

Psalm 139 and the Pro-Life Cause

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 May 2024

Preacher: Zac

[0 : 00] Praise to the only Holy God. Welcome.

It is good to be here. It is good to see the body of Christ, with Christ at its head, manifest. And it is an important and terrifying honor to preach God's word to you today.

I may have a lot to say, so I'll get into it. May it all be honoring to our God and edifying to this body of believers. But before we dive specifically in, though, let me read one passage I love and need to share each time that I am up here.

Acts 17, 10 through 13. Here reads the word of Yahweh. Acts 17, 10 through 13. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.

And when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

[1 : 18] Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

So reads the word of God. In this example from the historical book of Acts, which provides the account of what Jesus' followers did after Jesus died and rose again, we get an example of how to act when people say things about God's word.

This is true at all times, but it's especially true when a layman of the church like myself is the one preaching. So please, be Bereans with me. Search the scriptures with me.

Next, to get our context and purpose in order, I ask, why are we here?

I also answer, Most of us are here today because Christ has changed our lives. We have been made aware that there is a one true God.

[2 : 34] That that God has understood through the Bible and that he has created everything and has personally designed us and has done so in such a way that we are supposed to be in an active relationship with him.

We have, in some way, shape, or form, felt that hole, felt that incompleteness, felt that lack of good and grounding in our lives. Some may have felt that just enough.

Others may have been overwhelmed by it. In both cases, and those in between, we turn to Yahweh, the personal name of the God of the Bible, finding that he has already turned to us.

So, we are here because we have embraced that relationship and desire to maintain that relationship. And being here is part of that maintenance as we seek to interact with the totally creative, completely sovereign, true king that is our God in the ways that he, Yahweh, intends for us to interact with him.

So, we are here to worship our God, understand who he is, and learn what he requires of us. This sermon focuses on the last of those three, to learn what he requires of us.

[3 : 49] God has set us up with the backdrop of a fallen world full of fallen selves, including us. It is a world where persons go against God's order.

They go against his design, his mandate, and his priorities. In our worst moments, we are still a part of it. This fight is internal as well as external.

Make no mistake, Yahweh will win. But until his purposes are fulfilled, it is our responsibility to stand against this rebellion in what ways God allows.

I mean all that humbly, for we need to remember that Yahweh is in control, not us. We trust Yahweh first, and then act in areas that he opens up for us.

In such a thoroughly rebellious world, there is no shortage of different causes that can be created or recreated to both glorify God and benefit mankind. There are potentially so many that I believe that

no church body can act for them all.

[4 : 57] Rather, I believe that each church engages in the ones that, A, can be argued as the most important, and B, the ones that its members feel the need and gifting to engage in.

I, Zach, am a member of this church who believes that, A, the pro-life cause is one of the most important ones, and B, I feel the need to try to the glory of God and to the benefit of mankind. Across the world, and here in the United States, a debate constantly rages about whether our pre-born selves are sufficiently valuable to have their lives protected. One side believes that they are sufficiently valuable and that no harm should come to them.

The other side believes that they are not sufficiently valuable and that they can be destroyed for the sakes of others. There are caveats and degrees across the board, but that is still the basic dichotomy.

One group leans towards one side and the other group leans opposite. I am here because I believe that the pro-life side is so sufficiently, ambivocally, true, that a sermon can be made for the position.

[6 : 07] In other words, it is such a part of the Bible that we can grow in our relationship with God by exploring this theme in Scripture. This is a bold claim.

And so far, I have done more God talk than God's talk. Let me start to change this. Our main passage is Psalm 139. Found in the Book of Psalms, a part of the Old Testament.

The part of the Bible given to the Hebrew people and nation. In total, the Old Testament serves as the foundation for making sense of what we call the Incarnation, where Jesus, the second person in the Trinitarian God of the Bible, fully God, also became fully man so that he could become our Messiah, taking the punishment for all the wrongs that we have done so that, when we realize that we need God in our lives, God can meet that need while also maintaining his righteous and holy nature.

That act, and the New Testament Scripture that explains it, is necessary for the Old Testament account to be complete. But the Old Testament account is necessary for the New Testament to make any sense.

The passage that we will explore today is part of that grounding. With that, we will read Psalm 139, found on page 521 of your pew Bibles.

[7 : 34] That is Psalm 139, found on page 525 of the pew Bibles.

Let us stand as we read God's Word. Psalm 139, page 521 of your pew Bibles.

Here reads the Word of Yahweh. To the choir master, a psalm of David. Such knowledge is too wonderful.

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 day, for darkness is as light with you.

For you formed my inward parts.

[9 : 33] You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you. 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 books were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. O that you would slay the wicked, O God!

O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent. Your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?

[10 : 35] And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred. I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the everlasting. So reads the word of God.

Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, the Spirit that is with us, Jesus our Savior, the triune God, so distant, yet so close, so over and above everything, and yet so here with us, Lord.

Indeed, the God of the song. May you be with us today. May you be glorified. May your Spirit work as a filter for us, growing us up, helping us discern.

May whatever I say that is edifying to this congregation, and brings glory to you, may it be remembered. May they discern what is not, and may they forget it.

[11:46] To you be the glory at this time, and all times. In your precious and holy name I pray. Amen. You may be seated. So, my claim is that this psalm is pro-life.

The psalm makes it clear that we are persons with value, designed by God, starting at our original creation in the womb. How does this psalm make that clear?

First, and for record I have six points total. First, this psalm is highly personal. Period. In other words, even if I was not making a pro-life case for biblical personhood, this aspect of the psalm is very difficult to not talk about.

Now, that is not unusual for the psalms, but neither is it necessary. In contrast, Psalm 1, I believe, does not have personal language.

The blessed and the wicked that much of the psalm revolves around are abstracted away from any particular individual. Only God is personal in it, and only in the third person.

[13:00] Psalm 139 is on the other end of the spectrum. Most of the psalm revolves around David, in first person, and God, in second person. It is David talking directly to God.

And there is much about the psalm that reflects this. Nouns and adjectives are a huge giveaway.

The first person pronoun I is used 19 times. The personal adjective my, 13.

Me, 17. Your, 9. While it is hidden in English with the all caps Lord, the biblical God's own personal name Yahweh is used three times.

And always as, O Lord, as opposed to something less, less direct like the Lord. Those three uses also give the three uses of, O God, a personal ring.

All of this adds up to the fact that David is not abstractly speaking about God. He is speaking to God. Further, he is speaking to God as if he is near and always has been, and in perhaps every sense of the word.

[14:06] And again, this is true in a sense that would still exist outside of my point. For example, consider verses 9 and 10. Here reads the word of God. 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.

So reads the word of God. At this point, David is contemplating his existence in two extreme directions. Wings depict height, while the sea depicts depth.

Depth. The ESV study Bible scholars also point out that, given Israel's geography, the wings of the morning might also point to the east, where the sun rises, while the uttermost parts of the sea portray the west, the Mediterranean Sea.

These extremes, height versus depth, east versus west, convey a sense of wherever I may possibly go, convey a sense of wherever I may possibly go, can go.

At the same time, you have God not just leading, but even holding, wherever David may be. In other words, no matter where David goes, God is there.

[15:20] But not only is he there, but he is personally there. If David is there, it is because Yahweh led him there. Further, David's very existence in that place is because Yahweh is the one holding him, nourishing him, sustaining him, actively upholding the regular order of the universe, so that David may continue to live and ponder Yahweh's presence, wherever David is.

And that's just two verses. Verses one through five may be an even greater example. I will reread them, and as I do, please keep in mind how personal the wording is throughout.

Here reads the word of Yahweh. 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 a before and lay your hand upon me. Again, the personal language is everywhere. Yahweh's presence is a perpetual, intimate aspect of David's life.

[16:38] Yahweh does not just know these things about David as if he memorized the Excel spreadsheet of David's stats. Yahweh, even from afar, is actively discerning them.

God is all around him with the closeness of one putting a hand on another. So again, Psalm 139, even without discussion of this current issue, is highly personal.

It is about persons, Yahweh and David, in close, constant, commutative relationship with one another. Yahweh is the God that is always present, personal, and knowing for David.

And David can speak to him as if all of that is true. Second, this personal aspect begins in the womb. Like I said, this psalm is inherently personal.

It is basically part of a dialogue with Yahweh. However, that personal nature of the psalm is not merely in the present. Rather, David traces his personal relationship with Yahweh all the way back to his own beginning as a person.

[17:48] And where does David's beginning begin? Let us reread verses 13 through 16 to find out. Here reads the word of Yahweh.

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 books were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. So reads the word of Yahweh.

While there is more to this passage than a prenatal explanation, it is impossible to miss the fact that he is talking about himself as a person in the womb. It is not some pre-him that he is discussing, something biologically akin to him, yet not imbuing the qualities that make David David.

[18:55] No. To David, David was the person there in the womb. He was put together there, and he was fearfully and wonderfully made there. And Yahweh was there with him.

Yahweh was present, and not just present, but actively present, for Yahweh himself was creating him, taking David's unformed self and building it up.

Further, Yahweh was doing this even as David's existence was still in secret, before even his mother knew that he was there inside her. Yahweh is not just the most important person in David's life.

Yahweh is the first person in David's life. In short, there is no division in David's life, pre-born or post-born, that does not make David David.

And there is no division in David's life where Yahweh is not present. From his creation in his mother's womb onward, David was David, and Yahweh was there to make sure of that.

[20:01] Three of six. This personal, pre-born aspect is the basic reason behind the rest of the psalm. Granted, this section is not chronologically first in the psalm, and it is possibly more common than not that chronological order and rational order are both one and the same.

However, that may not be the case. Arguably, every thesis paper ever written jumps the gun and provides the conclusion first so that the reader knows what he or she is getting into.

The psalm is not that heavy-handed, but the stanza that consists of verses 13 through 16, the verses where David talks about being created by Yahweh in his mother's womb, has one important giveaway.

It starts with the word for. For. For is a word that often has less of a definition and more of an operation.

It serves to label a part of a passage as a reason for something. There is another for found in the psalm that serves the same purpose. Recall verse 12.

[21:11] Here reads the word of Yahweh. Even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is bright as the day. For darkness is as light with you.

So reads the words of Yahweh. Chronologically, the passage reads just as it did above. However, because of the four, the rationale, the rational premises to conclusion reading is as follows.

Premise. Dark is as light to Yahweh. Conclusion. Therefore, darkness is not dark to Yahweh and night is bright as day to Yahweh. Besides different propositions, which are statements that are either true or false, the difference between the four above and the four in verse 13 is that the four in verse 13 is at the beginning of a stanza, with stanzas being the largest unit, that is the largest sections, of the psalm.

And the stanza composed of verses 13 through 16 is the only stanza that has a four in front of it. I believe that this means that the stanza is the grounding reasoning for the whole psalm.

I do not want this point to be lost on us. There are arguably six stanzas in this psalm, but it is the third one that is the starting reasoning for all of them.

[22:33] So when David talks about God's perpetual presence everywhere at all time, from the greatest heights to the farthest depths and in any direction, he understands this because he first understood God's creative presence with him in his mother's womb.

It is the understanding that makes the rest of God's presence sensible. Fourth, that reasoning culminates with salvific implications.

The fact that the reasoning of the psalm starts with David's awareness that God is making him as a person in the womb does make one wonder. Where does the reasoning end?

In this psalm, the last stanza is verses 23 and 24. Here reads the word of God. Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the everlasting. So reads the word of Yahweh.

[23 : 39] In this psalm, it has already been made clear that God already knows David's thoughts. In verse 2, it is made clear that Yahweh even knows them at a distance.

In verse 4, it is made clear that God even knows them before David does. In that sense, the final verses may mirror the beginning verses. However, there is one important difference.

And that difference is best seen in the final verse. And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. David just doesn't want to be right in comparison to his enemies. He wants that. But he wants more than such a temporal victory. He does not want to be right only among his peers, but before a holy, immortal God.

David knows that only his God is everlasting, and only his ways are everlasting. Whatever David may think about his enemies, he knows that it is only God that makes him right.

[24 : 39] It is only God that justifies him, that puts him on the right path. However grand of a king David may have been, he knows that Yahweh is the true king.

It is at this point where the psalm becomes part of the grand narrative of the Bible. From Genesis 3 onwards, the plight of humanity is in a world where everything, including themselves, is at least in a partial war with God.

We are made in his image, but we want to be our own rescue. We want to be our own gods and solve this mess for ourselves, not realizing that the very desire to be our own gods is the actual problem.

Our problem can only be resolved once we realize that we need God as our Savior, and the whole of the New Testament is about Yahweh coming down to earth as one of us in order to be that Savior.

David, in his own pre-New Testament way, understands this. He realizes that he needs Yahweh to search him and lead him.

[25 : 48] However, in this psalm, that is not the thought he started with. David ends the psalm with a proto-gospel, but he starts the reasoning with understanding that Yahweh created him as a person in the womb.

It is a pro-life view that leads to a gospel perspective. 5 of 6. This psalm is not just for David.

At first appearance, it might seem that this psalm is only personal to David's perspective. By being his perspective, it cannot simultaneously be ours because we are not David.

However, this is not the case. For the psalms are the Old Testament, God-breathed versions of our modern worship songs. They are songs meant for corporate worship.

Now, I do not know of any passage that explicitly says this out, that spells this out in propositional form, but the biblical and natural evidence all point in this direction.

[26 : 54] For example, Psalm 92 starts with this introduction. A psalm, a song for the Sabbath. Note two things. First, it explicitly calls the psalm a song.

Even if a song can be personally sung and taken in without anyone around, it is clear that songs naturally lend themselves to communal interaction. Second, it is stated that it is a song for the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a day of rest that finds its roots in the creation week, where God rested from all the work that he did, setting a pattern for us. In other words, the Sabbath is for all people, so a song about the Sabbath is a song for all people about the Sabbath.

Now, Psalm 139 may not have an opening that obvious, but it is close. It starts by saying to the choir master, which makes it clear that the song was designed for a plurality of people.

A whole choir is supposed to sing it, and as they sing it, David's words become their own. When David first wrote the psalm, it is him asking God, where shall I go from your spirit?

[28 : 07] When the choir sings it, each individual in that choir is now asking God the same question, and so is everyone else that is singing along. Indeed, back then as it is now, it is often not just the musicians that are singing the song.

In Exodus 15, when the Israelites see that God has defeated the Egyptian army for them, that is again Exodus 15, the whole of the people break out in song. In 1 Chronicles 16, again, 1 Chronicles 16, the same David that wrote Psalm 139 appoints musicians and singers to praise God, but the people are at least a witness to this and praise God along with them.

So, the best understanding of the psalm is that it was made for anyone who wished to praise Yahweh. So David's understanding is not merely his own. Just as David can speak about how he was fearfully and wonderfully made by Yahweh in his mother's womb and can sing about it, so can we.

Sixth and last, this understanding extends to the New Testament. While I believe that all of the Old Testament is God-breathed, I do not believe that all of it carries over.

For example, I believe that much of it is there for contrast, so that we can understand how much of a blessing it is to have Jesus the Messiah reigning in our hearts, minds, and churches after his victory over death on the cross.

[29 : 41] However, this personal pre-born understanding of ourselves is one that does carry over. One example found in the New Testament is Luke 1, 18-17.

Or sorry, that would be going back in time. Luke 1, 8-17. Which, for those who want to follow along, it is on page 855 of the Pew Bible.

Luke 1, 8-17. Luke 1, 8-17. Luke 1, 8-17. Luke 1, 8-17.

Here reads the words of Yahweh. Now while he was serving as priest before God, when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by law to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him, him being Zechariah by the way, an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

[31 : 10] And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

So reads the Word of God. For this topic, the important point is the Davidic one. Similar to how David was formed in his mother's womb, John the Baptist will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

Akin to how God was there with David while David was in his mother's womb, the Holy Spirit, the third person of God in the Trinity, is there with John while he is being formed in the womb.

[32 : 31] In both cases, they are seen as a person in their mother's womb. In both cases, God is forming them for his purposes. I humbly but boldly suggest that both the Psalms and the Gospels are for us.

And while our purposes may be very different than those of David and John, we are no different in that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made from conception onwards.

In fact, given that Jesus became fully man along with us, even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not different in this regard. So I believe that this Psalm, along with other supporting texts, makes a clear case for our personal pre-born nature.

God gets to decide who lives and who dies.

But we want to be our own gods and decide who lives and who dies for ourselves. To have God lead us in the way everlasting is to have him lead us from such thinking and such practices.

[33 : 49] purposes. So what shall we then do? To the extent that we are able, I believe that we, as a body of Christ, are to at least indirectly help support the pre-born.

Several of us at this church are fundraising for the Walk for Life, and there are still five days left in which you can either sponsor one of us or fundraise for yourself. I believe that the God of life looks favorably down on such actions.

However, I believe that there is something even more important to do first. Praise God. Praise the God of life for fearfully and wonderfully making you.

Praise him that our lives, even pre-born, and maybe especially pre-born, are so valuable that Jesus himself became one of us from that point onward so that he could atone for our sins and allow us to become adopted sons and daughters of God through his death, burial, and resurrection.

Praise him for that. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, the God of heaven, the God of earth, the God of all things, the God of life, the living God, a God who is not a statue or a thought, but a person who creates persons because his desire is to create and to share his love.

[35 : 19] Glory be to you for that, Lord. May we remember this through all the hardships, through all the struggles. May we remember that you have made us, you have intended us.

We are not accidental, we are not mistaken, we are not valueless. Whatever we are going through, it is for your glory and to our benefit because you made us and you intended us and there is no mistakes with that.

To you be the glory. In your name I pray, amen. Amen. Amen.