

“Heart Surgery”

Psalm 139:1-12; 23-24

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Our attention this morning is drawn to a passage which is difficult to classify. Is it a prayer, a poem or a song? The ancient Jews would probably tell us it was all of these, which they used in a variety of settings.

What is not in question is how much this passage meant to God’s people. Psalm 139 was a favorite of the Jews who were taken by the Babylonians into exile and separated from their homeland, as well as those who returned years later to rebuild Jerusalem. To know God was with them at all times and in all places strengthened them for the many challenges they faced.

I am confident this passage was instrumental in Jesus’ faith development and led to the intimate relationship he had with God. One reason Jesus taught his disciples to refer to God as Abba, Father, was because of this Psalm’s influence upon him. The personal nature of God described in this Psalm is its most striking feature.

“O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from a far.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O Lord.

You hem me in, behind and before, and you have laid your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me; your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like day, for the darkness is as light to you." Psalm 139:1-12.

It is easy to tell the Psalmist's heart was overflowing with gratitude and praise. The awareness that the God who created the world not only knew him, even before he was born, but cared deeply about his well-being overwhelmed him. This close and abiding relationship brought the Psalmist more comfort than words could express. Never would he be alone or face life's struggles by himself.

This unique relationship led to a request of God by the Psalmist. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 139:23-4.

Why did the Psalmist ask God to search his inner most thoughts, feelings and desires?
The Psalmist knew he did not have a pure heart.

There were unhealthy attitudes, tendencies, beliefs, opinions and desires lurking in the shadows which led to bad decisions that hurt him and those around him. He knew he would be a better person if they were not there, yet he was all too aware of his inability to subdue and control them, much less get rid of them.

"See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the righteous way," the Psalmist prayed.

Why did the Psalmist ask God to search his heart? You would think he would try to hide his ugly thoughts and bad deeds from God.

He asked God to search his heart because he had a healthy concept of God. He viewed God as a parent who loved him unconditionally. He believed God wanted the best for him and would do all He could to help him achieve his potential.

He also saw God as a responsible parent who would be honest and save the Psalmist from self-deception. God would not ignore the threats He saw to the Psalmist's well-being, but reveal them so the Psalmist could deal with them before they led to bad decisions.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart," the Psalmist prayed. "Test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

Have you ever prayed that prayer? I suppose you have to be really serious about life and relationships to do this. You have to be driven and focused, much like a person who wants to lose weight, get in shape, make a good grade, play an instrument or excel in a sport. Getting

rid of the junk in our hearts requires the same kind of honesty, intensity, determination and help needed to achieve any worthy goal.

If God searched your heart today, what do you think He would find? Would God find a healthy heart or one in need of repair? Would he find a heart at peace or one that is troubled, angry, bitter or broken?

What do you think God wants to find when He examines your heart? I pondered this question for a long time last week.

I believe God wants to see a good, strong heart which values giving over getting, serving over being served, honesty over deception, love over hate, forgiveness over revenge, right over wrong, faithfulness over fickleness, strength over weakness, courage over fear, selflessness over selfishness, humility over arrogance, justice over favoritism and peace over war.

Furthermore, I believe God is looking for a heart that values healing over hurting, being responsible over pursuing pleasure, speaking truth over being popular, being kind over being cruel, encouraging over discouraging, being helpful over being critical and building bridges of goodwill and understanding instead of walls of suspicion and hate.

I think you see why the Psalmist asked God to search his heart. He knew he fell short of what God expected, as all of us do. This is why the Psalmist's request began with a word which means "to search continually." This was not something he needed God to do just once or occasionally, but every day, and many times throughout the day.

We need to follow the Psalmist's example, and I challenge you to do this in the week to come. No one's heart is completely pure, and God understands.

Allow God to love you as much as He did the Psalmist. Don't hide your heart from Him, as if you could. Don't be afraid to invite Him to search your heart. You can trust Him to handle a troubled or broken heart the same way you would trust a gifted and compassionate surgeon.

Listen carefully to the people God sends your way who also love and care for you. Their words could be the very ones you need to hear that can lead to a better life.

Ask God to help you get rid of anything in your heart which is hurting you and those around you. The Great Physician can do this if you will let Him, and I hope you will.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart," the Psalmist prayed. "Test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

May this be our prayer this week.