

## Jesus and the Pharisees

In that passage we just heard from Mark's Gospel, Jesus confronts the Pharisees' legalistic interpretation of the Sabbath. The Pharisees see Jesus and His disciples walking along, plucking grain, and eating it on the Sabbath – and they accuse them of breaking God's law. Jesus responds by telling them about how when David was in need, he ate the consecrated bread meant only for the priests. See friends, the immediate need superseded the ceremonial law – human need in every case, is a higher priority than ritualistic observance.

Then a little later in that account, we heard of how Jesus healed the man with the withered hand – also on the Sabbath – further challenging the Pharisees' rigid interpretation. He asks them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). The Pharisees' silence reveals their inability to grasp the spirit of the law, prompting Jesus to act in compassion. The healing Jesus did on the Sabbath shows that God's laws are firmly rooted in love and mercy – not in simple compliance.

Since we've mentioned David, let's look at something he wrote, long before the Pharisees were around to critique Jesus and the disciples, and long before God wrapped Himself in human skin to be birthed in Bethlehem. If you have a Bible or Bible app, turn with me to Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18. **Read Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18.**

## God Is Our All-Knowing Creator

Today's Psalm, like many others, was written by David. Bible scholars do not agree when David wrote this – whether it was early on in his reign, or if it was nearer to the end of his life. Of Psalm 139, Bible scholar John Stek writes, "[it's] a prayer for God to examine the heart and see its true devotion. Like Job, the author firmly claims his loyalty to the Lord. Nowhere outside Job do we find expressed such profound awareness of how awesome it is to ask God to examine not only one's life but also his soul."<sup>1</sup> The Psalm beautifully speaks of the intimate and vast knowledge God has of each individual.

David begins by praising God for His omniscience – He knows everything. "You have searched me, Lord, and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar," (Ps. 139:1-2). Even before a thought is in our head – God already knows it. Nothing – absolutely nothing – is a surprise to Him. There's nothing you can possibly do to surprise God.

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<sup>1</sup> John Stek, "Psalm 139," in *The NIV Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), page 925.

“You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue You, Lord, know it completely,” (verses 3-4). We may do things and say things that surprise each other. But not God. He’s not surprised. He sees everything you think, the stuff you say, even the hidden things you do – and loves you anyhow! Talk about grace! His love for us is a bottomless ocean!

God also provides us with constant protection. David writes, “You hem me in behind and before, and You lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain,” (verses 5-6). See, God sees all our flaws – yet He loves us anyways. You know, church, even in the messes we make – He knows it, He’s with us, and He loves us anyhow. And, if we really get messed up, He allows things to occur to protect us from complete destruction. He gets our attention sometimes through crises that we face.

### **Praise Through Crises**

David was no stranger to crises. Early on, he faced Goliath when the older men of the army were too scared to face him. A bit later, he faced the threat of death from King Saul – whom he had loyally served. He faced wars with larger, surrounding nations. He fell into temptation, committed adultery with his general’s wife, had the man killed, and then married Bathsheba, and had rebellious sons who tried to seize the throne for themselves. David knew strife and conflict. He knew his share of sin, and yet, the prophet Samuel says, “The Lord has sought out a man [David] after His own heart and appointed him ruler of His people,” (1 Sam. 13:14).

David does all this stuff, yet says that he is overwhelmed – the knowledge of God is too wonderful for him. It’s amazing, isn’t it? While it’s not part of our lectionary reading today, verse 7 is also noteworthy. “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?” We can’t get away from God, no matter where we go.

Next, we see David speak of God’s role in our creation. He’s in awe over the work God has done in each of us. He says:

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, (verses 13-16).

David marvels at the intricacy and wonder of human life. Each of us is “fearfully and wonderfully made.” In the eyes of God, every human life is precious. Each one of us holds sacred worth. We’re worth so much, in fact, that He stretched out His arms on the cross to prove His love for us.

“How precious to me are Your thoughts, 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,” (verses 17-18). God is omnipotent – He’s always present. The Apostles’ Creed reminds us that we call God, Father. This isn’t to reduce God to a human role, but rather to lift people by acknowledging that parenthood is role that is part of the Divine.

So, whether we’re Dad or Mom, or care for birth children, adopted children, or children baptized into the family of God – we reflect an attribute of God. We believe God cares – and so, we do, too. The creed reminds us that God is the Creator – and all of creation has a single point of origin – Him. The Gospel lesson today, along with today’s Psalm, challenge us to live out our faith in a way that shows God’s character. True observance of God’s law, Jesus shows us, is marked by compassion and a commitment to doing good. We are called to reflect God’s goodness into other people. We should be actively engaged, like David, in praising the Source of all things bright and beautiful – our Almighty Triune God.

**Prayer:** O God, we cannot escape Your love. We find no place to hide. You search us out wherever we may be. Your love is like a blanket, protecting us wherever we go. Your love shields us from evil. We may travel to the moon or to the depths of the ocean: Your love is there. We may think ourselves to greater levels of sophistication: Your love is there. We may fall into the pits of sin: Your love is there. Thank You, Creator God, for Your steadfast mercy. Thank You for being there, wherever we may be. Amen.