

THOUGHTS ON PSALM 139

During the last few days I've been spending time with Psalm 139 and I'd like to share with you, a few thoughts as a result of this. It will probably be helpful to look it up and read it through, as space does not permit me to print it in its entirety.

The writer expresses a deep sense of God's knowledge of us, a God who knows what we are thinking perhaps even before we do, and a God who is present regardless of where we go. We cannot escape God. I can cross the seas, I can descend to the depths of Hades, but God is still there – Jonah the OT prophet would be able to vouch for that! Even before we are born, God knows us as we are growing and developing in our mother's womb. He knows exactly how we are "wired up", our weaknesses and our strengths. Depending on how we may be feeling at the time this can be either terrifying, intensely consoling, or somewhere in between. But to me at this time, when I may struggle with prayer, as I do some of the time, and perhaps some of you do too, I find it reassuring, and God, who knows us, better than we do, can and will treat our thoughts as prayer itself. This, of course has echoes in St Paul's writings, Romans 8: 26 where he draws a picture of the Holy Spirit helping us in our weakness "when we do not know how to pray as we ought but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words". So we don't need to come to God, with a formal or elegantly turned phrase - an intended thought, bringing someone, or a situation to mind, a sense of pain or outrage, and awareness of our own fragility will be comprehended by God. And we may find we have started praying, speaking with God almost without knowing it. We can say to God something like "OK then, good Lord, you know the needs of this situation far better than I can tell you.....please give them wisdom, (or show mercy...or...)

So far, so good, for the first 18 verses. Then suddenly out of the blue (v19) there is an abrupt change of gear "O that you would kill the wicked, O God.....I hate them with perfect hatred" and so forth. These verses often appear in the psalms in this manner, and are sometimes called the "cursing verses". How do we deal with them? The easy way out perhaps is to ignore them, omit them from our reading, but is this honest? Or do we seek to come to terms with what they are saying in some more helpful way that speaks to our times. One way, and I certainly am not offering the last word on this, is to take them as a reaction to our own sinfulness, negativity and the bits of ourselves we don't like very much. Trust me, we all have them. That way we may begin to see how God can help us deal with those bits that we would rather were not part of our lives. Certainly if we look at the two final verses (23/24) it is not unreasonable to read these verses in this way. The psalmist asks God to search him out, to test him and lead him away from his evil thoughts, into the way of life everlasting.

Take time to read and reflect upon this psalm, and praise the God who allows us to draw close to him, in confidence, because there is nothing in us that he doesn't know, and be glad that he loves us, in spite of it all!

With my thoughts and prayers for you all. Alice