

Four Questions About God – Part 4

Psalm 139:19-24

Before we read Verses 19-24 of Psalm 139, it would most likely be a good idea to stick a warning label on the content of these Verses: What you are about to read is abrupt, it *sounds* mean, vindictive, and to our “politically correct” ears trained by a fallen world to hear only some of the soundtrack of Scripture, these last stanza of what up until now was great music just seems to head South, music-wise. It’s like if you loved pure classical music and thought all other styles of music is substandard at best or just plain tacky-to-awful at worse . . . And then, one day you’re driving in your car listening to a string quartet playing Pachebell’s “Cannon In D,” when all of the sudden, the cannon is being played with a loud, fuzzy electric guitar playing the melody, then the lead part changes to steel guitars and banjos and a harmonica, and then the song switches to some rap artist chanting rhyming lyrics while a strong rhythmic version of Cannon in D booms loudly in the background. In much the same way, this Stanza of Psalm 139 seems abrupt, even offensive.

That’s why some people, perhaps many people, have a problem with these verses. In a lot of hymnbooks and printed liturgies, the editors have performed a “Psalmectomy” on Psalm 139 by cutting out Verses 19-22 the way a Dr. would remove infected, inflamed appendix. Well, this Psalm, this whole Psalm, communicates some incredible TRUTHS about God, namely that He: 1) Knows everything I do, say and think; 2) Is so close to me that distance, darkness, and not even death can separate me from Him; 3) Designed and wove together this precious piece of ART that is me – before I was born! And before I was conceived, God both wrote the book of my life with the permanent ink pen of His absolute sovereign decree *and* wrote me into His Big Story, His Grand Narrative, the Bible. And there’s still something else you need to know about this God, so let’s read this last stanza of this incredible song. (READ Vv 19-24)

Have you ever noticed, in all great stories, there’s a certain plot line, a certain pattern they all seem to follow. It runs something like this: 1st, there’s a **crisis**, things are not right, people are OPPRESSED by some evil person, and the situation is NOT a good one. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the EVIL WHITE WITCH has enslaved the land or Narnia, causing the land to exist frozen in snow and ice, a condition C.S. Lewis described as “. . . always winter, and never Christmas . . .” In *The Lion King*, the Pridelands look run down, depleted, grey and ugly under the oppressive leadership of Scar and his Hyena henchman. In the classic western *Tombstone*, the town of Tombstone AZ is menaced by “the Cowboys,” a violent band of outlaws led by the Clanton Brothers.

Then, into those desperate situations, all the great stories introduce a hero, *someone* who comes in, fights against and defeats the enemy, and puts the world to rights again. By the end of the story, good wins, evil loses, and everything’s right w/the world. In the land of Narnia, Aslan the Lion is the Hero. In the Pridelands, Simba is the hero. In Tombstone, the heroes are Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp. The “key” that opens up the door of insight into “hero stories” is the *resolution* to a crisis through the *intervention* of a *hero*. In all the great stories, as long as there’s a hero, there’s hope that evil will end, good will win, and 1 day all will be right with the world.

Of course, all these stories appeal to us because these stories are ultimately signposts pointing us to the *greatest story* ever told. It's a story we find in the *greatest book* ever written, the Bible. As we come to grip with the story-line of the Bible, we encounter a world that was a good, but now the world is now fallen full of people who make life miserable for, well, everybody. We need a Hero, and the Big story of the Bible has a Hero. His Name is GOD.

As we come to the final stanza of this great song, the question before the House: **HOW is God the Ultimate Hero of MY story?** I know God is there, but how do I know He is there for me? These Verses tell us three ways I can know God is the Hero I can count on, the Hero we have all been waiting and longing for ALL our lives.

1st, God is my Hero because I can count of Him to tell me the truth about life.

When you go to a physician and you've been coughing up blood, or if you go into the ER with what you're about 99.9% sure is a broken arm, what you want, what you need is someone to tell you the Truth about what's going on. Your health, your life, depends on the Doctor telling you the Truth about your condition. We all have built in "baloney detectors" that register when we're being sold a big bag of hype instead of the real hope that comes from an accurate diagnosis.

As it is with a true Physician, so it is with a true hero. A true hero acknowledges that things are *not* right. Narnia is plunged into a winter that just goes on and on, the Pridelands lie in waste, the citizens of Tombstone are terrorized by the cowboys. The Hero of the story knows what's not right, and he calls a spade a spade.

Well, like a True Hero, God tells us that at the present time, things in this world are not right. We live in a world where evil forces and evil people throw a monkey wrench into a world designed to be a place of "shalom," a place of peace between God and mankind, peace between people, and peace with our environment would be a way of life. In other words, God's not going to tell you how wonderful everybody is when everybody who has eyes that see, ears that hear, and a heart that feels pain knows this world and the people in it are just not "right"!

So what does our Hero tell us? Read Verses 19-22... In this world, we encounter people who are ENEMIES of God and of God's people. The words used to describe these enemies are graphic and pointed. But the problem boils down to this: Instead of keeping the two great commandments, to love God and love your neighbor, these people are wicked, malicious in the way they speak about God. If they wrote a book, it would be entitled *God Is Not Good* (oh . . . somebody has already written a book with that title!) blasphemers, they hate God, they live in open rebellion against God. And when it comes to dealing with other people, these God-slanderers are bloodthirsty, violent people.

All you have to do is look at the parade of atrocities down through history. You'll see when people are hostile to God, their hostility extends to other people who are, after all, created in the image of the God they hate.

When Joseph Stalin first consolidated his grip on the Russian military, he was still faced with a large defiant population. One day, this dictator gathered his generals in a room and explained his plans for total control of the Russian people.

Here's what Stalin did. He ordered a live chicken to be brought to the conference room; and he proceeded to pluck every feather from the still live bird. Naturally, the chicken was terrorized, but chicken squawks are seldom noticed by dictators. When the bird was completely stripped, Stalin said, "Now watch this."

In clear view of all of his generals, he put the chicken on the floor. You'd think the instant this naked bird left his hands there would be a mad dash for the exit or farthest corner of the room. The stunned generals watched as this chicken huddled between Stalin's boots! As Stalin walked around the room, the chicken stayed in his shadow. At every stop, the bird jumped between the dictator's boots.

"That, gentlemen, is how I will control the Russian people." Thirty million beaten, starved or murdered 'chicken feathers' later, the naked Russian survivors that survived indeed huddled between the boots of this professing Atheist who dismissed God; and because he had a low view of God, he MISTREATED people created in God's image.

The two realities go hand in hand. When any rebel sinner slanders God and blasphemes God's Name, people who bear the image of God suffer. In communist Russia, God's image-bearers suffered. In communist China, God's image-bearers are suffering. Pretty much all human rights violations from modern sex slave trafficking to forced abortions to incarcerations and executions of people who oppose totalitarian governments; all of man's inhumanity to man grows in the soil of despising God. It's but a small step from despising God to despising and desiring to destroy those who bear the image of God.

So, how should we relate to people who are wicked, malicious, blaspheming, and bloodthirsty? Two ways: 1st, KEEP YOUR DISTANCE from them, Vs 19... 2nd, BE REPULSED BY THEM, Vs 21... In Vs 21, we most likely have something in poetry called parallelism where the 2nd line explains the 1st line. The equation of Verse 21 is this: To HATE = to ABHOR, to be deeply repulsed by something. It goes way, way, way beyond being offended. It means to look at something so what you see grieves your heart to the point where when you see evil, you see it as something disgusting, appalling, and something that literally makes you want to throw up!

And friends, therein lies the problem. Alexander Pope, in his *Essay on Man*, wrote the following lines; and I hope what you're about to hear sticks in your mind like Velcro laced with super glue:

"Vice is a MONSTER of so frightful mien (appearance)

As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;

Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,

We first *endure*, then *pity*, then *embrace*."

In other words, when you first encounter the people described in these Verses, what they do stirs up a sickness in your heart. "That's wrong!" "How can he use language like that?" "How

could he do that?” But... the longer you see the wrong, hear the wrong, and hang around with it, the more familiar with it you become, the more desensitized you become as to how bad the “badness” of bad behavior is, the more sympathetic you grow toward the one doing wrong (even to the point where you start making up all kinds of excuses for them). And, before you know it, you accept that language, you accept that behavior. and instead of keeping your distance from evil, you come to tolerate, accept, and even embrace evil. David Kupellian, in his book *The Marketing Of Evil*, calls this process “desensitization through repetition”.

OK, Let me ask you: How much does it bother you when the lead actors in movies and television shows you enjoy are living together and not married? How much does it bother you that in so many movies, sex is seen as an expected part of a romance. They meet, they fall in love, they have sex. Or worse, they meet, they have sex, then they fall in love, maybe. Does it grieve and make you sick to your stomach that your teenagers see this kind of behavior so often on movies and television that this behavior seems “normal” to them? Just think: 70 waking hours, 5 hours max of hearing the Truth about sexuality (hopefully in church), and 65 hours of ongoing exposure through the Media to the “gospel” of promiscuity. Does that bother you?

Or think about the language we hear in movies. Did you know there was a time when the entertainment industry was bound by a code that forbade them from using any blasphemy in a movie? It was called the “Hays Code,” and it stated: “Pointed profanity ~ this includes the words “God,” “Lord,” “Jesus,” “Christ,” (unless used reverently), “Hell,” “S. O. B.,” the “D” word, the “B” word, or every other profane or vulgar expression, however used ~ is forbidden.”

Every one of us knows the “Hays Code” no longer applies in Hollywood. But here’s something we don’t like to admit. In 2005, roughly \$8.8 billion was spent on movie tickets in the USA. How much of the \$8.8 billion do you think came from those who call themselves Christians? According to Barna Research group, it was a massive \$6.94 billion. In other words, over 70% of the box office intake came from people of Faith! The other day, I read a movie review column by a Pastor (!) who said this about a particular movie, “. . . once you get past the 238 profanities and all the violence, it was a great film!”

Friends, the Hero of the story of the Bible sees the world in black and white, good and evil. And, this Hero does us a favor by telling us the truth and warning us that evil people are poison ivy. If you’re allergic to poison Ivy, don’t cut a strand off and rub it all over you. Stay away from it!

Call evil what it is: Evil. Call evil people what they are: Evil people. There’s nothing wrong with saying it; and there’s something so very right about boldly speaking out against evil. And since evil people are intent on destroying all things good and God-honoring, don’t you think you need to be disgusted and repulsed by evil, whenever and wherever you encounter it? We need to express more moral outrage. Jesus was angry at sin; we should be, too. Or, to borrow a word people misuse when criticizing Christians, we need to be intolerant of evil!

2nd, God is my Hero because I can count of Him to destroy His and my enemies.

In order for Narnia to be put to rights, the White Witch and her army had to be destroyed. In order for the Pridelands to flourish, Scar had to be destroyed. In order for Tombstone to become a safe place, the cowboys had to be hunted down, and if they didn't surrender, they were shot dead as a doornail. For a garden to grow and flourish, weeds have to be destroyed. For a body to be healthy, the infection has to be eliminated. To put fresh, clear, clean oil in your car, the dark, dirty, old oil has to be drained out. Or to put it another way, for something live and grow as it should, whatever's hindering growth and life must be done away with!

In Vs 19, the Psalmist is calling on GOD to eliminate, to Destroy the wicked. The disinfection has to be complete. But notice here, the writer of this song is calling on GOD to eliminate the evildoers! God is the "Terminator," not Ar-Nald! It's not about taking personal vengeance on somebody! Read David's bio, and you'll see. David was NOT into revenge. One commentator put it this way: "David's passion was for the triumph of divine justice, not the satisfaction of personal malace." This isn't "payback." This is just a prayer for God to defeat evil so that good may prevail and prosper.

And by the way, if you have a problem with this prayer, then you probably do not need to repeat The Lord's Prayer each Sunday Morning, because when you pray, "THY KINGDOM COME," well, listen to the commentary from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q and A number 102: "In the second petition, which is, 'Thy kingdom come,' we pray that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened." **Vs 19** is asking God to put things right. It's a "Thy-Kingdom-Come" kind of prayer. One day, our Hero *will* defeat the enemy, and He will set up His Kingdom in all its GLORY and fullness ~ without one speck of evil polluting the landscape!

3rd, God is my Hero because I can count of Him to lead me through life.

By the way, this guidance is what sets our Hero God apart from all other heroes. In the movies and stories, even the heroes have weaknesses and make mistakes. Superman has his Kryptonite. Incredible Hulk has an anger issue. Simba runs away. Indiana Jones is afraid of snakes. One of the things I appreciate about the Bible is that the storyline of the Bible makes a point to tar almost every human hero and uncover all the dirt in their lives. David cannot say "Be like ME . . ." – you know, kill Giants and commit adultery. Instead, David would say, "The Real Hero of my life's story is God. Look to God to give you guidance and hope in this life and in the life to come"! God IS the perfect Hero Who gives you the perfect guidance.

It's fitting to end this song with PRAYER, verses 23-24. The prayer runs something like this: "Lord, my heart is too deceitful to paint a realistic picture of just how big a sinner I am. So, Lord, dig deeply into my life and dig up the dirt. Lord, you know all my anxiety that comes from not really trusting You as I should. Lord, you know all the ways I offend, hurt, and grieve people and grieve You with my own wickedness." Lord, Lead me to confess I am a Sinner and apart from your Grace in JX, I am in as bad off as any mass murderer on death row. Lord, my Hero, lead me down the path of confession."

Then, we need to thank our Heavenly Father for sending His Son Jesus to this earth to rescue us from our sin, to defeat the devil, to destroy evil, and to transform this world into what will one day be a holy and happy place! And then, we need to pray, “Holy Hero, lead me down the path of everlasting life.” We know that prayer will be answered because Jesus said, “I AM the WAY . . .” Jesus is the Path down which we walk, taking steps of repentance and faith all the way to everlasting life in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Jesus tells us to walk with Him, and He will get you to your glorious everlasting destination!”