

Jan 27th 2013: Psalm 139:19-24 The Holiness Of God

We have been slowly inching our way through Psalm 139 over the past three weeks, and have learnt a lot about our awesome God along the journey. This morning however, we come to verse 19 and the whole sentiment of the psalm seems to suffer a dramatic change for the worse.

David has waxed eloquent about God for the past 18 verses when suddenly he seems to lose the plot and starts to rant away at the wicked.

***If only you would slay the wicked, O God!
Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!
²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD,
and abhor those who rise up against you?
²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.***

I must admit that as a preacher I am tempted to just forget this part of the Psalm and move on.

Indeed it reminds me a little of a friend of ours with whom we would often go out to dinner at a restaurant. We would be having a lovely time chatting away with him and his wife until the meal arrived. Then we would wait with baited breath to see whether the food was up to his standard because there had been times when it wasn't, and he would call over the waitress and with raised voice tell her exactly what he thought of his meal and the restaurant. Now such may have been deserved, but for me it was just pure embarrassment.

Initially these verses in this psalm give me something of the same feeling until I recognize what David is doing here.

You see David is not going off at a tangent at all. He has been talking in a very personal way about these glorious and supernatural attributes of His God and the benefit he receives from them. Then all of a sudden it is as though he recalls that pre-eminent quality of the Almighty that makes any contact with sinful man and his sin polluted environment a miraculous thing. God's holiness.

The Bible tells us that out of all things that we can know or imagine, along with all things that are beyond our limited knowledge and imagination, only God—in all His fullness as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is HOLY. David knew that.

And David realized, much more than we seem to, that Holiness is God’s absolute perfection. His total goodness with no sin or weakness whatsoever.

Consequently Holiness is God’s splendor or beauty, and in 2 Chron 20:21 we read of King Jehoshaphat who, at the time of battle:-

“...appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army..”

To see God in His holiness is to see total and unadulterated goodness and perfection, and once the barrier of our own sinfulness is removed we would be so drawn towards God that we would never want to be away from Him.

We can all perhaps think of another human who is so kind and lovely; so warm and welcoming; so understanding and sincere, that we value their company greatly. But even then we know that they too have flaws and imperfections. But God is all that and more with no imperfections or weaknesses, and it’s due to His holiness.

But even more than that; David also understood that God’s holiness means a hatred of all that is evil and rebellious and sinful. That, as Habakkuk 1:13 declares about God:-

***“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrong.”***

And from thinking about the greatness of His wonderful God, David moves to meditating upon the wickedness in his own environment ; the evil that was present even in God’s people; in God’s Nation.

And picturing in his heart how this evil would affect God, his soul cries out for God to cleanse the people and places of great evil in his land.

He thinks of leaders in his own army who were successful because of their brutality and obsession with killing. Of others who expressed their hatred of God with words and acts of evil against God’s people and against God Himself. Who sided themselves with the powers of darkness in their enmity

to Him who is clothed in eternal light. And David, with great passion is empathizing with God, and is begging God to destroy the forces that are working to destroy God's name and favour on this earth.

In his Exposition of the Psalms, H C Leupold remarked about these verses that the motive is "**not a spirit of revenge, but grief over the presence of wickedness.**" A "**justifiable outburst.**"

And though we are conscious of the fact that David spoke out of an entirely different culture and time to ours, there is a sense that we are sometimes slow to see the evil in our world from God's viewpoint. Hesitant to accept evil as an attack on His holiness that distresses us because we know it must surely distress Him...And slow in our apathy to speak out or act against it.

There have been, and no doubt still are, exceptions to that. I think of William Wilberforce who saw the evil of slavery as something that needed to be combated in the name of a holy God, despite great opposition to him personally.

Of William Booth who created an army of God, in the Salvation Army, to act against the oppression of the poor by the rich, and the evil addictions that kept so many families in the gutters.

But getting back to Psalm 139 the big thing for us to note is the way that David moves in v23-24 away from external evil to the possibility of evil within his own heart and life.

***Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
24 See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.***

See, says David, if there is in me any way that is offensive to your holy nature and show me what I must do to combat it. Any sinful habit or activity that I am holding on to and is causing you pain because of your holiness.

In his book, "Gleanings In The Godhead", Arthur W Pink makes this challenging statement about sin and forgiveness.(p40)

"God has often forgiven sinners, but He never forgives sin; the sinner is only forgiven on the ground of Another having borne his

punishment; for “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb 9:22)”

God willingly paid a terrible price to cover our sin so that He could forgive us. So then, if we are forgiven through our relationship with Jesus, yet know that we deliberately ignore a sin in our lives, whatever that may be, then we still stay forgiven but we are holding an enemy of God’s holiness deep inside us. God is put in the shocking position of having those within His kingdom who are still consorting with His enemy

That’s why it is so important that with David we often pray this prayer, for the evil one loves to encourage sin in our hearts, as he delighted to encourage it in the heart of God’s people in David’s time.

And it especially important that we build internal walls against habitual sin, for we come into this place not mainly to receive from God or to satisfy our needs, but to worship Him in all His holiness, and to do that we need to follow God’s command found in 1 Peter 1:16

“Be holy, because I am holy.”

So in conclusion we who are in God’s kingdom need to note that God doesn’t say, be holy as I am holy, for no one can be holy like God. No one can reach that standard of absolute perfection whilst here on earth.

But what God says is, because I whom you worship am holy, you are to seek after holiness in all you say and do. Seek to be Christ like—make it your priority in life. And allow God to recreate you in the image of His holiness.

