



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“THE TRAVELER'S PSALM”

John Galbreath
Bible Study Series

Text: Psalm 139
Date: July 29, 1956

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken from a sermon preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church on July 29, 1956. The notes on the envelope indicate he also preached it at Wilson College in July of 1961. And, according to a bulletin from North United Presbyterian Church on Perrysville Avenue, he preached it at their services on August 19, 1956.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (Psalm 139).

Next, review the outline of the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and how you would “fill in” the remainder of the message from the chosen passage.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

I. Introduction

A. Author and date unknown and irrelevant, for it is eternally contemporary and personal.

B. The "Traveler's Hymn"

1. Appropriate as many of us go on vacation.
2. Appropriate inasmuch as many of our men spend much of their time in travel.

C. "The Wandering Jew"

1. The Hebrew people were wanderers.
 - a) *Abraham, from Ur to Haran to Bethel*
 - b) *Jacob, from Bethel to Haran and back*
 - c) *Joseph, to Egypt*
 - d) *Moses, to Sinai and back to Egypt, then the exodus back to Sinai*
 - e) *David, in conquests*
 - f) *The exile and return*
 - g) *The dispersion*
2. Jesus, a wanderer
3. Paul, the missionary

II. GOD KNOWS US. "O lord, Thou hast searched me and known me"

A. We think of our relationship largely in terms of what we know of God

1. The more important issue is, "What does God know about us?"

B. He knows what we do. "Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up."

1. God is not just the "star-maker," but is great enough to know what *I* do as well.

2. Here is the great gap in the religion of so many.

C. He knows what I am. "Thou discernest my thoughts from afar."

1. God knows our motives.

a) *He sees the seamy side of our apparent "good deeds."*

b) *He knows when our good intentions go awry.*

c) *When we fall, he understands our weakness as men cannot -- so is capable of mercy as no man is.*

D. Who knows you?

1. Person sitting next to you?

2. Parents? Young man who said he would like to sit down and talk with his parents, but is unable, despite the fact that he visits with them weekly.

3. Husband or wife? Do we ever truly understand?

E. Do we know ourselves? Find yourself a stranger?

1. A psychiatrist must undergo a year or so of psychoanalysis in order to understand himself.

F. Loneliness comes, not so much from the fact that we don't know others, but that no one knows us.

"Lord, Thou has searched me and known me. Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up. Thou discernest my thoughts from afar."

III. GOD IS WITH US "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

A. Do we believe it?

1. Is God in Church?

a) "Will the president be present at workshop this morning?" "No, but we believe God will be."

b) If we could assure the congregation that the president would be here, we could be certain of overflow.

c) If we were truly convinced of the presence of God, it would not be so easy to stay away -- even during July and August.

2. Is God with us in our daily life?

a) Survey indicated that 95% believe in God, but 39% said their faith materially influences their business and political opinions.

3. Is God with us when far from home?

a) A promise.

(1) Each trip from which we return home is a miracle. Each car we pass presents the possibility of stark tragedy.

(2) Angels on our yard-arm -- the Denver, under heavy Japanese attack -- hit but not sunk.

(3) We have never had a fatal auto accident in our congregation -- nor a drowning.

b) A threat.

(1) "The Far Country" phenomenon.

(2) "This is Buddha country" -- the gods here wink at this sort of thing.

(a) It is the same God in Tokyo that is to be found at home.

(3) The business trip -- the sales convention.

(a) We would not be so naive as to believe that God can be fenced into Allegheny County -- but we sometimes act as though he were.

Death of a Salesman -- whose son appeared at the door of his hotel room.

B. Is He present with us when we need Him? "If I say, 'Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night. Even the darkness is not dark to Thee; the night is as bright as the day.'"

1. Tom Mullins' story -- youngster left doll on the porch, told to go out and get it. Was afraid. "God is there." "God, would you hand me the doll?"

2. Take time to find God in times of tension.

a) The time you pray is the time you save.

IV. HE IS PRESENT WITH THOSE WHOM WE LOVE

A. Most anxiety comes, not from our personal danger, but our concern for others whom we love.

1. "O Lord, thou hast searched him and known him. Thou knowest when he sits down and when he risest up...If he takes the wings of the morning and dwells in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there thy hand shall lead him, and thy right hand shall hold him."

B. One of the most real fears we know is that of the wife who must see her husband leave so frequently or the mother whose son is in the service.

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.

Study Questions -- Part I*Bible Reading: Psalm 139*

Verses 1 through 4 say:

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

- Are there times when you suddenly feel you've done something because God led you to do it?
- What do you do when there are things you say that you are ashamed that God heard?

Verses 5 through 7 say:

⁵ You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

- Have there ever been times when you *have* moved away from God's presence? What did you do to get back to Him?

Verses 8 through 12 say:

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

- Are there things that have happened in history that make you wonder where God was? Are there places you think would have felt so dark to believers that they might wonder where God had gone?

Verses 13 through 16 say:

¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, ¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

- Does having your days "ordained" make you more or less committed to God's service?

Verses 17 and 18 say:

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

- How does knowing that God is with you each time you awaken shape your approach to your day?

Verses 19 through 22 say:

¹⁹ If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? ²² I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

- Do you ever think that some people who pronounce themselves as Christians are misusing God's name?
- How do you deal with individuals who misuse it?

Verses 23 and 24 say:

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

- What will God find when He searches *your* heart today?

Study Questions -- Part II

Sermon :

- I.A. In the original notes, the order was B, C, and A for this section. Why do you think Dr. Galbreath changed the order?
- I.B. The sermon is titled "The Traveler's Psalm." Why do you think he uses Hymn here?
- I.B.2. He notes that "many of our men" spend much time in travel. Do you think that is more or less true today than it was in 1956? How many women in our congregation do you think spend a great deal of time traveling today?
- I.C. The sermon refers to "the wandering Jew" and notes that Jesus was a wanderer. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to be seen in that way?
- II.A.1. Do you agree that what God knows of us is as important as what we know of Him? If 50-50 represents an equal relationship, where do you think you stand in that equation?
- II.B.1. How does it make you feel that God knows so much about you? What about you do you wish God didn't know?
- II.C.1.b. This mentions God knowing when our intentions go awry. Does that make you more or less inclined to take a chance on something that may not work out?
- II.D. How do you answer the question "Who knows you?"
- II.D.2. -- Dr. Galbreath made a handwritten note "Blue Denim." It is difficult to know what he meant there.
- II.E. How do you answer the question "Do we know ourselves?" How well do you know yourself?
- II.F. Do you agree that loneliness comes not from knowing others but that they don't know us? What can you let others know, then, to help you feel less alone?
- III.A.1. Do you truly feel God's presence during worship?
- III.A.1.c. How do you think God feels when he notices we're not in church? Do you think He accepts some reasons more readily than others? If so, what do you think God would find to be a "good reason" to miss church?
- III.A.2. What do you think the percentage of people believing in God would be today? The statistic is that 39% of those in 1956 believed that faith materially influenced their business and political opinions. What do you think that number is today? How would you answer that question?
- III.A.3. Dr. Galbreath structures his discussion of God being with us far from home as a promise and threat. In what ways do you think that is true?

III.A.3.b.3.(a) There is a handwritten reference to Willy Loman.

III.B.1. There is a statement about a child asking God to hand her a doll so she doesn't have to go where she is scared. Are there places you need to go and things you need to face where you would rather ask God to go for you? How does knowing He is with you help you to go there anyway?

IV.B. What are today's equivalents to husbands traveling on business and children in the service? What are the scary events that make you more worried about others than about yourself?

There is a handwritten prayer included with the sermon. It says:

From our many ways, our paths have come together. We feel Thy Spirit hast directed us to this place. Make our minds open to new understanding; may our hearts be prepared for renewed consecration.