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Sermon preached by Mr. F.L.Gosden, at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,  
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"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." Psalm 139:23-24.

David is before God. I think six times in this Psalm he expresses that exclamation, "O Lord! O God!" It is solemn, but it is a mercy to be brought before God. He evidently also had a particular manifestation of the divine perfections of Jehovah. His omniscience; His omnipresence; His divine sovereignty; and therefore there was a sacred awe upon David's spirit. This is a very solemn prayer to pray. There may be three kinds of characters that attempt to pray it. A Pharisee may pray this prayer thinking that the Lord will find no evil thoughts or ways. The Pharisee in the Temple thanked God that he was not like the publican. He might pray this prayer believing that the Lord would find that righteousness in him that he thought he possessed. I would say this carefully - and I would not encourage Pharisaism for a moment, but a Pharisee is not hopeless, otherwise the Apostle Paul would have been hopeless; for he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees and thought that he did God service when he persecuted the church. But if God undeceives a Pharisee He will bring that soul where He brought the Apostle; He will bring Him under the sentence of death in everything that he has, and everything that he is, to a wretched man; and it was when he was brought to that wretchedness that he began his blessedness. A Pharisee might pray this prayer with such an attitude.

Another character might pray this prayer and that is a hypocrite, borrowing language from the Word of God, a presumptuous professor - very solemn to borrow scriptures to use on the tongue of a professor. I do not know that you will find in the Word of God there has ever been any hope for a hypocrite. A hypocrite knows very little. He is not what he professes to be, but in a profession he may pray with the tongue, pray this prayer, and would not for a moment allow the Lord to answer that prayer and search him.

The third character is a poor burdened sinner, and he prays this from his heart: 'Search me!' I am the chief of sinners, Lord the uttermost of sinners, but I would not take the wings of the morning and fly into the uttermost parts of the earth - no! Now it would be a mercy if the Lord should manifest Himself to some burdened sinner, and show them that they are that third character. Some of you may be very troubled in your mind. I am. But you look at those three characters, and then look at your own heart. I really don't feel that I am a Pharisee. The Lord has made me well my vileness know. I could not point the finger to the most abandoned wretch and say 'Stand thou there, for I am holier than thou.' I could not do it. But O, when you come to a hypocrite, this is exceedingly trying. Well, what would be the right thing to say? You look at the Psalmist and I believe this would be one test. You see throughout this Psalm, especially the opening verses, the Psalmist shows what the solemn omniscience and omnipresence of Jehovah is; and yet he did not flee from Him. Now look at that point concerning yourself. I believe it is safe - and be honest with your own conscience, if the Lord has made known to you what a sinner you are, would you flee from Him? Would you send a message after Him as the citizens did, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us"? Do you

wish - think of it - do you wish that the Lord was not what He is? Do you wish that He was not omnipresent and omniscient, that He did not know all about you? Would you be relieved if God was not what He is? How do you answer these questions?

Is there in your heart even in the midst of all these things, that that goes out after Him? Can you say, not in word only, not audibly, but in secret - "Thou O Christ art all I want." And I believe that if you are found in that case and those exercises you are the third character, a poor burdened sinner, the chief of sinners the vilest of them all. It is most distasteful to hear one confess such things if they never felt it. You would not know some people are humble unless they told you so. But you will know some dear souls are humble, because they are, not because they say so.

'Search me O God.' This Psalm is in the language of first and second persons only. There is no third person in the Psalm. It is me and mine, Thou and Thine. The Psalmist is alone with God; O how profitable that is. Are we ever alone with God? Public worship is a blessing, it is a divine ordinance; but as we have sometimes said, so it is important to repeat, that if our religion is entirely public there is something wrong. Therefore, look not to your public religion, your open religion, to know where you stand, but put your finger upon the pulse of secret prayer, what goes on in your heart before God.

'Search me O God.' What is the motive of this poor sinner, taught of God, to ask God to search Him? There is a reason for everything; and if you pray this prayer you will have a reason for praying it. One reason will be this; that you will have been taught that your heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Another reason will be because you tremble at the Word of God.

The record of those solemn characters, apostates, - Ahithophel, Absalom Saul, Judas. You cannot shrug your shoulders and say, well I have no evidence of being one of them; but you may depend upon it that you will be exceedingly tried at times as you read of those characters, one or the other of them may come very near to your case, and it will bring you to pray this prayer.

Another reason would be this that you have a real desire to be made right before God. To be made right before Him, having been taught that everything outside of Christ is wrong. Everything apart from Him is dead. That there is no righteousness but in Him; everything outside of Him is crooked; and having been shown that your nature is crooked, that you cannot see things as they should be seen, you pray this prayer; 'Search me O God, and know my heart.' Well, how does God search His own people? He searches them in the first place I believe by the Scriptures. You take that word in the Hebrews, "for the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." That is a solemn, blessed Scripture. Has it ever made you tremble; and yet peculiarly and blessedly, has it given you a love to Him whose searching eye can see you through and through? Has it bought a peculiar relief to you? Why! when you confess your sins unto the Lord, knowing that He can fathom what is unfathomable to you -we shall never fathom the depths of iniquity, but He can; and therefore, He knows what we need to get underneath those depths, for He can save to the uttermost. O the dear

suffering Son of God, when He was made sin went to a depth that under-bottomed the sin of His people: So that He searches His people by the Scriptures.

We would look at a few Scriptures that do search, that have searched me; searched me yesterday. That one in the 6th Chapter of Galatians - "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." Man may be. We may deceive men, we may deceive ourselves; but "God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." What a discriminating word that is! It will give us to search ourselves, as well as the Lord searching you, for you may depend upon it when He begins to search by the Scriptures and His Holy Spirit, we shall begin to search also, and in that connexion we shall begin to search how we are sowing. "He that soweth to the flesh." And what are the seeds? Every thought is a seed. "The thought of foolishness is sin." Every word, every imagination of the heart is a seed. I believe, my friends, if it were possible to know it that every seed of sin that we sow - and we cannot look without it, we cannot breathe without it, we cannot live without it - O the malignity of sin! It may be a dismal consideration to some, but I can say this, that a right knowledge of sin by the law, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, is the next best blessing to divine pardon. O the preciousness of the Gospel is based upon conviction and repentance unto salvation. 'Search me O God' — not the one next to me. Ah some poor sinner might say, 'my sins don't want any searching they are upon the very skirts of my garment.' Searching you feel sometimes that they will break out in public disgrace, they need no searching; but they do. Why! those sins which you are so conscious of my friends, there are depths which the natural mind can never fathom. There are two mysteries revealed in the Scriptures, the mystery of iniquity, and the mystery of godliness, of redemption. But, O blessed be God the mystery of redemption is infinitely greater, and can and does in the case of His dear people, swallow up their iniquity, cast all their sins into the depths of the sea and that is another reason why a poor sinner asks the Lord to search them. 'Search me O Lord.' O there are depths of iniquity in my nature, search it out Lord!

Another way that He searches His people is by the ministry. A searching ministry may not be popular, it may not fill a chapel, but I do believe that it is essential; and if one is searched himself then he will search the people with that searching whereby God has searched him. Are you willing? do you feel, to make bare your breast before the Lord? do you long to make your worst condition known?

'Search me O God, know my heart.' I must stand before Thee, I must either stand before Thee in a Substitute, sheltered beneath Thy precious blood, or I must stand before Thee in my own person, in my sins. 'Search me O God.' You will long for it. O if you do it is a good sign. If some of you could know at this moment where you could go and have all your sins blotted out and be made whiter than snow, justified in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, would you not gladly go to that secret Place - for there is one; "The secret place of the Most High."

'Search me O God and know my heart.' It is not to give God any information, He knows our hearts right enough, but it is for us to know them, and when He sets our iniquities before us in the light of His countenance, then sin like itself appears. 'Search me O God, and know my heart, try me.' This is something more than searching. O this is solemn! 'Search me O God and know my heart, try me.' - put me to the test. Why! you may feel it will destroy you if He puts you to the test; for I cannot stand

a moment, my shameful deeds, my continual backslidings. 'Try me.' "The Lord trieth the righteous." Blessed is the man that endureth trying, that endureth temptation, that endureth testing. Well, what is it that the Lord tries? "He trieth every man's work of what sort it is." O what a real testing is fire! It will consume everything but gold. It will consume all false pretensions in religion. The fire will prove a man to be what he is, and not what he seems to be. But what a mercy, my friends to have a God-given faith, Looking at yourself, why, you will say, 'I could not bear the slightest testing, I would not stand for a moment: "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" What will stand? Faith! Nothing else. A living faith, because the life of God is in it and because it stands in the power of God.

My friends, to attempt to evade this searching and this trying is to deceive ourselves. 'Try me.' Some of you may be under trial now; when the enemy comes in like a flood and seems as though he will take the very ground from beneath your feet. When you are given the wine of astonishment to drink and the Lord shows you hard things; when He smashes before your eyes your dearest idol, when He may perhaps rack your poor body with pain. 'Try me.' But there is a secret. If the Lord tries His dear people He will strengthen them in the process. He will. Like in the Pilgrim's Progress, there was one pouring water, trying to put the fire out; but it did not go out, the secret of it was that at the back of the fire there was one pouring in oil.

Look how Jacob was tried. O the fear he had of his brother Esau! 400 armed men. He did not have 400 armed men for nothing; and Jacob knew he was guilty, that he had supplanted his brother and deceived his old father. He was in a strait. But he was an object of God's love and mercy. He had no refuge but in God; and the Lord tried him. Wrestled, wrestled him; but my friends, Jacob overcame. Omnipotence allowed a poor man with his thigh out of joint to overcome Him and the secret of it was that the angel did not wrestle against him, He wrestled with him.

'Try me.' Look at dear Job. O who could stand such a trial? Job could not by himself, but his faith stood the test. "Will He plead against me with His great power? No! but He will put strength in me." And so Paul found when the Lord tried him tested him with the thorn A rankling thorn and a festering thorn is exceedingly painful - and that thorn came from hell for it was a messenger of Satan - and a messenger of Satan does not come from heaven; it came from hell to buffet him. O what a trial that was! Paul asked for it to be extracted, asked three times. Did the Lord answer him? He answered him with 'No.' No, is an answer, as well as 'Yes.' And we may well remember that. "But My grace is sufficient for thee." O what teaching then there is to a poor burdened sinner

'Search me O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me.' Not that he thought there was not, but discover them Lord.

Hypocrites use it out of pride and presumption, of carnality, search me and see if there is in me malice and guile and hypocrisy and back-biting and evil-speaking, see if there is any wicked way in me. O have you longed to be purged? Have you sometimes felt under the influence of the fear of God you have longed to be made right before Him? Have you ever looked at the opening verses of the 5th Matthew - the Beatitudes? I remember once as it were bringing those Beatitudes before the Lord and asking Him to work all those spiritual qualities in my soul. If He did, and you were possessed of all those 'blessednesses' in your heart, O what a sanctified, blessed state of soul you

would be in. 'See if there be any wicked way in me,' and he did not conclude there – 'but lead me in the way everlasting,' that was his objective. Right the way through, search me O God and lead me in the way everlasting; try me and know my thoughts and lead me in the way everlasting. See if there be any wicked way in me; deliver me from every wicked way and lead me in the way everlasting.

What is the everlasting way? The Lord Jesus Himself. What a comfort this was to Habakkuk, when the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty, that fierce nation, were about to invade the land, and he exclaimed "Art Thou not from everlasting, O God my Holy One, we shall not die, Thou hast appointed them for correction." He saw the wisdom of God even in raising that bitter nation, and saw that this great God was greater than the Chaldeans.

'Lead me in the way everlasting.' For the Lord Himself said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." I am all of it - and how that suits a poor sinner. It brings before him the fullness that there is in Christ. "Let us draw near in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. "There is a new and living way which the Lord Jesus has consecrated through the veil, that is to say His flesh. There is something very precious in that expression. He has consecrated a way. He is the way. He is all the life that is in the way, but He has consecrated it as a Forerunner; and if you are a true follower and are being led forth in this everlasting way to heaven, you will feel the sacredness of Him who has gone before and has consecrated the whole way; it is cast up through the wilderness. O my friends, the Lord Jesus entered into everything that His people were to enter into. All their temptations He was tempted with. All their sorrows, all their sins. We have not a High Priest who is not tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

'Lead me in the way everlasting.' And this everlasting way is traced through the Word of God. He is the way and He has cast up the way, and He will trace it through the Scriptures and sometimes when the blessed spirit leads you into the way everlasting and brings the everlasting Gospel into your heart, you will rejoice in Him. Give you some sweet assurance that you are in the footsteps of the flock – and 'Lead me in the way everlasting.' It leads to everlasting bliss. It is an everlasting way because God is an everlasting God. It is an everlasting way because the Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and for ever. It is an everlasting way because the Holy Ghost is the eternal Spirit, and therefore, everything in the things of God is eternal, and will issue in eternal glory.

'Search me O God.' Are you willing now? Ah you would not hide a thing, you cannot hide anything from Him; you would not if you could. You are glad that He knows you better than you know yourself. Well, how can this be? "With Him is plenteous redemption." His salvation is an eternal salvation.

Sometimes it lifts my poor sinking head to believe there is one greater than I, greater than my sins, greater than the devil, greater than hell. '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 in the way everlasting' - to everlasting bliss.

Amen.

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