

# Thirsty for God

## Psalm 63

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*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek  
you;  
my soul thirsts for you...*

David composed Psalm 63 while seeking refuge in the Judean desert. He had fled Jerusalem after his son Absalom mounted a successful rebellion against him. The betrayal felt by David must have been excruciating. His own son sought to steal away the throne and even his life.



As had happened so often in David's life, here in Psalm 63 we see God bringing out the best in him in difficult times. When this Psalm was written David had been ruling for years. He had been blessed by God in remarkable ways. His devotion to the Lord was unique among the kings of Judah. However, David's life and his reign had been marked by serious trials and calamities since his sin with Bathsheba. Indeed, he would come to lose four of his children. And now, one of those children threatened his kingdom and his life. But, as this Psalm indicates, the most devastating loss for David was that he was separated from the presence of the Lord in his sanctuary; the temple.

Certainly, this does not mean that God was somehow bound to the temple. However, David, a faithful Jew, knew that God's ordinary means of grace and his covenant presence with his people was attached to that special place. So committed was David to the Lord's administration of his ordinary means that he ordered that the Ark of the Covenant remain in Jerusalem rather than be taken away into the wilderness even though that would have given him an advantage over Absalom.

### 1. The Dilemma: Our longing souls

- Vv 1-2
- **"Oh God, you are my God..."** – Let us not miss the significance of David's utterance. This is covenantal language. These are not the words of a stranger. In his excellent commentary on the Psalm, Derek Kidner writes that this opening clause of verse one "is the secret to all that follows, since this relationship is the heart of the covenant, from the patriarchs to the present day" (p. 224).
- **"...earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water."** – As he considered his desolate surroundings where water was scarce David saw a direct connection to the condition of his soul. More than anything he desired to taste of the goodness of the Lord in his sanctuary. It is a desire expressed by the king numerous times in the Psalms.
- **"So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary beholding your power and glory."** – Here David recalls those joyful days when he worshipped God in the tabernacle. God's power and glory were displayed in the sanctuary worship, that is, in God's ordinary means of grace. It must be pointed out that David's longing to once again be in the sanctuary of the Lord does not indicate that God is confined to that one place. However, it is a recognition of the significance of God's administration. The Lord determined to be among his people in a special way through the means and in the place that he determined. The inwardness of David's devotion to the Lord would be complete by the outward and corporate praise of God's people.
- C.S. Lewis pointed out that the reason we long so much for something better than this present world is precisely because we were made for another world. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Augustine affirmed this common human dilemma by writing, "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you."

## 2. The Solution: Satisfaction in God alone

- Vv. 3-8
- **“Because your steadfast love is better than life...”** – From the earliest days of the church up until our own moment, a multitude of martyrs have borne witness to this reality. As Paul declared: “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (**Acts 20:24**). As was the common Hebrew practice, David lifts up his hands in prayer “to give the body its share in expressing worship (**Psalms 134:2**) or supplication (**Psalms 28:2; 1 Kings 8:54**)” (Kidner, 226).
- Keep in mind that David offers praise to God even though at the moment he is not experiencing the blessings of God’s covenant love. Indeed, he declares that he will praise God “as long as I live.” The clause captures the totality of life; every moment both pleasant and bitter will be met with praise.
- **“My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food...”** – The image here is rich. David’s desire is not for the merest of relief from thirst. He desires the feast. The “will be satisfied” of verse 5 can be more literally rendered “*my soul is feasted*.” David longs for God for who he is. He is not praying for relief from his present circumstances per se (though such prayers are not inappropriate). But this is a matter of priorities. God is David’s chief goal.
- **“My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.”** – Here we see the connection between the sovereign will of God to lose none of his elect and the perseverance of the saints. David “clings” to God. But in the end the decisive reality is God’s “right hand” which will not let David go. What a comfort for those Christians in the midst of great trials to know that their Savior will never lose his grip on them (**John 10:27-28**).
- This Psalm gives us a window into the experience of longing for God when all the props of material comfort have been taken from us. The particular challenge before those of us in prosperous West is that because we have so much we often confuse the gift with the Giver. What is more, our enjoyment of the gifts can quickly morph into a kind of idolatry whereby we begin to prefer the gift over the Giver. This Psalm captures the heart of a man who clings to God even when the experience of his comfort and the presence of his gifts have been removed.

## 3. The Result: Rejoicing

- Vv. 9-11
- **“They shall be a portion for jackals.”** – Here David employs a graphic image to depict the inevitable end of the wicked. Jackals are scavengers. They feed upon the leavings of greater predators such as lions. The picture is one of total destruction. The wicked will not survive the judgment of God. We must keep in mind that those who sought to overthrow David were opposing God. This was not merely a political squabble among rivals. At that point in redemptive history God ruled his people in part through his anointed king whom he set in Jerusalem. So, David’s words are not self-serving. He understood the moral catastrophe of mutiny against the Lord’s anointed (something he rigorously avoided even after he was anointed by Samuel while Saul was still king).
- David says three things about his enemies: 1) They are going to the place of the dead, 2) They are going to be slain in battle, 3) Their lying mouths will be stopped by the Lord. David has no evidence from his present circumstances that this will happen. But still he trusts in God. He does not conspire how he will regain his kingdom. He simply trusts in God. This does not mean that all planning is somehow ungodly. Not so. The Bible praises planning, diligent work, wise investing, and the like. But what we see here is David’s rest in God’s sovereign hand to bring about the restoration of the kingdom. Again, it is a matter of priorities for David. He desires God far more than a throne. In contrast to the sorrow of the wicked, the king (that is, David) will rejoice.
- As he looked around at his desolate surroundings where water was scarce David saw a direct connection to the condition of his soul. More than anything he desired to taste of the goodness of the Lord in his temple. It is a desire expressed by the king numerous times in the Psalms. David’s Greater Son, the Lord Jesus, appealed to this very imagery of thirsting souls as he called men and women to himself. To the Samaritan woman Jesus said, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (**John 4:10**). During the annual Feast of Booths Jesus stood before the gathered crowd and announced, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink...” (**John 7:37**).