

Search me O God

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[0 : 00] Shall we turn now to our reading in the Old Testament Scriptures, in the book of Psalms, Psalm 139, in these one-one words at the end of the psalm, verses 23 and 24.

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my self. And see there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

It's very nice and fitting that we should never look at these verses without very closely connecting them, of course, with the whole psalm, but more particularly with the verses that come immediately before us.

Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate me. Do not I grieve with those that rise up against me. I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies.

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

[1 : 13] It's right that we should take these verses together, because very often verses 21 and 22 are used in criticism of the psalm.

They're used as indicating that while the psalmist shows us an immature spirituality, that he was typical of an Old Testament dispensation, that he was filled with a lot of love and compassion of the psalmist.

It's filled with new credence and everything of the love and the compassion of the new text. Such a criticism of the psalmist is altogether unfounded.

Here we don't have, in these verses 21 and 2, something that is sub-Christian. Here we don't have a wrong understanding of God or his will.

If we're inclined to criticize the psalmist when we read 21 and 22, if we find it difficult to accept that he speaks about hating anybody, it's good for us to go on and read verses 23 and 24.

[2 : 37] Remind ourselves that it's the same man who wrote 21 and 22, who writes 23 and 24. It's the same man who makes the confession of 21 and 22, who makes the confession of 21 and 22, who makes the confession and the prayer of 23 and 24.

When we look at 23 and 24, we don't see something that's sub-Christian. We don't see something that's out of harmony with the New Testament.

We don't see any immature spirituality. We see a man who is deeply exercised by the Spirit of God.

A man who wants all his thinking, all his attitudes, to be in harmony with the heart of God himself.

And so verses 23 and 24 should always be looked at as correcting any misunderstanding, any criticism we may feel in our hearts of the psalmist who wrote 21 and 22.

[3 : 57] And they set us to look again at exactly what he was meaning when he talked about hating anybody, and why he said what he did say in these previous verses.

And these verses have got to be taken together too because the psalmist who said and said in all sincerity, I hate them that hate thee.

I'm grieved with those that rise up against thee. I hate them with a perfect hatred. The psalmist who said that, the psalmist who said it in all sincerity. The psalmist who said it from the very best of motives.

Because he loved God. Because he loved God. Because he loved God's ways. Because he hated all opposition to God. Because he in his own thinking couldn't look on man's actions and words and deeds in separation from the man who did this.

The psalmist who said what he did, in these verses 21 and 22, and said it in all sincerity, said it from the best of motives, said it out of his love to God. Yet, he knew that he himself couldn't be trusted.

[5 : 18] He knew that at the very best. He knew that when he was saying the very best things from the very best of motives, that he was declaring in the most striking language, his love for God.

His love for God's commandments, that he was expressing in the keenest terms, his desire to see God glorified and God's name and God's cause vindicated.

Yet, he knew that in these times he was capable of sin. He knew that in these times he needed God to serve you.

God to cleanse you. God to deliver you from what was wrong, what was sinful, what was of self, in his attitude, in his spirit, and in his words.

And so these verses ought always to be looked at together. Yet, although they do go together, verses 23 and 24, in a way at least can stand in their own.

[6 : 45] And so, for his own reasons, felt the need to pray as he did in verses 23 and 24.

Well, for his own reasons at this particular time, in the particular situation that he was in, felt his need to pray as he did here.

Has in his prayer, left us a prayer that we can always take out. That we can use again and again.

And without forgetting the connection with the verses that go before, we want to think particularly of verses 23 and 24. A prayer that we can always be using.

A prayer that speaks for itself as being particularly appropriate at the beginning of our communion season.

[7 : 42] Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me.

And believe me in the way everlasting. As we said, there's nothing out of harmony with the New Testament here. Here is prayer taught by the same Spirit who has been poured out in his fullness after the ascension of Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament chapter, we cannot find richer praying, more appropriate, more meaningful praying than this.

This is prayer that manifests the wisdom that the Holy Spirit himself gave.

Look at this prayer as the prayer of wisdom. And the prayer of wisdom is the prayer of man who is making a right use of God's Word.

[8 : 52] Making a right use of God's Word to teach him about God himself. he's been taught by God's word to declare concerning his God what he declares at the very opening of this psalm oh Lord thou hast searched me and known and he goes on to develop that theme of God's knowing us God knows us through and through this is the kind of God we have a God who knows us who sees us our thoughts our words our ways the God from whom neither day nor night can hide he's been brought by God's own revelation of himself in his word to a wonderful knowledge of God to a wonderful understanding of what it means that God knows us what does he do with this now he turns it into prayer he doesn't conclude the way a man left to his own reasoning would conclude well if God knows me like this that's the end of it if God knows me like this I don't need to do anything and if God knows me like this what's the use of praying God search me and know me that's the way the natural heart would reason that's the misuse of God's word that we left to ourselves would make but when we're taught by the spirit of God we use the knowledge God gives us of himself in a right way and realizing that the God with whom we have to do is the God who knows us we're led to pray with the saints search me oh God and know my heart this is not foolishness this is wisdom the spirit taught heart reasons like this because God does know me who better to pray to in this way because God does know me because God can search me and because inevitably he will search me and in the end

I and all the world will know that he knows us through and through then who better to pray to who else to pray to than to this God and what better to pray than to pray search me and know me this is in keeping with the spirit taught wisdom that we find throughout all scripture this is the way the spirit is constantly teaching the child of God to use the knowledge that scripture gives us the spirit of God teaches us that at all times we are absolutely helpless in ourselves we're absolutely dependent upon God we're absolutely thoughtful of coming to the spirit of God we're aqui to cai the spirit of God's work is the spirit who leads us not to abuse that knowledge not to abuse it by concluding well what's the point of now doing anything what duty what responsibility have we got what's the use of praying what's the use of attending the means of grace what's the use of reading God's word what's the use of all making any effort of any sort if we are helpless if we are helpless if we are helpless if we are volunteers in our absolutely dependent upon God. No, the Spirit who teaches us to recognize our dependence upon God is the Spirit who teaches us to use that knowledge, to use it in prayer, to use it in using the means of grace that will bring down to us the mercy and the grace and the help that we need from the God on whom we're absolutely dependent. The Spirit teaches us that God is the God who makes promises. The Spirit shows us these promises in God's Word and he shows us how relevant, how meaningful they are for us. They're not promises that are promising us things that we don't need.

They aren't promises that are addressed to people in conditions other from ourselves but they're addressed to us human beings, they're addressed to us sinners, they're addressed to us who by nature are under wrath and condemnation, they're addressed to us who in this life are confronted with all sorts of perplexing problems, they're addressed to us who are surrounded by the wiles of Satan. The Spirit shows us these promises, shows us that they're real and true but when the Spirit is our teacher we don't say well because God has promised us these things it doesn't matter what I'm doing, it doesn't matter whether I'm believing them, it doesn't matter whether I'm walking in the ways of obedience. No the Spirit who teaches us what the promises of God are teaches us to walk in the ways of the obedience with which these promises are connected. The Spirit teaches us to come in prayer and they hold upon these promises. You see the Spirit when he is our teacher doesn't use us to abuse knowledge but teaches us to use knowledge. According to the pattern we see here the the psalmist has been taught, thou has searched me and known me. And so he prays, search me O God and know my heart.

And this is the prayer of wisdom. And this is the prayer of wisdom revealing the Spirit's wisdom by which a man has a knowledge of himself. What do we mean? Well on one hand the psalmist is praying like this because he doesn't know himself. He only needs to pray search me O Lord and know my heart because he doesn't know himself. But on the other hand there is something he does know about himself.

He does this about himself. He does this about himself that he cannot trust himself. He cannot trust himself to search out his own heart. He can't trust himself to penetrate all the recesses of his own heart, to fathom all the depths of his own thinking.

[16 : 32] And so he calls in God. And so he calls in God. And he says search me and know me. Here is the psalmist and he's expressing that same knowledge of himself that he expressed in that psalm we were just singing, psalm 19.

Who can he? Who can he? Who can he? Who can understand? Who can understand? Who can understand? Who can search out his own heart? Who can be sure that he's got a perfect knowledge of himself?

Who can his errors understand? Search thou me within? This is knowledge of self.

That leads us to know that we can't trust ourselves with this business. We know ourselves and we know that we're prejudiced. So we're ready to condemn certain sins.

And we're ready to condemn them not just when we find them in others. Quite frankly we're ready to condemn them in ourselves. But sometimes the louder we cry to condemn certain sins within ourselves is just the sign that there are other sins that we're trying to hide.

[18 : 02] Or that at least we're not facing up to. And we don't want to believe in ourselves. We're prejudiced. And we're self-deceived.

Oh what a startling experience it is. But how often we have reason to be thankful for it. When God leads us to pray like this and God answers us.

And we see how self-deceived we have been. And God is his own way of answering a prayer like this. He can answer it by putting us in a situation where suddenly we're revealed to ourselves.

Suddenly there gushes forth right down from deep within our hearts. Thoughts, feelings, attitudes that we didn't believe were there.

It was God's own way of answering a prayer like this. Of searching us out and showing us what we were. And when it happens we're brought to realize how self-deceived we were.

[19 : 11] And how good it is when we recognize that we're prejudiced. We're self-deceived. We can't understand our own errors.

And we make this our regular prayer. Search me, O God. Because thou dost know me and thou hast searched me.

Because thou knowest my thought afar off. Search me. You see it's such an important work. It's such an important business to know ourselves.

And the man who is taught by the Spirit realizes the importance of it. And he's made to realize that it's so important a work that he didn't leave it to himself.

He didn't give it to anyone else. It's such an important work that no one else is fit to deal with it but God himself.

[20 : 15] And here is the wisdom that indicates the Spirit giving us a true knowledge of Satan. giving us to know that Satan is there.

That Satan is real. And that Satan is constantly at work. And that Satan is clever and subtle. We've talked about our own self-deception.

We've talked about our own prejudices. And oh how active Satan is to keep us self-deceived. To keep these prejudices going.

These prejudices that can make us seem to be very zealous in one direction while we're ignoring fatal thoughts in another direction.

And because Satan is so active and Satan is so subtle in this business about keeping us self-deceived and prejudiced.

[21 : 24] Oh how we need to pray like the sanders and ask God to search us out in this conflict in this subtle warfare.

There's no one a match for Satan but God himself. Paul tells us that we have wrestled not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers against spiritual enemies and in that connection Paul teaches us to take unto us the whole armour of God and he lists the armour.

But you see we have to remember that this warfare is a warfare that's carried out with all sorts of tactics and all sorts of weapons. warfare between nations and warfare between conflicting parties so often the victory is going to be not with those who have the biggest weapons not with those who have the biggest tanks or the biggest guns but with those who are cleverest those who are most subtle and so it is in this warfare oh Satan is subtle he's so subtle that in this matter of knowing ourselves knowing ourselves so that the sin within us should be dealt with we cannot trust to anyone else than the all-knowing the all-wise God oh when Satan finds us on our knees praying this kind of prayer praying it with all our hearts praying it as those who won't give up until we've got an answer or then Satan trembles this is the kind of praying that makes Satan afraid because Satan then sees who he's up against search me oh God and know my heart try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting the prayer of wisdom spirit taught wisdom to know God and to make a right use of our knowledge of God spirit taught wisdom to know ourselves so that we don't trust ourselves with this important matter spirit taught wisdom so that we recognize the subtlety of Satan and we dare not face him or prosecute the warfare in our own wisdom but look to God but this is also the prayer of faith if the spirit teaches the son is to pray like this in wisdom he teaches him to pray in faith this isn't presumptuous prayer this isn't the prayer of a self-righteous man who's saying search me and you'll find no fault in me this is not the prayer of the Pharisee who comes and opens his heart that God may admire his goodness no this is the prayer of a man who takes his own sins seriously who trembles because of it who hates it who sees its danger who sees its consequences who sees how God is dishonored by it who acknowledges its guilt who acknowledges its inexcusableness and yet who looks to his God

God will deal with his sin in mercy and in grace deal with it graciously but deal with it powerfully to root it out to destroy it this is the prayer of faith this is the prayer of a man who knows he's God he's seen that already and he knows his God as the God with whom there is forgiveness the God with whom there is mercy oh cleanse thou me within from secret faults thy servant keep and deliver from presumptuous sin it's the prayer of faith he knows he's God and he knows that he can't hide himself from God he searches all the universe and he knows there isn't a place where he can hide from God he searches time and eternity and he knows there isn't a place he can hide from God but the point is that in faith he doesn't want to hide from God it's not that he he's despising God's holiness he thinks of God's holiness but he knows that the Holy God has already searched him and will search him and now in faith he welcomes God he beseeches God to come as the good physician with healing in his wings he welcomes God as the good physician and oh if we're Christ this is what we've already done and this is what we need to go on doing over and over again welcoming the good physician and oh if we've never welcomed him before if there's anyone tonight and you've never really prayed like this oh pray now in a day of grace though God in Christ has a wish as the son of righteousness with healing in his wings seek the good physician ask him to teach you to pray ask him to use his own words taught by his spirit ask him to teach you to use them in faith and he'll come he'll come because he is the God of mercy he is the God of grace he is the one who in his own son through Calvary has opened a fountain for sin and for unpleasing he is the one who has power to break the grip of sin he breaks the power of cancelled sin well this is the prayer of faith it's not an easy prayer it's the prayer to the God of grace but the God of grace is the good physician is the God who deals sternly with sin the God who dealt sternly with sin on Calvary has to deal sternly with us even while he freely pardons our sin we don't merit our pardon but God who freely pardons us knows how the work of sanctification

of breaking the power of sin of rooting out sin he knows how it needs to be done and the man who is taught by the spirit to believe God casts himself on God and allows the good physician to walk in his own way it's the prayer of faith and it's the prayer of consecration and dedication really we can't think of a more profound prayer of consecration and dedication than this search me oh God and know my heart try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting what's this all about?

[30 : 46] it's all about being conformed to the heart and mind of God it's all about obedience it's all about pleasing God you see, the Samus doesn't make his own terms he doesn't say I'll obey you here or I'll obey you there but he says search me oh God and know my heart try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting the way everlasting is the way of blessedness it's the way of peace it's the way of joy it's the way of fellowship with God but it can't be all these things without at the same time being the way of obedience being the way of consecration to God to his law to his will if there be any wicked way in me what's a wicked way?

what did the Samus think of a wicked way? to him wickedness was a matter of disobedience to him wickedness was a way of coming short of God's will for him wickedness as he makes perfectly plain was not just a matter of outward disobedience obedience it was a matter of the inward thought the inward attitude search my heart and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me it's the prayer of the most profound consecration and dedication you see he wasn't content just with an outward conformity it was an inward conformity it was an inward conformity and he wasn't making his own terms he left it all to God he brought in God's all searching eyes that God might have his way oh this isn't easy praying but as we've said it's wise praying it's the praying of faith it's the prayer of dedication it's prayer taught by the Spirit of God oh it's the work of God's grace to teach us to pray like this it's all of grace it's God the fountain of all grace leading us back to that fountain oh it's not church it will be costly we can't pray like this without knowing in some ways the cost of it and yet it's of grace let us emphasise that it's grace who teaches us to pray like this it's grace that gives the answer and it's grace that will enable us to accept the answer whatever it may be and it was it's grace that will lead us into the new experience of blessing and the new ability to glorify God that are the outcome of praying like this and having God answer the prayer that he himself teaches search me oh God amen let us pray oh Lord our God who dost give us such simple and yet such profound words oh leave us not just with the words but give to us the spirit and do thou answer in thine own way the prayers that we find in the word are answered by the word it is as thou it is as thou thyself dost apply thine own truth to our hearts it is as thou dost go on to work through thine own words

that we will be searched that we will know what needs to be confessed that needs to be turned away from it is as thou dost apply the word that we'll look to thee for the strength and the grace to go on in the way of obedience it is as thou dost apply the word that we will when we are confronted with ourselves and what we are when we have a vision into our own hearts when we hear our own words when we see our own deeds it is as thou dost apply thy word that we will be brought to confess and repent so lord as thou hast put thy word in our midst now may we go with thy word hid within our hearts that we might not sin against for thy name's sake amen