

Psalm 139:1-18 and Luke 14:25-35

A MAN NAMED DAVID WELLS IN HIS BOOK "GOD IN THE WASTELAND", OBSERVED THAT AS FAR AS SOCIETY IS CONCERNED- GOD FOR THE MOST PART IS UNNOTICEABLE.

WELLS EXPLAINS HIS MEANING OF THAT REMARK BY SAYING: "THOSE WHO ASSURE POLLSTERS OF THEIR BELIEF IN GOD'S EXISTENCE MAY NONETHELESS CONSIDER HIM:

LESS INTERESTING THAN TELEVISION, HIS COMMANDS LESS AUTHORITATIVE THAN THEIR APPETITES FOR AFFLUENCE AND INFLUENCE,

HIS JUDGMENT NO MORE AWE-INSPIRING THAN THE EVENING NEWS, AND HIS TRUTH LESS COMPELLING THAN THE ADVERTISER'S SWEET FOG OF FLATTERY AND LIES."

JESUS WARNED HIS WOULD BE FOLLOWERS ABOUT THE DANGERS OF THIS KIND OF LAXITY CONCERNING GOD. HE ALSO EMPHASIZED NECESSITY FOR REAL COMMITMENT ACCOMPANYING A CONFESSION OF FAITH IN HIM.

THE SAVIOR'S WORDS NOT ONLY APPLIED TO THE CROWD AROUND HIM, BUT ALSO TO THE CROWD OF PEOPLE TODAY WHO SPEAK ABOUT FAITH IN CHRIST WITHOUT REALLY TRYING TO LIVE AS HIS DISCIPLES.

WE WHO LIVE IN THE POST-RESURRECTION ERA ARE ESPECIALLY REMINDED BY JESUS THAT DISCIPLESHIP IS NOT A VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY WE DO ON OUR OWN TERMS AT OUR OWN CONVENIENCE.

MUCH TO THE CONTRARY, IT IS A DAILY COMMITMENT-- ONE WHICH HE WANTS US TO CONSIDER CAREFULLY, BEFORE WE START CALLING OURSELVES "CHRISTIAN", AFTER HIM.

HERE IS A STORY THAT HELPS TO EMPHASIZE THIS POINT: ONE DAY A SOLDIER IN THE ARMY OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE GENERAL ON THE CHARGE OF DESERTION.

THE OUTCOME FOR THE DESERTER WAS NOT EXPECTED TO BE GOOD SINCE EXECUTION WAS THE USUAL PENALTY.

BUT WHEN THE GREAT MAN ASKED THE SOLDIER FOR HIS NAME, HE REPLIED- "IT IS ALEXANDER".

THE GENERAL LOOKED INTENTLY AT THE SOLDIER AND SPOKE A SENTENCE THAT WAS MERCIFUL, YET CHALLENGING, SAYING: "CHANGE YOUR NAME OR MEND YOUR WAYS".

WE WHO CALL OURSELVES BY THE NAME OF CHRIST NEED TO BE AWARE OF THE RESPONSIBILITY WE HAVE TO LIVE UP TO THE **SAVIOR'S** NAME.

FORTUNATELY-WE HAVE THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SCRIPTURE TO DO SO, AS WELL AS FORGIVENESS THROUGH CHRIST, WHEN WE REPENT OF OUR SIN.

LOOKING TO PSALM 139, WE CAN SEE THERE SOME OTHER WAYS IN WHICH CHRIST CHALLENGES US TO LIVE UP TO HIS NAME. AND THERE IS BOTH GOOD AND BAD NEWS IN THIS PASSAGE.

THE BAD NEWS IS- WE CAN RUN AND CAN EVEN HIDE, BUT WE CANNOT EVER ESCAPE THE AWARENESS OR PRESENCE OF GOD NO MATTER HOW HARD WE TRY.

AND WHILE FEW INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS AND EVEN FEWER CHRISTIAN CONGREGATIONS WOULD ADMIT TO WANTING TO FLEE FROM THE LORD, OUR ACTIONS- AT TIMES, MAY SUGGEST OTHERWISE.

IT IS OF COURSE GOOD NEWS TO KNOW JESUS LOVES US, AND IS WITH US ALWAYS, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE NEED HIM.

BUT PERHAPS IT IS ALSO A LITTLE LESS COMFORTING TO THINK OF HIM ALWAYS BEING AWARE OF OUR EVERY THOUGHT-AS WELL AS OUR WORDS AND DEEDS.

YET, FAR TOO OFTEN, CHRISTIANS, IF ONLY UNCONSCIOUSLY, TRY TO LEAVE JESUS OUT OF THEIR DAILY LIVES.

IT IS AS IF WE ASK HIM TO CONTINUE TO WAIT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR-UNTIL WE ARE READY TO DO HIS WILL, OR NEED HIS HELP.

IT IS OF COURSE THE DOING OF CHRIST'S WILL ALL OF THE TIME THAT IS THE ROOT OF OUR PROBLEM, BECAUSE WE ARE UNABLE TO BE FULLY SUBMISSIVE TO HIM.

FOR EXAMPLE: SUBMISSION CAN BE DIFFICULT WHEN JESUS SAYS WE MUST HATE OUR FAMILY, AND OUR LIVES.

BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS-CHRIST'S WILL IS NOT FOR US TO LITERALLY HATE OUR FAMILY MEMBERS, OR HATE OUR EARTHLY LIFE- LIKE HIS WORDS FROM LUKE 14 SEEM TO SAY.

HIS WORDS THERE ARE WHAT IS CALLED A HYPERBOLE, THAT IS AN EXAGGERATION, FOR THE PURPOSE OF MAKING A POINT, BUT **NOT** MEANT TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY.

WHAT JESUS ACTUALLY MEANT BY HIS STATEMENT CONCERNING COMMITMENT WAS- THAT HE MUST COME FIRST IN OUR LIFE AND LOVES, BEFORE EVERYONE ELSE, EVEN BEFORE OURSELVES.

HERE IS HOW A PASTOR, WHO WAS ASKED FOR HIS INTERPRETATION OF JESUS' CALL TO COMMITMENT, EXPLAINS IT:

“COMMITMENT TO CHRIST IS LIKE SIGNING OUR NAME AT THE BOTTOM OF A BLANK PIECE OF PAPER AND ALLOWING **GOD** TO FILL IT IN.”

FURTHERMORE, COMMITMENT TO CHRIST MEANS STICKING WITH HIM EVEN WHEN WE MAY WANT TO SHUT HIM OUT OF ONE OR TWO THINGS IN OUR LIVES.

IT IS TO PERSEVERE IN WELCOMING HIS PRESENCE EVEN WHEN OR WE'D LIKE HIM TO LOOK THE OTHER WAY SO WE CAN DO “OUR OWN THING” FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

REMEMBER, ONCE HAVING BEEN INVITED INSIDE OUR LIVES- JESUS IS NOT GOING TO LEAVE US OR FORSAKE US-EVEN IF WE WANT HIM TO DO SO.

THE PSALMIST EXPRESSED HIS AWARENESS OF THIS BY WRITING- THERE IS NOWHERE TO GO THAT IS BEYOND THE REACH OF THE LORD.

AND WHILE ON OCCASION THE PSALM'S DESCRIPTION OF GOD HEMMING US IN ON ALL SIDES-MAY FEEL CONFINING IT IS MEANT TO BE COMFORTING AND EMPOWERING.

THE PSALM'S MENTION OF GOD SEARCHING- THAT IS SIFTING THROUGH OUR THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, WORDS, AND DEEDS- MAY ALSO SOUND THREATENING.

AFTER ALL, GOD'S INTIMATE SEARCH WITHIN US CAN MAKE US VULNERABLE TO THE ALL POWERFUL CREATOR AND JUDGE OF THE UNIVERSE. AND YET, THIS IS ACTUALLY GOOD NEWS.

THE NEWS OF GOD'S TOTAL AND CONSTANT AWARENESS OF EVERY SECOND OF OUR EXISTENCE IS GOOD NEWS-BECAUSE GOD LOVES US.

IT IS GOOD NEWS BECAUSE GOD TRULY DOES WANT THE BEST FOR US-AND DOES NOT SEEK TO TAKE OUR FREE WILL AWAY- BUT ONLY TO HELP US CHOOSE TO MAKE HIS WAY OUR WAY.

WHEN WE REALIZE THAT THE CREATOR AND RULER OF THE UNIVERSE TAKES A PERSONAL INTEREST IN YOU AND ME- EVERYONE- IT IS INDEED TOO WONDERFUL TO GRASP.

THERE IS ALSO ENCOURAGEMENT TO BE FOUND IN THE FACT THAT GOD WHO IS ALL KNOWING, SEEING, AND IS ALWAYS PRESENT EVERYWHERE-CARES ABOUT US.

PSALM 139'S PRIMARY MESSAGE OF COMFORT IS SUMMARIZED IN THE STATEMENT THAT:

GOD IS EVERYWHERE, AND IF GOD IS EVERYWHERE-- THAT MEANS WHERE EVER I AM- GOD IS ALSO THERE.

THIS MIGHT BE BAD NEWS WHEN WE WANT TO DO WHAT WE KNOW IS WRONG IN GOD'S SIGHT-BECAUSE WE WILL NOT GET AWAY WITH IT.

BUT IT IS GOOD NEWS WHEN WE REMEMBER THIS MEANS WE ARE NEVER BEYOND GOD'S HELP OR THE REACH OF HIS LOVE.

THE APOSTLE PAUL SAID AS MUCH TO THE CHURCH IN ROME, WRITING IN ROMANS 8:35 and 37-39:

“WHO CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST? WILL HARDSHIP OR DISTRESS, OR PERSECUTION, OR FAMINE, OR NAKEDNESS, OR PERIL, OR SWORD?

NO IN ALL THESE THINGS WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US.

FOR I AM CONVINCED THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NOR ANGELS, NOR RULERS, NOR THINGS PRESENT, NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR POWERS, NOR HEIGHT NOR DEPTH,

NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL OF CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.”

SURELY PAUL WAS INSPIRED TO WRITE THESE WORDS. AND NOT ONLY INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BUT PERHAPS INFLUENCED BY PSALM 139, AS WELL!

TRULY IT IS THE INSEPARABLE LOVE OF GOD FOR US THAT CAN GIVE US CONFIDENCE TO PRAY THE FINAL VERSES OF THIS PSALM:

“SEARCH ME, O GOD, AND KNOW MY HEART; TEST ME AND KNOW MY THOUGHTS.

SEE IF THERE IS ANY WICKED (OR HURTFUL) WAY IN ME, AND LEAD ME IN THE WAY EVERLASTING.”

THESE VERSES ASK GOD TO INVESTIGATE OUR ACTIONS, KNOW OUR HEARTS-THAT IS OUR INNERMOST SELF.

THEY INVITE THE LORD TO EXAMINE-EVERYTHING ABOUT US, DISCERN OUR THOUGHTS, AND TO SEEK AND FIND ANY SIN WITHIN US.

THE PURPOSE THE INVITATION IS SO WE MAY BE MADE TO RECOGNIZE OUR SIN, AND SO REPENT, AND BE MADE CLEAN.

AND SO, LOOKING AT THE WORDS OF THE PSALM WE FIND THAT ALMOST ALL THE ACTION IN IT IS DONE BY GOD.

WHAT EACH BELIEVER OR FAITH COMMUNITY DOES IS- TO PRAY THE PSALM IN FAITH. FAITH THAT GOD IS THERE-AWARE- AND CARES.

FAITH THAT GOD IS WILLING AND ABLE TO SEARCH, KNOW, TEST, SEE US AS WE ARE, AND THEN LEAD US WHERE HE WANTS US TO BE.

FAITH IN THIS SENSE INVOLVES MAKING A CHOICE TO BELIEVE- IN THE MIDST OF DOUBTS AND FEARS WITHIN US, AND CHALLENGES FROM OUTSIDE US.

THERE IS A STORY ABOUT A GIRL WHOSE FAITH IN GOD HELPED HER WHEN DUE TO AN EMERGENCY, HER PARENTS HAD TO LEAVE HER HOME ONE NIGHT FOR SEVERAL HOURS.

THEY RETURNED-WORRIED AND SHE MIGHT HAVE BECOME FRIGHTENED TO BE ALONE AT NIGHT, BUT SHE ASSURED THEM SHE HAD BEEN JUST FINE- AND EXPLAINED WHY, SAYING:

“WHEN YOU’RE HERE GOD EXPECTS YOU TO TAKE CARE OF ME. BUT WHEN YOU’RE GONE, HE DOES IT ALL BY HIMSELF!”

THOSE WORDS ARE AN EXPRESSION OF ACTIVE FAITH; AS IS THIS RESPONSE A BOY MADE TO HIS NEIGHBOR ONE SUNDAY.

THE LAD HAD JUST RETURNED FROM CHURCH SCHOOL WHEN HIS NEIGHBOR GREETED HIM, AND THEN ASKED WHAT HE LEARNED IN CLASS.

THE BOY REPLIED HE LEARNED ABOUT GOD’S PRESENCE. THE NEIGHBOR THEN CHALLENGED THE YOUNGSTER.

HE TOLD THE BOY HE WOULD GIVE HIM A DIME IF THE BOY COULD SHOW HIM WHERE GOD IS.

BUT THE BOY RESPONDED HE WOULD GIVE THE MAN A DOLLAR IF HE COULD PROVE WHERE GOD IS NOT.

THIS BRINGS US BACK TO OUR MEDITATION ON PSALM 139 AS A SONG OF FAITH.

IT FOCUSES ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN OUR LIVES, AND OF US BEING CONSCIOUSLY AWARE OF GOD’S PRESENCE.

SUCH AWARENESS- SUCH FAITH, IS A SPIRITUAL GIFT. AND TO HOLD ONTO IT TAKES SOME EFFORT ON OUR PART.

INDEED, MAINTAINING AN AWARENESS OF GOD, AND AN ACTIVE FAITH TAKES COMMITMENT AND PRACTICE.

A 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY MONK NAMED BROTHER LAWRENCE SHARED HIS REALIZATION OF OUR NEED TO ALWAYS BE AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE-AND TO CONTINUALLY CONVERSE WITH HIM.

BROTHER LAWRENCE'S WORDS COMPLIMENT THE NEWS OF PSALM 139, FOR HE INSTRUCTED THAT:

IF WE WANT TO KEEP AWAY FROM SIN, WE NEED TO REMEMBER HOW IMPOSSIBLE IT IS TO ESCAPE FROM GOD'S NOTICE.

WE OUGHT TO BE AWARE THAT ALL WE SAY AND DO, AND EVEN THINK HAPPENS, AS BROTHER LAWRENCE DESCRIBED IT, IN THE "INFINITE PRESENCE OF A HOLY GOD."

CONSEQUENTLY, WE SHOULD NEVER LIVE AS THOUGH GOD DOES NOT EXIST, BUT INSTEAD "PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD", BY SPEAKING TO HIM THROUGHOUT THE DAY.

PERHAPS THE FAILURE TO PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS THE REAL OF THE PROBLEM WITH SOCIETY TODAY-

SINCE EVEN SOME CHRISTIANS SEEM TO GO ABOUT THEIR DAILY LIVES AS IF THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN GOD REALLY IS PRESENT WITH THEM-ALL OF THE TIME.

BUT REMEMBER, ONE PART OF THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP IS THE NEED TO LIVE EVERY DAY BEING AWARE OF, AND GUIDED BY, GOD'S SPIRIT, AND THUS HIS PRESENCE.

TRULY, IT IS OUR RESPONSE TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD THAT ENABLES US TO RETAIN THE FLAVOR- THE SALTINESS OF OUR LIVES AS CHRISTIANS.

LET US PRAY:

ALMIGHTY GOD, YOU KNOW OUR INTENTIONS AND OUR HOPES. RESHAPE US, WE PRAY, WHEN WE DO WHAT IS WRONG, AND FOR THE SAKE OF JESUS' SACRIFICE FOR US, RESPOND TO OUR REPENTANCE WITH MERCY.

BY YOUR SPIRIT, EMPOWER US TO HEED JESUS' CALL FOR US TO LET GO OF OUR ATTACHMENTS, AND FOLLOW HIM IN A LIFE OF LOVE AND CARE FOR OTHERS. IN HIS NAME WE PRAY. AMEN