

Our Sovereign God

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this morning, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Psalms and Psalm 139.

In the book of Psalms, Psalm 139, I want us to look at most of this psalm, but if we read again at verse 1, where David writes, O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

You know, as we stand on the threshold of a new year in our lives, there always comes with it an element of apprehension, and none more so than this year, because as we cross the threshold into a new year and into the unknown of 2021, we leave behind all that took place in 2020.

And as you know, a lot took place in 2020. But you know, I stood here a year ago on the 1st of January 2020, and last New Year's Day, we looked at a passage, a passage which exhorted and encouraged us to enter 2020 with a 2020 vision for our congregation and our community.

[1 : 33] And as you know, any vision that we had for 2020 was completely shattered by the month of March. Because we all began living in lockdown.

We all started having to cope with COVID-19, and we all were being confronted and dealing with the reality of death. But these things were never part of our 2020 vision, because that's not what we proposed and planned and purposed to do in 2020.

But now as we stand on the threshold of 2021, we look back, and we can see that all that took place is exactly what the Lord proposed and planned and purposed to do in 2020.

It may not have been part of our 2020 vision, but it was certainly always part of the Lord's 2020 vision. Because as our Bible reminds us, His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

For our God, my friend, our God is a sovereign God. He's king and He's in control. He declares and He decrees whatsoever comes to pass.

[2 : 49] He rules over and overrules in every detail of our lives. And you know, that's what's emphasized here in Psalm 139, that our God is a sovereign God.

Because despite all that's taken place in the year which has just passed, we've been reminded of the fact that every detail of it has been completely out of our control.

In fact, all that took place in 2020 was out of the control of people and parliaments and even the powers of this world. But none of it, none of it was out of the care, compassion, and control of our sovereign God.

For throughout 2020, the Lord was speaking to us. He was speaking to us as a congregation. He was speaking to us as a community. And He was speaking to us as a country.

And the Lord was reminding us that He's our sovereign God. He's our sovereign God. And you know, at the beginning of a new year, we're often nostalgic and sentimental.

[3 : 59] We're often thoughtful and reflective about the year that has just passed and the year that's now before us. And of course, some people, they approach 2021 with enthusiasm and excitement because this is the year that they hope to get married or build a house or have a child.

But you know, for others, as they approach 2021, they do so with anxiety and apprehension because they know that what's before them this year is the continued reality of old age and infirmity or the progression and deterioration of illness or even another year missing loved ones.

Friends, needless to say, bringing in the new year, it is happy for some, but it's heartbreaking for others. It's happy for some, but heartbreaking for others.

So what do we do? Where do we go? Who do we turn to? But to our sovereign God, because the truth is, my friend, he knows exactly what 2021 holds for us.

Therefore, we must begin this new year by committing and commending ourselves into the hands of our sovereign God. And Psalm 139, it reminds us and reassures us that our sovereign God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent.

[5 : 33] Psalm 139 reminds us and reassures us that our sovereign God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. And there are three headings this morning.

Our sovereign God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. So first of all, he is omniscient. He is omniscient.

Now look at verse 1. David writes, O Lord, O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from afar.

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it. You know, Psalm 139, it's a favorite psalm for many people because it's such a personal psalm.

[6 : 40] Because Psalm 139, it reminds us and reassures us that our sovereign God not only knows us individually, but he also knows us intimately. And that's expressed to us by the fact that there are over 50 personal pronouns in this psalm.

Over 50 times, David, the psalmist, he uses the expressions I, my, and me in order to emphasize that this psalm is a personal psalm.

Because our sovereign God, he is omniscient. He's all-knowing. And he knows us personally. He knows us privately. He knows us particularly.

And so I want you to see that this psalm, my friend, is a personal psalm. And it's a psalm that's speaking to you personally. It's a personal psalm.

Because Psalm 139 was written from a personal perspective. And it was written not only from a personal perspective, but it was also written for you to remember and be reassured that your sovereign God is all-knowing.

[7 : 51] He's omniscient. And he knows you. He knows you personally. He knows you privately. And he knows you particularly. And that's what's emphasized in the opening verse in verse 1.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. O Lord, you have searched me and known me. Psalm 139, it opens with the confession that the Lord, the covenant king, the one who keeps covenant with his people, the one who is faithful to his promises, he has searched you and known you.

And these words, searched and known, they're expressive because they describe exploration and examination. They describe exploration and examination.

They describe, in many ways, a minor. A minor who is digging deep into the heart of a mine in order to find his treasure. And that's who your covenant king is, my friend.

He has searched you and he has known you. He has dug so deep into your heart that he knows everything there is to know about you. He knows everything there is to know about you.

[9 : 04] He has explored and examined you and he knows you intimately and intensely that you can say about him as it is in verse 2. You know when I sit down and when I rise up.

You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. My friend, you can say, O Lord, my sovereign God, you have searched me and you know me.

You have explored and examined me. You know me personally. You know me privately. You know me particularly. You know when I wake up and you know and you know when I lie down. You know when I go out and you know when I come home.

You know when I go to work. You know when I come home from work. You know every detail of my life. You're acquainted with all my ways. You know where I worship.

You know where I live. You know what I do. You know even when I'm wayward. O Lord, you have searched me and known me. But the thing is, he says, you not only know my ways, you also know my words.

[10 : 15] Because verse 4, even before a word is on my tongue, he says, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in behind and before and lay your hand upon you, upon me.

You know, I'm sure that we're all familiar with the concept of Big Brother and the TV show which locked people in a house and put them under 24-hour scrutiny and surveillance with the cameras of

Big Brother.

They all watched their every move and they watched where you would go and what you would do and they watched which room you walked into. They heard what you say.

They took note of your reactions and your mannerisms and your temperaments. Big Brother sees all and knows all. But you know, Psalm 139 reminds us that our sovereign God, he sees all, he hears all and he knows all.

He knows even what we're thinking and he knows what we're going to say even before we say it. Verse 4, even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it all together.

[11 : 33] And you know, my friend, the omniscience of our sovereign God, it should bring conviction because there are times when we're wayward in our ways and the Lord knows it.

He knows when we're wayward in our ways. He knows when we go to places we shouldn't go. He knows when we keep the company we shouldn't keep. He knows when we watch things we shouldn't watch.

He knows when we listen to things we shouldn't listen to. But you know, the Lord not only knows when we're wayward in our ways, he also knows when we're wayward in our words because he knows when we need to tame the tongue.

He knows when we praise God and curse men. He knows when we gossip and gallop about others. He knows when we speculate and slander and smear someone, be it our family, our neighbour, our work colleague, our elder or our minister.

He knows when we're wayward in our words. My friend, the omniscience of our sovereign God, it should remind us that we need to keep our Christian character, conduct and conversation in check because the Lord knows when we're wayward in our ways and wayward in our words.

[12 : 51] But you know, the omniscience of God, the omniscience of our sovereign God, should not only bring conviction, it should also bring comfort. The omniscience of our sovereign God should bring conviction and comfort because despite searching and knowing us, despite exploring and examining us, despite personally, privately and particularly being aware of all our faults, our flaws and our failings, you know, the greatest comfort is that our sovereign God, who is omniscient, he loves us and he looks after us.

Despite knowing everything about us, the Lord has such a care and a concern and a compassion for us. My friend, our sovereign God, he knows our name, he knows our nature, he knows our needs, he even knows the number of hairs upon our head.

Our life is like an open book before him where everything is highlighted and nothing is hidden because he knows our ways, he knows our words, he even knows our worries.

And you know, this is what I find so comforting about the omniscience of our sovereign God because when we pray to him, when we pray to him, he not only knows what we're going to say before we say it, he also knows what we would say even when we can't say it.

He knows what we would say even when we can't say it. That's kind of what Paul reminds us in Romans chapter 8 that sometimes our prayers, they don't even need words because when we're at our lowest and when we're at our weakest and when we feel most vulnerable and prayer seems impossible and maybe no one else knows what's going on in our heart.

[14 : 45] Maybe no one is aware of it and we feel completely lost for words and yet our sovereign God assures us that by his spirit he makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.

My friend, our sovereign God is omniscient and he reminds us and reassures us in his word that he knows all things and that he is working all things together for good to those who are called according to his purpose.

You know, it's no wonder David could say such knowledge is too strange for me, too high to understand. And so Psalm 139 reminds us and reassures us that our sovereign God is omniscient. But secondly, we see that Psalm 139 reminds us and reassures us that our sovereign God is omnipresent. Our sovereign God is omniscient and he's omnipresent.

He's omnipresent. Look at verse 7. Where shall I go from your spirit or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there.

[16 : 06] If I make my bed in the grave, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me.

If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night, even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is as bright as the day for darkness is as light with you.

You know, these verses, they remind us and reassure us that our sovereign God is everywhere. He's omnipresent. There's nowhere where our sovereign God is not.

Because the thing is, he's not restrained or restricted. He's not confined or contained. He's not bound or barriered in any way because his presence is boundless.

It's limitless. It's infinite. It's immeasurable. It's inexhaustible. He's omnipresent. And the omnipresence of our sovereign God, it's emphasized to us here by all these rhetorical questions that we see in verse 7.

[17:16] Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? And the answer is, there's nowhere. There's nowhere in time or in eternity where we can fly or flee from the presence of our sovereign God.

He says, if I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in the grave, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, you are there.

And you know, in these verses, we're actually, in verses 8 and 9, we're given all four points of the compass. We're given north, south, east, and west.

And he says, if I ascend to heaven, if I go north, you are there. If I die and make my bed in the grave, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning sun as it rises in the east, you are there.

And if I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, the Mediterranean Sea, which was to the west of Israel, he says, you are there. You are everywhere. Doesn't matter where I go, you are there.

[18:28] You know, my friend, there's nowhere in time or in eternity where we can fly or flee from the presence of our sovereign God. And you know, as we said earlier, the omniscience of our sovereign God should bring conviction and comfort.

And in a similar way, the omnipresence of our sovereign God should bring conviction and comfort. The omnipresence of our sovereign God should bring conviction because there's nowhere in time or in eternity where we can fly or flee from his presence.

And you know, many have tried it but failed. When they sinned in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, that they tried to run and hide from God but they failed.

When he was called to preach to the people of Nineveh, Jonah, he tried to run in the opposite direction. He ran away from God but he failed. When David committed adultery and murder, he tried to run from God.

He tried to hide his sin but he failed. They all tried to run from the omnipresence of our sovereign God and they all failed. So my friend, let's not think that we'll be any different to them.

[19:53] In fact, do you know my unconverted friend, do you know the most solemn thing about the omnipresence of our sovereign God is that God is in hell.

God is in hell. And I say this to you because if you were to die without Christ as your Lord and Saviour this coming year, then not even hell will separate you from him.

Because you know, hell is, hell is not the absence of God. Hell is the presence of God. You know, there was a book written a number of years ago by the American theologian Ligon Duncan and there was a book called Fear Not.

And the book is, it's an examination of death and it looks at death from a Christian perspective and what happens after death and what hell and heaven is like.

And in the book Ligon Duncan, he describes the key difference between heaven and hell. He writes, heaven is eternity in the presence of God with a mediator.

[21:10] Hell is eternity in the presence of God without a mediator. Heaven is dwelling in the conscious awareness of your holy and righteous Father but doing so through a mediator who died in your place, the one who absorbed the fullness of the penalty of your sin.

But hell, he says, hell is eternity in the presence of God being fully conscious of the just, holy, righteous, good, kind, and loving Father's disapproval of your rebellion and your wickedness. He says, heaven is eternity in the immediate presence of God with Jesus but hell is eternity in the immediate presence of God without Jesus.

And you see, my unconverted friend, the difference between heaven and hell is Jesus because Jesus makes all the difference.

And you know, I can't stress this to you enough. I can't stress the solemnity and the seriousness of this and I urge you this morning at the beginning of a new year, start this new year in the right way.

[22 : 29] start this new year in the right way. Make this your new year's resolution. Seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and ask the Lord to give you a new heart and a new beginning and to make you a new creation in Christ.

Seek your sovereign God because, my friend, he's omnipresent and you will never run from him. You will never run from him.

So don't run from him. Run to him. Don't flee from him. Flee to him. And you know, his omnipresence, it should not only bring conviction, it should also bring comfort.

And this is what's being emphasized in this psalm that if we were to travel to any part of the world, if we were to take any one of the four points of the compass, if we were to travel north, south, east or west, there's nowhere in time or even in eternity where we can fly or flee from the presence of our sovereign God.

Because even if we were to go to the deepest and darkest parts of the sea or of space itself, we're told in verse 10, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me.

[23 : 51] My friend, our comfort today is that wherever we may go and whatever events may unfold in our providence, the Lord is there.

Always be assured of that. The Lord is there. Even if we're confronted with the darkest of providences that cover and envelop and hide the light of God's presence, even the darkness, we're told, in verses 11 and 12, even the darkness is as light to our sovereign God.

He says, if I say, surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night, even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is bright as the day for darkness is as light with you.

You know, they're such comforting words, aren't they? That even in the darkness of all that we go through in our lives, whether it's the darkness of sin or the darkness of sickness or the darkness of suffering or even the darkness of sorrow, even when we're in the darkness where we can't see the way ahead and we can't see the way forward and we can't see good coming out of this darkness and painful experience and yet, my friend, our sovereign God looks at the darkness of our providence and we're told it's as light to him.

It might seem like a cold, dark night to us but it's a bright, warm day to him. We might wonder what he's doing while we go through the depths of darkness and experience the feelings of depression and despair and despondency but like it was in the experience of Job, our sovereign God, he knows the way that we take and when he has tried us, we will come forth as gold.

[25 : 49] My friend, it's the omnipresence of our sovereign God which reminds us and reassures us of one of the greatest promises in Scripture. I will never, ever leave you.

and I will never, ever forsake you. You know, when you read that verse in the English translations it just says I will never leave you and never forsake you but when it was written originally in Greek it had this huge emphasis upon it, this huge promise behind it.

I will never, ever leave you and I will never, ever forsake you. And is that not the promise of our Emmanuel that he is God with us?

He is God with us. My friend, rather than flee from him, oh flee to him. Flee to him. Come to him.

Cast all your cares upon him because in him, in Christ, we have the assurance that there is no condemnation condemnation and there is no separation.

You know, this is something we should be fully persuaded about when it comes to our sovereign God that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things in the present nor things to come in 2021, neither height nor depth nor any other creature, nothing he says, absolutely nothing is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[27 : 31] My friend, our sovereign God, he is omniscient, he is omnipresent and he is omnipotent. That's what we see lastly.

Our sovereign God is omnipotent. He is omnipotent. Now look at verse 13. For you formed my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works. My soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written every one of them the days that were formed for me when as yet there was none of them.

You know, these verses, they remind and reassure us that our sovereign God is all-powerful. He's omnipotent. But you know, when the psalmist considers the omnipotence of our sovereign God,

what's interesting is that he doesn't draw attention to the fact that our sovereign God created all things out of nothing, visible and invisible, and he created them in the space of six days and all very good.

[28 : 53] He doesn't highlight that in the beginning, in the genesis of this world, our sovereign God spoke into the dark recesses of this world and said, let there be light.

He doesn't say that. He doesn't mention the creative omnipotence of our sovereign God when he called this whole world into being by the word of his power.

He doesn't mention that. He doesn't refer to the fact that our sovereign God perfectly ordered the creation. He ordered the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, the solar system.

He ordered it all. The psalmist doesn't highlight even the fact that he formed the land and the seas, the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the oceans, the rivers and the forests.

The psalmist doesn't tell us about how our sovereign God filled the earth with trees and plants and animals and mammals and birds of the air and fish of the sea and all the creepy crawlies and insects.

[29 : 53] He doesn't speak about our sovereign God and how he ordered all the times and seasons, the sunrises and the sunsets, the wind and the waves. He doesn't even talk about the days and the weeks and the months and the years and the decades and the centuries and the millennia which he has ordered and he's ordered every detail in the vastness of this creation and he's ordained it all from before the foundation of the world.

And yet the psalmist we see here, the psalmist doesn't mention any of that, doesn't say anything about that in order to draw our attention to the omnipotence of our sovereign God.

Instead, he says to us, and this I think is wonderful, he says you don't even need to look around you to know that your sovereign God is omnipotent.

All you need to do is take a look at yourself. All you need to do is take a look at yourself.

Do you know, as we said, Psalm 139, it's a personal psalm. And in these verses we're reminded and reassured that our sovereign God is omnipotent, he's all-powerful, and yet he deals with us so personally, so privately, and so particularly because our sovereign God, he not only knows everything about us, but he knew us and he saw us when our frame was being formed in our mother's womb.

[31 : 28] He knew us and saw us in our most primitive and private beginning. Even before an ultrasound could pick up our substance, our sovereign God knew us and saw us.

We were hidden out of sight and yet we were being made in secret, we were being fearfully and wonderfully created, and yet our sovereign God, he knew us and he saw us and he appointed every day in our lives for us.

That's what we're told in verse 16. Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them. My friend, our sovereign God weaves us in the womb and he weaves us in the world. Our sovereign God weaves us in the womb and he weaves us in the world.

Because like a weaver sitting at his loom, our sovereign God, he has in mind what the end product is going to look like. And with all his threads, he pulls them all together and he weaves them all together and he weaves them in time and in tune.

[32 : 48] We were woven so intricately and carefully in our mother's womb. We were formed and fashioned so uniquely, so beautifully, so fearfully and wonderfully.

We were made in the image and likeness of our sovereign God. And because we bear his image, we're precious to him. We're precious to God and our life is precious to God.

In fact, every day of our lives is precious to God. That's why our sovereign God weaves us in the womb and weaves us in the world.

Our sovereign God has planned every thread of providence and he has woven each one of them into the tapestry of our lives. And the marvel of who our sovereign God is is that with him there are no mistakes.

There are no mishaps. There are no loose threads. every thread that goes into the tapestry is accounted for. We might not understand why he has woven this thread of providence into our experience, but he does.

[33 : 57] Because he's the divine weaver. And my friend, he knows what he's doing. He knows what he's doing. Even in our hardest of circumstances and the most testing of trials, he knows what

he's doing.

And my friend, you know that you're in safe hands when you're in the hands of the divine weaver. Because he's still weaving all these threads of providence on his loom and he'll still keep weaving as you go into 2021.

He'll weave all these threads of providence into your life. It's not why everyone loves that poem about the divine weaver.

But it says, My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me. I cannot choose the colour. He worketh steadily.

Of times he weaves sorrow and I in foolish pride forget that he sees the upper and I the underside. But not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why the dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skilful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern he has planned.

[35 : 19] My friend, there may be threads of providence that have been woven into the tapestry of your life and you may never know why. Maybe not until you leave this world.

But your greatest comfort is that your sovereign God knows you. He knows you and he knows what he's doing.

And if our sovereign God has seen you and knows you and he knows all your days then why wouldn't you trust him with all your heart?

Why won't you trust him with all your heart? And as I know what Solomon said if you want to be wise.

If you want to be wise said Solomon trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not lean upon your own understanding but in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path.

[36 : 25] friends bringing in the new year it is happy for some but it's heartbreaking for others. And this morning we're being urged to look away from ourselves.

We need to look up. We need to look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen my friend they are only temporal but the things that are unseen they are eternal.

We're to look to the unseen God our sovereign God because he is omniscient he is omnipresent he is omnipotent he knows what 2021 holds for us.

Therefore we must begin our year by committing and commending ourselves into the hands of our sovereign God for both time and for eternity.

And may the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray together. O Lord our gracious God we give thanks for that wonderful reminder that we have a sovereign God who is sovereign over every detail in our lives.

[37 : 50] We give thanks that every day has been foreordained that it has all been planned and purposed by thee and help us then we pray to walk in thy will and to follow thy way and to stay close to thy word not only the word that has been written but that the word who became flesh and dwelt among us that we would continue to behold his glory as we as we go into a new year.

O Lord watch over us we pray guard our steps guard our hearts and our minds keep the evil one from us and remind us day by day that our God is omniscient our God is omnipresent our God is omnipotent O Lord the omnipotent God he reigns and we give thanks to thee for that bless us then we pray as we commit ourselves into thy hand that ours watch over us and keep us and go before us in all things for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake Amen Well we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing the words of Psalm 139 Psalm 139 which is the psalm we were looking at this morning we're considering the words of the sing psalms version Psalm 139 and we'll sing verses 1 to 10

O Lord you have examined me you know me through and through my sitting rising all my thoughts afar are known to you my going out and lying down are plain before your view before I speak a word O Lord it is well known to you down to the verse Mark 10 of Psalm 139 to God's praise O Lord you have examined me you hold me through and through my sitting rising all my thoughts sagt for you before I speak

The Word of God is His, welcome to You.

You have me in behind before, You lay on me Your hand.

[41 : 12] Such knowledge is too wonderful, too high to understand.

Where can I draw your spirit lead, or from Your presence go?

If soon the heavens do I fail, or in the depths be old.
Then I should take the wings of dawn, and dwell beyond the sea.
There also You would be my light, Your light and hold in me.