

Escape from God

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Massachusetts
September 20, 1964

Scripture: Psalm 139

Introduction

*"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"*

These statements in question form, form the center of Psalm 139. They express the fact that God is inescapable. Only the God who is inescapable is truly God.

I. There is no place to which we could flee from God which is outside God.

A. Flee to the heavens: *"If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!"*

The astralists of all times have tried to escape to heaven in order to escape from God. They have tried to reach to the heaven of perfection, truth, justice and peace.

E.g. Philo of Alexandria

But this heaven is a Utopia. Lacks the restlessness of the divine Spirit and the judging presence of God.

B. Flee to Sheol: *"If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!"*
Sheol is the realm of the dead.

We also have desired to be liberated from the burden of existence by stepping out of it.

Is this our daily desire?
My experience as father and student.

C. Flee to the ends of the earth: *"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 uphold me."*

But to fly to the ends of the earth would not be to escape from God. Yet our technical civilization attempts just that in order to be liberated from the knowledge that it lacks a center of life and meaning. Flee from God in the modern way – rush ahead and ahead.

E.g. Gagarin – "There is no God."

But God's hand has fallen heavy upon us. Our flight is in vain.

- D. Flee into darkness – into forgetfulness: *“If I say: ‘Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night’, even darkness is not dark to Thee, the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light with thee.”*

The alcoholic – plunge into darkness and irresponsibility.
But there is no escape from God through forgetfulness.

II. Man desires to escape God.

*“Where could I go from thy Spirit?
O, where could I flee from thy face?”*

A We do not desire to flee the pictures of God which are of our own creation:

- (1) No reason to flee a god who is the perfect picture of everything that is good in man. Why make such an ideal?
- (2) No reason to escape the god who is simply the universe, or the laws of nature, or the course of history.
- (3) No reason to flee from the god who is no more than a benevolent father who guarantees immortality and happiness.

These are not true pictures of God but of gods made by man, products of our imaginations and wishful thinking.

B The prophets and saints, and even atheists, have desired to escape from God.

- (1) Friedrich Nietzsche – the famous atheist, ardent enemy of religion and Christianity.

Zarathrustra – the prophet of the higher humanity says to the Ugliest Man – the murderer of God.

“You could not bear him to see you,
always to see you through and through...
You took revenge on the Witness...
You are the murderer of God.”
The Ugliest Man replies: “He had to die.”

For according to the Ugliest Man,
God sees with eyes that see everything.
He is one that sees into man's depth and shame.

(2) Man cannot stand such a witness:

*“O Lord, thou hast searched and known me!
Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up;
Thou discernest my thoughts from afar.
Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is in my tongue,
lo, o Lord, thou knowest is altogether.
Thou dost beset my behind and before,
and layest thy hand upon me.”*

(3) We do not want to be known by others, nor even to be known by ourselves.
We shrink away from the restless observer.

(a) Martin Luther hated God. “I did not love God. I hated the just God... and was indignant toward him, if not in wicked revolt, at least in silent blasphemy... We cannot love God, and therefore we cannot will him to exist. We cannot want him to be most wise... and most powerful.”

Luther hated God because he found that there was no escape from him.

(b) Francis Thompson

*“I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind; and in the midst of
tears,
I hid from Him, and under running laughter...”*

Nothing can be hidden ultimately. There is no final isolation.
In our own existence we can discern the all-seeing and all-knowing eye.

III. Man recognizes the Gracious Creator

A. *“I praise thee for the awful wonder of my birth; thy work is wonderful.
For thou didst form my being, and weave me together in my mother’s womb.
None of my bones were hidden from thee, when I was made in secret and molded in
the lowest parts of the earth.”*

The God from whom I cannot flee, is also the friendly presence of an infinitely creative wisdom.

Behind me, the creator.

- B. There is purpose and meaning in life.

*“Thine eyes saw the sum total of my days,
And in thy book they were all written.
They were counted before they ever came into existence.”*

There is ultimate meaning in life. Days are not accidental. Thus we can say:
*“How mysterious thy thoughts are to me, O God!
How great the number of them all is!
If I were to count them, they would outnumber the sands,
and if I were to come to the end of them,
the span of my life would be like thine.*

Conclusion

- A. Make my enemies your enemies:

*“O that thou would slay the wicked, O God,
and that men of blood would depart from me,
men who maliciously defy thee,
who lift themselves up against thee for evil!
Do I not hate them that hate thee, O Lord?...
I hate them with a perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies!*

Fanaticism – danger for the church and religious men.

- B. Complete openness before God

*“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.”*

Example of the hunchback who broke the mirror. Radical attack on one's existence.