

Group Notes 4 September 2011

David the Psalmist

Welcome - Ice Breaker

The highlight of your holidays please!

Word – Psalm 139

A large number of the Psalms in the Bible are written by David. In them we can track the ups and downs of his life as we have followed it in our series on David. Most of Psalms 51-63, for example, start with an autobiographical note about David's circumstances when he wrote them. They reflect his joys and sorrows, his faith and his fears. They show total honesty with God.

Question:

- *Why do we find it hard to be totally honest with God? After all, he already knows all about us...*

Psalm 139 is a Psalm of wonder. David is totally amazed and humbled by how deeply God knows and loves him. It starts with lots of words which express the intimacy of God's knowledge of us:

- V1 You search, like someone questing for what they most long for
- V1 You know – a very powerful word in Hebrew, much stronger than just knowing facts – it's about personal interaction.
- V2 You perceive – someone who gazes intently until they fully understand is using their powers of perception.
- V3 You discern – this is when you see what is going on deep inside someone, perhaps deeper than they themselves really understand.
- V4 You are familiar – this is someone who knows another person's ways intimately through a long and deep relationship such as a marriage

It's like someone who is deeply in love and cannot stop gazing at their beloved, thinking of them and wanting to be with them. That, says David, is how God feels about us! God's thoughts towards us are without number, v.18

Question:

- *If God feels like that about us, how should we feel about ourselves?*

This loving gaze of God searches everything about us. Nothing is too trivial, whether we get up or sit down, go out or have a rest (v 2 and 3). It scans back in time to our mother's womb (v.13) and forward to our unknown future (v.16). It wants to continue gazing on us everlastingly, as the final words of the Psalm point out (v.24).

Questions:

- *Do you have difficult experiences from your past? Or worries and anxieties about your future? Do they make it hard for you to believe that God is really shaping your life?*
- *How do these compare with David's own anxieties and life experiences?*
- *Do you believe God is really interested in the trivia of your life?*

In verses 7-12 it all seems to get a bit too much for David! It's almost as though it's too heavy to have God so close all the time – where can I flee? How can I escape? Can I ask the darkness to hide me? Of course he realises it's futile. You can't run away from omniscience (though several Bible characters, like Jacob, Moses and Jonah tried). I wonder what is the darkness that David is

talking about. Could it be sin, as when he had an affair? Is it to do with "the valley of the shadow of death" from Psalm 23? There is quite a lot of evidence from various Psalms that David suffered from bouts of depression... But even that darkness is dispersed because God is light.

Questions:

- **Why do you think some people might feel God's presence is too close for comfort?**
- **How can we train ourselves to be open to God's loving attention rather than feeling judged or oppressed by it?**
- **Does anyone have an experience of God rescuing them from depression?**
- **Have you ever tried to run away from God? What happened?**

There was an understanding in Jewish times that the Psalms were not just about David but also about the Messiah, because the Messiah would be the Son of David. Jesus reflects this understanding in Matthew 22:41-46 where He debates the meaning of Psalm 110 with the Pharisees. Jesus is in fact present in Psalm 139 as well. When it speaks of going up to heaven (v8), Jesus both came from heaven and returned to heaven for us. When it speaks of going down into the depths (v8), Jesus went through the depths of suffering and death for us. And when David wonders if the darkness can hide him from God's love, Jesus entered that darkness in the night of Gethsemane and in the darkness that came while He was on the cross. In His loving pursuit of us he entered the womb, lived through all the ordinary experiences of human life, and even went through suffering and death to win us. Just as there is nowhere where God's love was not there for David, so there is nowhere where Jesus would not go for us. Jesus is the active expression in human form of God's searching love.

Question:

- **Where else in the Psalms might you see Jesus? *If you are stuck, start with Psalm 22 (the cross), Psalm 23 (the Good Shepherd) and Psalm 24 (the ascension into heaven).***

Worship ideas.

Read through Psalm 139 again, not for study but for praise. Pick out a verse each from the Psalm and give thanks for what it says about God and His love.

Works/witness.

We have got two great opportunities for witness coming up!

- Back to Church Sunday 25 September. Could you pray as a group for the people you want to invite? Ask for the boldness to invite someone, the right person to approach, and a positive response from them.
- The Alpha Course starting Thursday 29 September – is your group involved in supporting Alpha? Setting up, clearing away, discussion leaders? Are there people you could invite to come with you to Alpha? Pray for them!