

Psalm 139

Introduction

1. What do you think of when you hear these words? –READ vs. 13-16
2. Much like most people think of funerals when they hear the words of Psalm 23, the words of Psalm 139 are probably most often heard in the context of the abortion debate to justify life beginning at conception
3. As appropriate as that is, that wasn't David's purpose
4. There is debate on how best to categorize this psalm
 - a. It is clearly written as a prayer so in this respect it would be considered a psalm of personal lament
 - b. There are also elements that resemble that of wisdom and praise psalms
 - c. However, it can also be categorized as an Imprecatory psalm which is one which calls down judgment upon one's enemies or the enemies of God
5. As to David's purpose in writing this psalm, one cannot escape the sense that he is pleading with the LORD for vindication (the action of clearing someone of blame, suspicion or false accusations), possibly from false accusations made against him by his enemies and the enemies of God
6. He does this by appealing to three of God's attributes, and one of his own

A. Structure and Poetic Elements

1. Structure (alliteration with the letter "o"):
 - a. David seeks vindication through the LORD's omniscience (1-6)
 - b. David seeks vindication through the LORD's omnipresence (7-12)
 - c. David seeks vindication through the LORD's omnipotence (13-18)
 - d. David seeks vindication through his opposition to the LORD's enemies (19-24)
2. Poetic Elements:
 - a. Merism (the use of two opposite words or statements to indicate the whole):
 - 1) v. 2: "**sit down...rise up**" (meaning all the time)
 - 2) v. 3: "**my path (journeying)...my lying down**" (meaning everything I do)
 - 3) v. 5: "**behind and before**" (meaning all around)
 - 4) v. 8: "**heaven...Sheol**" (meaning everywhere)
 - b. Contrast: vs. 11-12 - darkness, light, night, day
 - c. Hyperbole (exaggeration used to emphasize) – v. 18: "**If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.**"
 - d. Repetition: v. 21-22: "**Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD?...I hate them with the utmost hatred.**"
 - e. He bookends the psalm with the same language and theme :
 - 1) v. 1: "**O LORD, You have searched me and known me...you understand my thought from afar"**
 - 2) v. 23: "**Search me, O God, and know my heart; try to and know my anxious thoughts."**

B. Teaching

1. David seeks vindication through the LORD's omniscience (1-6):
 - a. The LORD had examined David and therefore knew him intimately (1): **"O LORD, You have searched me (perfect tense) and known me (imperfect tense; ongoing)."**
 - 1) He knew his motives (2): **"You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought (lit. aim or purpose) from afar."**
 - 2) He knew everything he did (3): **"You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways."**
 - 3) He even knew what David was going to say before he said it (4): **"Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all."**
 - b. The LORD's intimate knowledge of David provided protection for him (5): **"You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me."**
 - 1) David's point here appears to be that the LORD knew him so well that He set protections around him to restrain him (at times?) from sin
 - 2) This is alluded to in 1 Corinthians 10:13 (READ)

Keeping Maxx in his cage when gone/at night, putting blocks between wall and cage to prevent eating the wall, gates up to keep him out of the living room, new hinges on the cabinet to keep him out of the garbage—all of this because we know our dog and what he might do!

- c. That the LORD would know David this well was practically overwhelming to him (6): **"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it."**
 - d. David's appeal for vindication here is basically, "LORD, you know I am innocent of their accusations *because You know me!*"
 - e. Practical Application:
 - 1) Why was David able to do this with such confidence?—He wasn't a perfect man, but the LORD Himself said David was a man after His own heart, someone who wasn't always perfect but loved the LORD and sought to please Him through obedience
 - 2) I wonder, would most Christians—would we—be able to call upon the LORD as our with as much confidence as David did when accusations are made against us?
 - 3) We can, but only as long as what was true about David is true about us—look at Philippians 2:12-16 (READ)
2. David seeks vindication through the LORD's omnipresence (READ 7-12):
 - a. Initially you might wonder what God's omnipresence (the fact that He is everywhere) has to do with David's plea for vindication
 - b. First off, the fact that God is everywhere and sees everything means that nothing can be hidden from Him--This is reflected in something the LORD said to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 23:24: **"Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD."**
 - c. However, David's words here go beyond simply stating this fact—they convey a sense of not wanting or attempting to hide anything from the LORD
 - d. In fact, he rejoices in the fact that no matter where he finds himself the LORD is not only present with him, but there to lead him (10)

- e. David’s appeal for vindication here is basically, “LORD, you know I am innocent of their accusations *because no matter where I’ve been you’ve been there to lead me and I’ve followed you!*”
 - f. Practical Application:
 - 1) I wonder how our actions, behaviors, and words might change if we were more keenly aware of God’s omnipresence—the fact that He’s always there and sees everything we do
 - 2) Sometimes I forget—not necessarily in a theological sense but in a practical one—that God is there, that He sees everything I do good or bad
 - 3) In other words, even though technically know He’s omnipresent, I don’t always live like it
 - 4) How about you?
3. David seeks vindication through the LORD’s omnipotence (13-18):
- a. Just as we might have wondered what God’s omnipresence has to do with vindication, we might wonder here what God’s omnipotence (His great and unlimited power) has to do with vindication
 - b. In this section, David reflects on the LORD’s awesome power in creating him (14-15): **“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;”**
 - c. How might the LORD’s power in creating David vindicate him against the false claims of his enemies?
 - d. There are clues in the next three verses (16-18):
 - 1) David understood that God’s omnipotence always has divine purpose and he saw this in his own creation (16): **“Your eyes have seen my unformed substance (lit. embryo); And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.”**
 - 2) David both rejoiced and was overwhelmed by such a thought (17): **“How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.”**
 - a) Here David says that the LORD’s aims or purposes (“thoughts”; same word used by David in v. 2) for him are precious to him
 - b) He says they are vast and outnumber even the sand on the shore!
 - e. So, David’s appeal for vindication here is basically, “LORD, you know I am innocent because you created me for a purpose and I have valued and embraced that purpose!”
 - f. Practical Application:
 - 1) Do you realize that in His omnipotence, the LORD also created and called us with a purpose and we are to value and embrace that purpose just as David did?
 - 2) Look with me at what Paul wrote to the Ephesians: 1:3-6, 18; 2:1-6; 4:1-3; 5:1-2, 17-21
 - 3) When we live out this purpose and live in this way, it doesn’t matter what sort of accusations others make against us because we will always be vindicated by the LORD
4. David seeks vindication through his opposition to the LORD’s enemies (19-24):

- a. While David's first three appeals for vindication focused on the LORD's attributes of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, he now focuses on his disdain—or opposition to—God's enemies
- b. He begins with a call to God to destroy the wicked and for such men to depart from him because of their opposition to God (19-20): **"O that You would slay the wicked, O God; Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. For they speak against You wickedly, And Your enemies take Your name in vain."**
- c. David reminds the LORD of his hatred for such men (21-22): **"Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? 22 I hate them with the utmost hatred; They have become my enemies."**
 - 1) There is no way to soften this—David used the word hate four times!
 - 2) You might say, "But doesn't the Bible tell us to love our enemies?"
 - 3) Jesus's command to love our enemies (like in Matthew 5:44) were directed against seeking personal vengeance
 - 4) Here, David is referring to moral disgust or repugnance, not personal vengeance, because he makes it clear he hates such men because they hate the LORD
- d. David ends his prayer in a similar fashion to how he started it but with a bit of a twist (23-24):
 - 1) In v. 1 he referenced the LORD's intimate knowledge of him (1): **"You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar."**
 - 2) He uses that same language here, but as an appeal for the LORD to further examine him and lead him in His ways (2): **"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way."**
- e. David's appeal for vindication here is basically, "LORD, you know I am innocent because I despise wickedness!"
- f. Practical Application:
 - 1) I wonder what the LORD sees when He examines my heart? What does He see when He examines your heart?
 - 2) Does he see someone who despises wickedness, so much so that it drives me/us to flee from it?
 - 3) Or, does he find someone who has become desensitized to it or too tolerant of it, especially in our own lives
 - 4) Counseling session where young man said he committed an affair, but the counselor challenged him by calling it wickedness and adultery
 - 5) When we don't see sin for what it truly is, we are more prone to not only tolerate it but do it

Conclusion

1. One of the things that stands out in this psalm is the humility with which David appeals to the LORD
2. His confidence that the LORD will vindicate him against the false claims of his enemies isn't based on pride or arrogance, but the faithful relationship he has with the LORD

