

HERE...THERE...EVERYWHERE
PSALM 139:7-12

There was an intriguing movie that came out a few years ago entitled, *The Truman Show*. Truman Burbank (played by Jim Carrey) thinks he is a normal man living a normal life in a normal town. He has an ordinary job as a desk clerk, an ordinary wife who gushes over him, an ordinary neighbor, and an ordinary friend, who pops in from time to time with a six-pack. But Truman's life is not ordinary—in fact it's not even real. His life is actually a non-stop, reality television show, and he's the star—although he (and he alone) doesn't know it.

Truman doesn't realize that his quaint hometown is a giant studio set decked out with high-tech simulations of the sun and sky and sea in which everything, including the weather, is created by the special effects department. Truman doesn't know that the folks living and working there are Hollywood actors with headphones in their ears, and that even his incessantly bubbly wife is a contract player. He has no idea that there are hidden cameras everywhere and that millions of people are watching every move he makes, and that he is simply going from one staged situation to another that is seamlessly orchestrated by a powerful producer who has made a fortune playing God with his life.

But after the production crew makes a couple of mistakes, Truman figures out what is going on, and when he makes this discovery he becomes angry and upset, naturally, because even though his life and circumstances are pleasant and comfortable, they are artificial. He's being manipulated and exploited. He's not free. He's in a prison of sorts and he's under constant surveillance. And so the rest of the movie is the story of how he tries to escape.

In watching *The Truman Show* one cannot help but think about our relationship to an all-knowing, everywhere present God—a God from whose gaze you cannot escape, a God who is intimately acquainted with all our ways, and a God who is absolutely sovereign—who is in complete control of events and circumstances and orchestrates them to accomplish his own purposes. It raises the question: Are we prisoners, just like Truman Burbank? Should we feel exploited and manipulated?

That all depends on how well you know God and what your relationship with God is. I suppose it *could* feel like prison to those who are strangers to His benevolence and grace. But for those who know that they are the objects of His unconditional love, God's constant attentiveness and His continual presence are reasons for rest and security. See what you think as we look at Psalm 139 again this morning.

Verses 1-7.

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is high; I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning

and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me.

*¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"*

*¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as
light with you. (ESV)*

I told you last week that David wrote Psalm 139 as a hymn to be sung during the worship services of the Hebrew community. It is a song about the character of God— theology put to music—but it is a song that celebrates how God's attributes affect us personally, and how our awareness of these attributes endears us to Him. The first six verses of Psalm 139 are about the knowledge of God. They declare that God's knowledge is pervasive and comprehensive, something theologians call *omniscience*. God knows everything. He knows everything completely, exhaustively, and perfectly.

Verses 7-12 are about the presence of God. They declare that God is present everywhere all at the same time. Theologians call this *omnipresence*. He is here, there, and everywhere, all at the same time and to the same degree. There is no place where He is not, and there is no escaping His presence.

David begins this section in verse 7 by asking a question. *"⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?"*

Have you ever asked those questions? I'll bet you have. They are as old as our first parents, Adam and Eve, and we have been asking them ever since. Mankind sincerely wants to know, "Can I ever really escape from the presence of God? Can I ever hide from Him?"

When Carly Blue was little we played a game every night that revealed a lot about her four-year-old perceptions of reality. I would tuck her into bed, pray with her, and then leave the room, but no sooner was I out the door than she would call out, "Daddy, come and try to find me." I would go back into the room and it was obvious where she was. There was a Carly Blue sized lump in the middle of her bed underneath the covers. The lump was moving ever so slightly. It was giggling.

But I was not about to let on. I would say in a puzzled tone, "Oh boy, I don't see her? Carly Blue where are you?"

From under the covers a voice blurted out, "I'm behind the door!" I would look behind the door. I would look in half a dozen other places that the voice from under the covers told me to look. And when she finally sensed that I was utterly defeated and ready to give up, she would pull the covers back revealing a victorious grin. Once again, she had successfully pulled the wool over her daddy's eyes.

Her four-year old logic was plain enough. *If she couldn't see me, then I couldn't possibly see her. If her eyes were in the dark, then mine must be as well.*

Isn't it interesting that this same logic is used by so many with reference to God? In fact, it has pretty much been the way man has related to God ever since the Fall. Do you remember what Adam and Eve did after they had sinned and they heard God approaching them in the Garden? They hid from Him among the trees.

And that response reveals two of the most tragic consequences of sin. One, that the Lord who created them for His own pleasure and who offered Himself to them for *their* pleasure, was no longer viewed as a God to be adored and a Friend to be enjoyed, but a Foe to be feared. Sin severely strained that once perfectly harmonious relationship so that *distance became more desirable than devotion*.

And man has been trying to get away from God ever since for the same simple reason. It's not comfortable for the sinner to be in the presence of the Holy One. His penetrating light exposes the darkness and reveals things that make us feel ashamed.

But the other effect of sin revealed in Adam and Eve's attempt to hide from God is a severely distorted concept of God.

Think about it. These were perhaps the two most intelligent human beings who have ever lived. They certainly knew more about God than any theologian to have come along since, for they had enjoyed His personal presence each and every day. And yet they were playing 'hide and seek' in the same manner and with the same logic that four-year-old Carly Blue used with me. "If we can't see Him, then He can't see us."

Did they really think they could pull it off? Did they really think He didn't know where they were?

It proves sin's devastating effect upon our concept of God and reality. And those distorted concepts have been passed on to all the offspring of Adam and Eve as well. Our spiritual perceptions are, by nature, childish.

That's why it is imperative that we understand God's nature, His character, and His attributes, and that our knowledge be in accordance with the truth. So let's explore God's omniscience in these verses.

Look at **verse 8**. In answer to the question, *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?* David replies,

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

David is identifying the two vertical extremes. He is telling us that God is not confined to the surface of this planet. In other Scriptures the word *heaven* is used to refer to the dwelling place of God. If this is what the Psalmist meant then it would be the place where you would most expect to find Him.

But '*heaven*' is also used with reference to the sky and sun and moon and stars and planets. And I think this is more likely what David had in mind. He is saying that if he had the ability to fly to the moon or fly to the sun or the stars or any other terrestrial body, he would find life, for God is there.

There is also life in the heart of the earth, for God is there as well. *Sheol* is a word used with reference to the underworld, the place where the dead were believed to have gone. In this passage it is used metaphorically to describe the furthest extremity below us.

God is above me and below me. He is present in the most immense black holes of outer space, as well as the most inconspicuous ant hole under my feet. So up or down we cannot escape God's presence.

Verses 9-10.

⁹ *If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*
¹⁰ *even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.*

The *wings of the morning* is a single Hebrew word which refers to the pale light that illumines the horizon just before sunrise. As you know, the dawn is but for a few fleeting moments. The sun quickly emerges and spreads its light from east to west.

But David is saying that if he were able to fly with such speed that he could literally beat the daylight, he still would not be beyond the reach of God. He would be there.

He is also in the uttermost parts of the sea.

Jonah found that out, didn't he? When God told him to go east to Nineveh to preach, he tried to escape God and went in the opposite direction intending to go as far away from Nineveh as possible. And he discovered that no matter where he went he couldn't get away. God was present in the most western regions of the earth. What is more, he discovered that God was also present in the depths of the sea, for it was in the belly of a fish that he got reacquainted with God and encountered Him in truth.

Do you see what the Psalmist is saying? For God there is no east or west, north or south, up or down, here or there, near or far, because there are no spatial boundaries with God. There is no such thing as a God-forsaken place. He is here, there, and everywhere, all at the same time and to the same degree.

This is the meaning of *omnipresence*. God is everywhere at once. You can find Him on the largest star and you can find Him on the tiniest atom, and He is not in any one place more or less than any other.

That's because God is a Spirit—an infinite Spirit. He doesn't have a physical body. He cannot be contained or confined. He is immeasurably bigger than the universe and is subject to nothing in the universe, such as time, space, or gravity. He holds the entire universe in His lap, just as easily as you hold your Bible right now.

I don't know about you, but when I contemplate the greatness of this God, especially in relation to the universe—when I think that there are approximately eight billion galaxies with about one hundred and fifty billion stars in each, most of which are hundreds if not thousands of times bigger than this planet on which we live—it makes me wonder, “Is this infinite God really interested in little ol' me?”

And then I read verse 10 and am compelled to blurt out, “Wow!!!” This God leads *me*, with His right hand He holds *me*! Think about it. The God who holds the universe in His lap holds me in the palm of His hand, with His fingers wrapped snugly around me.

This is a picture that is intended to convey His intensely personal interest in our lives. Notice: I'm not clutching Him; He is clutching me. My position in His palm is one of security. I may let go of Him but He will never let go of me. I may turn my back on Him so that He escapes *my* notice, but I can never escape *His*. I am never alone, never lost, never left unprotected. Even in those dark nights of the soul when I cannot sense Him, much less see Him, He is still there—guiding and protecting.

Look at **verses 11-12.**

¹¹ *If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,*

and the light about me be night,”
¹² *even the darkness is not dark to you;*
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

You cannot play hide and seek with God. He sees in the dark. He sees right through things. Nothing is opaque or solid to him; everything is transparent. That's what the writer of Hebrews says, "*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before his eyes...*" (4:13).

So in response to the Psalmist's question in verse 7, "Where shall I go from your Spirit?" The answer is 'nowhere'. "Where shall I flee from your presence?" Nowhere.

How does that make you feel? Again, that depends on what you think of God and what you think God thinks of you.

Many years ago Francis Thompson wrote a provocative poem that has since become a classic. It is entitled "The Hound of Heaven." In it he describes his flight from God. A God whom he felt was a frightful Being, who would smother him and confine him to a life of duty and dread if He ever caught him.

And so Thompson describes himself as a restless vagabond, searching high and low for something that would satisfy his craving for fulfillment, contentment, peace, and joy.

But in his elusive pursuit of these things he kept hearing footsteps—steady, deliberate, relentless. It was God. He could not get away from Him; no matter how fast he ran or what direction he went. And yet he dared not stop fleeing from this dreadful Presence lest he have to face Him. And so on and on he ran.

That's what it's like for those who neither know Him nor love Him. To them, God is a prison warden or, what's worse, a monster who is all eyes, and from whom they must try to escape.

Their methods of escape vary. Some try to escape God by plunging into a world of sensual pleasure, others by giving themselves entirely to the pursuit of material things, still others by devising elaborate ways of reinterpreting reality. They ignore the things that are plain to everyone and create their own worldview, even denying the very existence of God.

And some of these methods are fairly convincing on the surface. Because they've created enough diversions and made enough noise to drown out the sound of His footsteps, so that it *seems* that He's nowhere in the vicinity. But it's four-year old logic, no different than Carly Blue's. *If I can't see Him or hear Him then He must not see me, or He must not exist.*

But they are deluding themselves. It is impossible to escape from God. He is everywhere at once. He holds the universe in his lap. He is intensely interested in His creatures.

Should these people fear Him? If they reject Jesus Christ, God's Son and God's provision for their salvation, then yes, they have reason to be afraid. The Bible says that when God unleashes His wrath against those who have rejected Jesus, they will cry out for the rocks and mountains to fall on them in order to escape. But, try as they may, they shall not be able to.

But there is another possible scenario that produces not a fear of terror, but a fear of wonder and reverence and awe. It is the response of those, like David here, who have not attempted to hide from this God, but who have emerged from the shadows and allowed His

penetrating light to expose them. Who have come to God as poor, helpless sinners in need of grace and mercy, and have embraced God's provision of salvation in Jesus Christ. Who have trusted Him to forgive them from their sins and make them righteous in His sight. Who have become the adopted sons and daughters of God through Christ, and have been made His friends, with whom He enjoys sweet fellowship.

That is precisely what happened to Francis Thompson. When he finally turned around to face the Hound of Heaven he discovered a loving arm outstretched and a gentle voice saying, "Come, I am He whom thou seekest." The very freedom and peace and fulfillment he thought would be squelched by God he found *in* God.

So, what are the personal and practical implications of understanding God's omnipresence? There is nothing that brings a greater sense of security and satisfaction. For if you have embraced the Lord Jesus Christ He loves you with a love that knows no bounds, just as His Being knows no bounds. He will never turn His back on you, never ignore you, never let you out of the palm of His hand.

But there is something else. The fact that He is here, there and everywhere means that everywhere is "holy ground." So wherever you are is God's temple, for God is equally present in all places at the same time.

When we were in Jerusalem I was amazed at the emphasis the various religions placed upon certain "holy" sites. That's what most of the religious tension is about. Muslims occupy space that the Jews want, Catholics have a piece of ground the Orthodox Church wants, and there is so much tension and conflict over these "sites" that you are tempted to think they worship the ground rather than God.

On most of these sites a temple or an altar has been erected, and there are candles and places to kneel and pray. Because many believe their prayers will be more effective and more powerful if they are prayed on that site.

That's paganism. That's an indication of a distorted concept of God. He's not confined to space. He doesn't dwell in temples or buildings.

Since God is everywhere, everywhere is holy ground. Your home, your place of employment, this church building, the places where you conduct business, the places you visit.

Think about it. If you are standing or sitting or lying down you are on holy ground all the time! You can communicate with God and enjoy fellowship with Him any time. His power is accessible and His comfort is available wherever you are, 24/7.

HERE...THERE...EVERYWHERE
PSALM 139:7-12

Main Idea: God is here, there, and everywhere, so wherever I go I am always in close proximity to him

The big question: Can I get away from God? (7)

God is present in the two vertical extremes (8)

He is in the heavens

He is in Sheol, the depths of the earth

God is present in the sky and the sea (9-10)

A description of remoteness

His personal leadership and guidance are still there

God sees in the dark (11-12)

We cannot hide from God (11)

Darkness and light are just the same to God (12)

Personal implications of God's omnipresence

It brings a great sense of _____ and _____

Everywhere I am is _____ ground