

Psalm 139:23-24

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

James Edwin Orr was born in Belfast on 15 January, 1912

- Although capable at school, the death of his father and older brother
- Made Edwin the family breadwinner and he worked as a clerk in a bakery
- At the age of 18 or 19 years, Edwin a friend started to preach in the open air
- With an evangelistic group, *Christian Endeavour*
- And when he was 21 years old he responded to the call to be an itinerant evangelist
- Starting in London he travelled the British Isles, then on to Europe, Turkey, Palestine
- Later he preached in Canada and the United States, visiting all the mainland states
- In 1936 his travels took him to New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and Rhodesia
- On his 25th birthday he married and later became father to four children
- He began to write autobiographical books about his travelling experiences
- And made an evangelistic tour to the portions of China not occupied by the Japanese
- During the war years he began studying in Chicago and became a Baptist minister
- He served as a Chaplain in the United States armed forces
- His Air Force service took him to New Guinea, Borneo, the Philippines and China
- Discharged in 1946, hitchhiked through Korea, China, India and Egypt
- Before making his way to South Africa where he rested with his family
- He then went through the Congo to West Africa, crossed the Sahara
- And headed for England, where he enrolled at Oxford University
- And was awarded a doctorate in 1948 – he received further doctorates from
- University of South Africa, Serampore University and the University of California
- But it was only after all of this that his most memorable work began!

In 1949 he began speaking tours and evangelistic meetings at colleges and universities

- This took him all over the U.S. and to Australia, Britain, Canada, South Africa, N.Z.
- He also went to Brazil and to India
- From 1966-81 he was professor at Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission
- He was on the board of Campus Crusade for Christ, now Agapé
- He was an advisor to Billy Graham, who regarded him as an authority on revival
- Dr F.F. Bruce, for many years New Testament professor at Manchester, said:

“Some men read history, some write it, and others make it. So far as the history of religious revivals is concerned, J. Edwin Orr belongs to all three categories.”

James Edwin Orr wrote a number of hymns, including

- ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart today’ based on Psalm 139
- and undoubtedly becoming popular with its setting to the tune of a Maori folk song
- Edwin Orr first heard the tune at an Easter Revival meeting in New Zealand in 1936
- And wrote this hymn which is a meditation on the words

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-24)

I am absolutely committed to expository sermons

- That is sermons where the main structure is directly linked to the scripture text
- And every main point is found in the text of the Bible
- I am going to use the four verses of Edwin Orr's hymn
- Not to preach from the hymn (which I would be against)
- But as its own exposition of the text

Search me, O God,
And know my heart today;
Try me, O Saviour,
Know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be
Some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from every sin
And set me free.

The Psalmist has been meditating on the fact that God knows everything about him

- God knows when he sits and when he stands (v. 2)
- God knows his thoughts (v. 2)
- God knows when he goes out and when he goes to bed (v. 3)
- God knows what he is going to say even before he says it (v. 4)
- God knew him before he was born and knows the span of his life (vv. 15-16)
- God even knows all his sins

It is not often that I will say this and 'listen very carefully, I will say this only once'

- I want you to focus on the very first thing that comes into your mind
- The very first thing that comes into your mind will be of vital significance
- Don't dodge the very first thing that comes into your mind
- After I have asked you a simple question that I learned from David Pawson
- David Pawson is perhaps the most mesmeric Christian speaker of our generation
- He could convince the congregation that snow was black
- Focus on the very first thing that comes into your mind when I ask his question
- 'God, is there anything in my life that you do not like?'
- There it is! There is no dodging it now. You might try to think of something else
- But it was that very first thing that is at the top of the queue
- Know for certain that your relationship with God cannot be as it should be
- While that remains there unaddressed – you can keep it secret from me
- You can keep it hidden from your nearest and dearest
- You can try to bury it pretending that it is not making any difference to your life
- But when I asked you the question – there it was
- And I must ask you, what are you going to do about it?

Maybe your response to this is, 'I don't know, what should I do about it?'

- The answer is, bring it to the foot of the cross where Jesus died
- Hear the searing sound of metal banging on metal as you realise
- That the thought which first came into your mind – is nailing Jesus to the cross
- Bring it to the foot of the cross ... and let it go

The other day I met a very nice lady who told me that her Mum used to attend church

- But as happens in church from time to time there had been some falling out
- Probably, as is often the case, over something trivial, relatively unimportant
- As a consequence this woman had stopped attending the church
- Saying, 'that the people who did not go were every bit as nice as those who did'
- There are many circumstances in which we could echo that sentiment
- But the issue is not whether the people who do not come are 'as nice'
- We all know they are 'as nice' as the people who come are they 'as forgiven'

Are you willing to bring the first thing that entered your mind when I asked you the question

- 'God, is there anything in my life that you do not like?' to the foot of the cross
- and to allow the burden of that sin to fall upon the shoulders of Jesus?

But supposing you are the kind of genuine person who struggled with the question

- because you, like others, are continually dealing with it and resolving it
- then you must pray the prayer of Charles Wesley

Show me, as my soul can bear,
The depth of inbred sin;
All the unbelief declare,
The pride that lurks within;
Take me, whom thyself hast bought,
Bring into captivity
Every high aspiring thought
That would not stoop to thee.

(HP 544)

We can so easily limit sins to tangible actions but what about the roots of sin?

- Unbelief, pride, selfish ambition – lurking, ensnaring, captivating the believer
- 'Lord, who loved me and bought me with your own life-blood –
- is there anything in my life that you do not like?'
- that great Bible commentator Matthew Henry puts it this way:

"Lord, I hope I am not in a wicked way, but see if there be any wicked way in me, any corrupt inclination remaining; let me see it; and root it out of me, for I do not allow it."

This is the spiritual battle for the soul – not the soul as opposed to the body

- but a spiritual battle for the whole being
- the enemy likes two tactics – you do not need to repent (you are too good)
- there is no chance for you to repent (you are too bad)
- both are lies – instead use this couplet of Charles Wesley
- to begin a prayer that assures every sinner of the adequacy of the grace of God

O Jesus, full of truth and grace,
More full of grace than I of sin

(MHB 346)

I praise Thee, Lord,
For cleansing me from sin;
Fulfil Thy Word,
And make me pure within.
Fill me with fire
Where once I burned with shame;
Grant my desire
To magnify Thy Name.

The great theme of Christian worship is thanksgiving

- we meet to offer our praise and prayers because we are thankful
- this is not like the prayer of the Pharisee – who was thankful not to be like other men
- this is the prayer of the tax collector – calling out for mercy (Luke 18:10-13)
- I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin

Over the years many of my members have remarked how I seem to know so many hymns

- I have never made a conscious effort to learn them
- But, of course, I have lived and breathed them since I was a very small child
- When I was a teenager, I was given a music edition of the Methodist Hymn Book
- Which had belonged to Revd W. Percy Bates, who had been a missionary in China
- Mr Bates was always very kind to me and I was sorry he died when I was so young
- The handwritten words inside the hymn book read:

To my dear husband on his 87th birthday (1.8.1970)
Grateful for inspiration from his storehouse of memorised hymns.

I doubt that I could have competed with Mr Bates, but I can give a fair account of Wesley

- And that has stood me in good stead over the years
- When my grandfather died, I was away on ministry practice in Notting Hill
- I remember my Dad ringing me to tell me the news
- Regarding my grandfather's faith in his last days my father said
- That Jesus had been his light in Satan's darkest hour, which I recognised as a line from Wesley's little-sung, hymn, 'Thou hidden Source of calm repose'
- about the same time, I had my own personal disappointment
- and I had to return from London knowing that my marriage plans were over
- As I headed towards Bethnal Green underground station, so I recalled the words
- From a previous verse of the same hymn

Jesus, my all in all Thou art:
My rest in toil, my ease in pain,
The medicine of my broken heart,
In war my peace, in loss my gain.

I have taken to singing hymns to my dog, especially if I am out walking with him

- He seems to quite like it and can already recite quite a few
- His favourite is, 'One more step along the world I go' which is more at his level
- Out with the dog, I was thinking about this hymn when suddenly I realised
- 'Medicine of my broken heart' was not primarily about personal sadness
- but about comfort for the Blessed Mourners

Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted' (Matt. 5:4)

- this was not mourning in bereavement but mourning because of sin
- this is the passage that Jesus read from Isaiah when he first preached at Nazareth

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour.

(Isaiah 61:1-3)

What I like about the phrase 'bind up the broken-hearted' is that it is hands-on

- the church should be fully involved with those who are suffering in whatever way
- but this particular hands-on treatment is for believers mourning over their sins
- Charles Wesley (MHB 346, original verse added) renders it this way:

Weary of wandering from my God,
And now made willing to return
I hear and bow me to the rod
For Thee, not without hope, I mourn:
I have an Advocate above
A Friend before the throne of love.

O Jesus, full of truth and grace
More full of grace than I of sin
Yet once again I seek Thy face:
Open Thine arms and take me in
And freely my backslidings heal
And love the faithless sinner still.

Now, there are many hymns that we think of primarily in terms of conversion

- But conversion is more the beginning than the end of our Christian experience
- At conversion the believer is released from the penalty of sin
- But many believers are still oppressed by guilt and shame
- Surely, it is with this in mind that Wesley can write
- 'He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free' (HP 744)
- In his hymn, 'King of glory, King of peace,' George Herbert, describes the dialogue
- Between a sinner and his sins (
- The Bible is quite clear, when we have fallen into sin
- We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One
- And that should be enough, but because the Gospel is such a miracle of grace
- Satan who once cast sin as a friend, now casts it as an enemy
- So that sin that is forgiven by God, cries out in accusation against the believer

Though my sins against me cried,
Thou didst clear me;
And alone, when they replied,
Thou didst hear me.

(HP 499)

But we must move on to the third verse of Edwin Orr's hymn

Lord, take my life,
And make it wholly Thine;
Fill my poor heart
With Thy great love divine.
Take all my will,
My passion, self and pride;
I now surrender, Lord
In me abide.

These are words of consecration

- One of the great mistakes that people in the church are making today
- Is to reduce the Christian experience to the gathering of more information
- Instead of emphasising that the Christian experience is a constant transformation
- The backslider likes to convince him or herself that it is possible to stand still
- 'I might not be further ahead as a Christian but I am not further back'
- this is a falsehood of epic proportions, especially when disguised with learning
- it is possible to know a lot more about Jesus but not know Jesus a whole lot more

The classic Wesleyan and Methodist emphasis in the Christian life was summed up as

- Christ dying for us
- Christ reigning in us
- At conversion (justification) the believer accepts – Christ died for me
- But that is not the end, it is a matter of growth in grace and holiness
- As the Lordship of Jesus pervades all of our life
- There are many believers today who experience Christ dying for us
- But are not in the position of Christ reigning in us, it was in the answer
- To the question, 'God is there anything in my life that you do not like?'
- But it is even more subtle than that
- Some years ago, in one of my back gardens, I cut down a rotten tree
- The trouble was that even after it was cut down
- It threw up suckers that had to be attended to
- Eventually, there was only one thing to be done, root out the tree stump completely
- Aren't there just a lot of Christians living like this
- The tree of sin in their life was cut down when they first believed
- But the suckers are still allowed to spring up

It is these suckers in the garden of our Christian experience that rob believers of joy

- Believers are robbed of the joy of salvation because sin lives on their lives
- Believers are robbed of the joy of salvation because sin accuses and condemns

You know that I don't know much about gardening but what I do know is this

- When you have gathered together all that has no place in your garden
- What you really need is fire – it is the same with the garden of our hearts and lives
- General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, wrote the lines

Thou Christ of burning, cleansing flame
Send the fire!

The Lord Jesus Christ is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit and with fire

- It seems to me, from the New Testament, that the believer receives the Holy Spirit
- At his or her conversion – and knows the inward washing of the Spirit for salvation
- But what we as believers need now is the baptism of fire
- In common daily speech, 'baptism of fire' means starting the hard way
- But in the Bible it means refinement and purification
- We have to be careful what we pray for as we might just get it – Wesley prayed

Refining fire, go through my heart,
Illuminate my soul;
Scatter thy life through every part,
And sanctify the whole.

(HP 740)

But the personal experience that can be ours is not something to be sought in isolation

- Too many believers are losing sight of the importance of the community of believers
- But we must turn to the fourth and final verse of Edwin Orr's hymn

O Holy Ghost,
Revival comes from Thee;
Send a revival,
Start the work in me.
Thy Word declares
Thou wilt supply our need;
For blessings now,
O Lord, I humbly plead.

When I was about 12 years old, I went with my parents to a meeting at the Bethel Mission

- The Bethel Mission was on Plymouth Barbican, at the heart of the local community
- For although the Barbican is a tourist area – with ice cream and souvenir shops
- Back then, it was also the home to a socially marginalised sector of the community
- I guess it would have been my fourth service of the day, morning, afternoon, evening
- And now, in the Little Theatre, which I remember vividly but have not entered since
- What can only be described as a mob of youths and expectant Christians gathered
- To hear the great preacher Duncan Campbell
- The youths were behaving so badly that I was ill at ease
- And things did not look much more promising when a dodderly old man appeared
- The meeting unfolded and I remember the reverent hush that fell upon the meeting
- As the presence of God was revealed through the faithful preaching of his servant
- Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down
- That the mountains would tremble before you (Isaiah 64:1)

For 40 years, I have been privileged to be among the fellowship of Christian people

- Who look for a specific work of God in the life of the church
- So that the church returns to a new, vital and fervent relationship with God
- Maybe one so great that spills out into the surrounding community
- It is not that we want another Pentecost – we only needed one Pentecost
- For the Spirit once given has never been withdrawn
- But we need the breath of the Spirit and the fire of Pentecost
- In our hearts and lives, in our church and community
- Our own Methodist Church was born a period of revival

Search me, O God and know my heart today

- God is there anything about my life that you don't like?

Fill me with fire where once I burned with shame

- We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One

Lord, take my life, And make it wholly Thine

- Christ dying for us, Christ reigning in us

Send a revival, Start the work in me.

- Lord send the breath of the Spirit and the fire of Pentecost

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(Psalm 139:23-24)