

## Immensity | How God's Greatness is Good for Us Psalm 138-139

### State of Union

- Financial Celebration
- Story | The Narrative of God's Redemption. Glory Conclusion from Ps 138-39.

David, the king of Israel writes: "I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word" (Ps 138:1-2). Why would anyone lose their dignity and bow before God, especially a king, especially Austinites, who don't hold anyone higher than themselves? Why praise anything with your whole heart, devote your whole life to it, when you're forging your own, unique identity in a city that celebrates diversity? Verse 4, the kings of Psalm 138 give us a reason for bowing down, for losing decorum. What is it? God, his name *Yahweh*, is exalted above *all* things. Kings will discover there is one being above all others and therefore worthy of worship. The tenses of these verbs carry a prophetic certainty. The cultural elites go even further. They *sing*, "of the ways of the Lord" —why?—"for great is the glory of the Lord." Kings shed their dignity because they find someone so unique that he's worth devoting their entire lives to. They worship God because *great is the glory of the Lord*. Glory, is a

word we've been considering for a couple months now. Glory is God's *weightiness*. Peering in on God's nature, we've weighed the weight of his perfections—mysterious, trinity, holy. My hope is that you've seen the greatness of God's glory in these messages. As we've considered his *glory* over the past couple months, we've felt the Spirit move through us, responding in sorrowful repentance, joyful worship, and renewed faith. I'm so grateful. I've experienced significant repentance and renewal myself. This is why I felt prompted to this series. It's what I've been praying for. I had been concerned that we were losing a sense of our need for the gospel. **When we lose sight of how glorious God is, we lose a sense of our great need for Christ.** I know many of you have sensed your need for a glorious God, again. I've heard it in city groups, prayer requests, counseling sessions, fight club conversations. If you haven't gained this sense, it's never too late. As we move into this final message, I exhort you to not allow this to be a passing sermon series, but to nurture whatever God is doing in you, to reflect on it, share it, pray about it to move deeper into it.

## **Immensity**

Psalm 138 & 139 aren't usually taken as a pair by scholars, but I believe that, when read together, we get a deeper sense of who God is. In Psalm 138, we see David encountering God as great and

glorious. He clearly has the sense that God is above him, exalted in holiness. Perhaps this was written after his unexpected defeat of Goliath? Marveling at God's might, David describes the Lord as *high*. He's reaching for images to describe God's immensity. We use the word "immense", to describe something beyond our expectations. "Man, that was immense." That was my response to the Jonsi concert, a multi-sensory set that filled me with awe, joy, and wonder. It was *immense*, transcendent. Theologians used to include sections on God's immensity in their works. Going back to the 1930's, the Dutch Reformed theologian, Louis Berkhof, describes God's immensity as, "[that perfection of the Divine Being that transcends all spatial limitations...](#)" (ST, 65). **Here we have the reason why we should abandon ourselves in worship—God transcends.** He is high, above, great is his glory. Immense. Now, the interesting thing about God's immensity, is that it does not limit him from interacting with creatures who aren't immense. David goes on to say "[For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly but the haughty he knows from afar](#)" (138:6). *This is the link between 138 and 139.* **Here we have yet another, but different reason to worship. Though God is high, he dwells with the lowly.** Who are the lowly? Not merely those who are oppressed. You can be oppressed and be haughty. Think of the embittered, angry person who curses God in their trials. Lowly is a state of heart not a state of

circumstances. [prayer in office] Peter reminds us that God is opposed to the proud but gives grace the humble. In fact, if we humble ourselves before him, recognizing there is one being who above all others, who is utterly unique, then God says he will lift us up and place us next to him (1 Peter 5). Is God immense? Yes. But God is also immanent, close, near the humble. The immanence of God must be held together with his immensity. Otherwise, we end up with a remote, disinterested God. We end up deists not Christians. With this immanence, the psalm takes a sudden shift, repeatedly mentioning God's **hands**: stretching out, delivering, and fighting for David. We're meant to see God getting his hands into things for David, loving hands that will never leave him or forsake him: *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.* We are meant to see **the immense God is an immanent God**. He high and he is low. The perfect God, a personal God. This theme continues into psalm 139.

## **Intimacy**

Psalm 139 is often cited for proof of God's immanence, that he is everywhere: *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee*

from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. God is everywhere through his Spirit, his presence stretches from heaven to earth (and beneath the earth), from east to west. Now, some would hear this and see a kind of pantheism, that God is creation. Many Austinites practice this kind of spirituality, treating food, trees, dogs, and water with godlike regard. These are wonderful gifts, but does immanence make a case for them being God? Well, the Spirit goes one step further: “O Lord you have searched and known me” (139:1). The thesis of 139 is that God *knows* you. In pantheism, God can't know you. God is creation; he does not love creation. You can love mother earth, but the problem is that the earth can't love you. It can't know you. When a couple is struggling, they come into my office, and inevitably women confess they just wish their husbands *knew* them. They want to be *known* by their husbands. Instead, they often feel used for housekeeping, for sex, for kids but rarely known. The Father is telling you that he knows you. He knows about you, when you sit and stand, where you struggle, sleep, and weep. He knows your heart—your longings, fears, and hopes. He even knows thoughts you haven't expressed to anyone: “Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether” (4).

How is it that sometimes I can predict what my wife is going to say? I know the story she's going to share. Its because I know her so well, after thirteen years of life together, I can anticipate her words before she speaks. We all want this kind of intimacy, for people to anticipate our wants and needs. Deep down we all want to be known. C.S. Lewis called this the **inconsolable secret**. Why is it a secret? Think of the risk of going public with your inconsolable longing. What if you told someone what you really wanted? That you want to be perfectly loved and known so well people could anticipate your desires. It would it scare them away! After all it is inconsolable. There's not enough consolation in the world for it. We need something that transcends the world and knows our hearts. Something immense and immanent. People don't have the capacity for that kind of consolation. In Christianity, however, God can know you intimately. God, as Creator (not the creation), has the immensity and the proximity to love and know you just like you want to be known. David blushinglly goes on: "[You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.](#)" Here we see God's loving hands again. The word "hem" means to enclose. The image is of God cupping his hands around us to protect us and care for us. Christ takes up this imagery as the good shepherd. He says: "[I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I](#)

know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep... My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:14,29). In the Trinity we have a God who is high enough for our worship and our consolation and unique enough he's worth devoting our lives to. We are in the Son's hand, and the son is in the Fathers hand. Father and Son know us. How? He is the shepherd; he knows the voice of his sheep. If you're lost, call out, he will bring you home. God knows us everywhere we go and in everything we do, and still loves us. The Spirit together with the Son, the two hands of the father, hem us in and bring us close, cradling our deep, inconsolable secret. **In the Spirit and the Son, the immense God becomes an intimate God.** Try to know God on your own terms, and you wont be known. Throw yourself to the Spirit and the son and youll know him intimately. When we follow God from psalm 138 into psalm 139 we discover an **immensity for intimacy**. Victor Hugo says in Les Mis: "Life's great happiness is to be convinced we are loved." To be convinced you must encounter someone who is great enough for your inconsolable secret. He has to be immense, glorious, worthy of collapsing into. Are you convinced or do you just concede? *Look* at the immense God who cradles you in his hands. *See* the Shepherd who lays down his life for you. *Sense* the Spirit who knows you, now, right where you are and is stirring you to be convinced, to receive

his love for you. Perhaps now we can see why David would say: [Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.](#)” In the words of Eugene Peterson: “This is too much, too wonderful—I cant take it all in!” This, my friends, is the glory of God for you—his immensity for intimacy!