginning of time. The Apostle Peter is speaking here and he says:

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."

Here we see that the suffering and death on a cross of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was not just an unfortunate thing that happened by chance. Instead, it happened according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. This was God's rescue plan from before the beginning of time. And our God loves us and cares about the intimate details of our lives more than we can even begin to comprehend.

We have some amazing reasons to praise our God today as we sing our closing songs. And my prayer is that we will continue to praise Him and draw near to Him every moment of every day and in everything we do! And that we will have peace and an enduring sense of safety in every situation and fear we face in life, knowing without a shadow of a doubt that our God's presence is with us and His steady hand is guiding us through the darkness and into His marvelous light!