

“Thirsting for Love That’s Better Than Life”

Psalm 63

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

*O God, you are my God; 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.*

*² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.*

*³ Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.*

*⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.*

*⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,*

*⁶ when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;*

*⁷ for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.*

*⁸ My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.*

*⁹ But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;*

*¹⁰ they shall be given over to the power of the sword;
they shall be a portion for jackals.*

*¹¹ But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him shall exult,
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.*

What’s Your Deepest Longing?

When I was 14 years old, I had a poster of a red Lamborghini Countach on my wall. For me, this was the ultimate car, a V-12 Italian sports car, and I just knew I would own one someday. By the time I was 17, my dream car had changed to a red-and-white 1962 Corvette, the last year of the original roadster body style.

Teenage me was convinced that the greatest thing I could own was a really cool car. In reality, the first car I drove was a 1982 Plymouth Horizon, a car that was as far removed from the Lambo and Corvette of my dreams as a go-cart is from a jet plane. Still, it worked, and over the years I have learned that cool cars aren’t the tickets to the good life I once thought they were.

Over the 29 years since I hung that car poster on my bedroom wall, the place that cars held in my heart has been replaced by other objects of deep longing – money, fame, respect, honor, a happy family, significance, being liked and admired by others. In the end, though, I must confess that a large income, a great reputation, acclaim from others, influence, prestige and even a perfect family life are all as ultimately incapable of satisfying the deepest longings of my soul as the Lamborghini that hung on my wall.

Augustine of Hippo said it well in his autobiographical *Confessions* in the year 400: “*You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find their rest in You.*” David wrote much the same thing as Augustine 1,400 years earlier, in a number of his psalms, including Psalm 63.

A. Seeking, vv. 1-4

David wrote Psalm 63 when he was in the Judean wilderness, where he had been driven by his son, Absalom, who had led a rebellion and overthrown David, driving him out of Jerusalem. The wilderness of Judah is a dry and desolate area where Jesus would later spend 40 days fasting before being tempted by Satan three times. In this Judean wasteland, David cried out to God –

*O God, you are my God; 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.*

Last week, we saw that David opened Psalm 3 with a relational cry: “O LORD,” calling on the Lord by name, using His covenant name of YahWeH, a name of relational intimacy and covenant faithfulness. Psalm 63, written at the same time in David’s life, opens with a different relational cry, “O God, you are my God.” The word for God, Elohim, emphasizes God’s power and strength, and by confessing that God is his God, David is crying out to God, trusting that God will exercise His power and strength for him as his God.

David cries out that he seeks God earnestly or early, depending on which translation you have. The Hebrew verb here denotes an intense and earnest seeking, which David emphasizes by saying how much his soul thirsts for God, how much his flesh longs for God, in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.

In his commentary, William Plumer quotes Ernst Hengstenberg, saying, “*A king who could not get even a drink of water to quench his thirst! all human fountains of consolation and happiness were dried up to the Psalmist. But he thirsts all the more earnestly after the divine fountain which still remained open to him.*”

I. How We Seek to Worship God, vv. 1-2

If we were in David’s situation, would we be thinking about God? More importantly, would we be longing for God with eagerness, seeking Him and His presence above even water or any other earthly comfort?

In his commentary, Hengstengberg goes on to say, “When the children of the world are in a dry land, and are wearied and without water, the last remains of any desire after God disappear from their souls. But real piety, in proportion to the severity of personal suffering, becomes all the more intense in its longings after God. By the extent to which a man, in severe sufferings, can say “I seek thee,” may he decide on the state of his soul.”

Most of us live fairly comfortable lives. We live in safe houses with pantries and fridges full of food. We have more clothes than we need, and we are rarely in real danger, afraid for our safety or our lives. In such circumstances, it is easy for us to forget God. David forgot the Lord and failed to long for Him as he should when we was in the safety and abundance of his palace, which is why he fell into his sin with Bethsheba.

When we gather for worship on the Lord’s Day or when we seek the Lord in His word and prayer privately, are we aware of our desperate need for Him? Do we seek Him with passionate zeal, our souls thirsting for Him, our flesh longing for Him? We need Him just as surely on our best days as on our worst, in the comfortable places as much as in the desert wilderness.

Some of you may feel like you are in a desert wilderness in your lives, because of some fear or uncertainty or sin or shame. There is no better time to cry out to the Lord with deep longing.

2. Why We Seek to Worship God, vv. 3-4

How does David seek the Lord? He remembers, worships and meditates -

*So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.*

³ *Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.*

⁴ *So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.*

David here remembers the times when he was able to worship God in the tabernacle. In the Tabernacle were visual and sensory reminders of the power and glory of God: gold, incense, altars, bread. In corporate worship in the Tabernacle, David saw God’s power and glory. The same glimpse of the reality of God is available to all of us in all creation:

*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. – Psalm 19:1*

... his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

– Romans 1:20

Evidence of the power and glory of God are all around us, in spectacular events like hurricanes and eclipses, as well as in ordinary glories such as sunsets and thunderstorms.

Yet it is not God's power and glory which most deeply impress David in the wilderness; it is His steadfast love: "Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you." God's steadfast love draws forth David's deepest and most earnest praise.

As Plumer says, "It is better not to exist than to exist without God's favor. It is better to die enjoying his lovingkindness than to live without it." God's power and glory are impressive, but His steadfast love draws Him close to us, allows us to seek and find Him, bends His power to our aid, and enables us to live for His glory.

And so when we seek to worship God in spirit and in truth, we are reminded of His steadfast love and we are motivated by His love to praise Him, to bless Him as long as we live – telling of how wonderful He is – and to lift up our hands in holy adoration before Him. (Yes, even Presbyterians can lift their hands. The Bible says we can!)

B. Satisfying, vv. 5-8

As David turns to God in worship in the desert, he knows that his soul will only be satisfied in Him:

⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,
⁶ when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
⁷ for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.
⁸ My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

The satisfaction of David's soul is an act of faith, a hope that eagerly anticipates what God will do. Some of our hopes and expectations inevitably disappoint us, but the hope and expectation we have in the Lord will not be disappointed. Our souls will be as satisfied with the presence of God as ever our bodies could be with the most luxurious banquet of food – and without heartburn, gas, bloating or other forms of indigestion.

The reason why our souls will be satisfied with God and with God alone is that our souls were created by God to be satisfied with God alone. Try running your car on water or milk and you'll have more success than trying to satisfy your soul with anything less than God Himself. As Plumer says, "To offer to satisfy such a soul with the things of time is to offer ashes to one dying of thirst. "Gracious souls look down upon the world with a holy disdain, and look up to God with a holy desire."

Last week, in Psalm 3, we saw how the Lord gave David sleep in the desert wilderness. Here we see David awake in the watches of the night, but he is filling his mind with thoughts of God. He is meditating on God.

It is vital to our souls that we meditate on God. How do we meditate on the Lord? We ponder His character, His word and His ways. Psalm 1 says that the blessed man meditates on the law of God day and night. Psalm 77:12 says, “I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.” And Psalm 143:5 says, “I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands.”

David is lying awake pondering and meditating on God for a very real, vital and practical reason: He needs the strength, help, support and joy he can only find in God –

*for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.*

When we truly need help, only the Lord can help us. When we are lonely and full of sorrow, the shadow of the Lord’s wings is the only place where we can sing for joy. God’s right hand, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the only One who upholds us, as our strength and our support.

C. Saving, vv. 9-11

Now that David has turned to the Lord, sought Him, worshiped Him, meditated on Him and found his strength and joy in Him alone, his thoughts turn to his enemies and to his need for salvation –

*⁹ But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;
¹⁰ they shall be given over to the power of the sword;
they shall be a portion for jackals.
¹¹ But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him shall exult,
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.*

Sometimes people accuse Christians of being escapist, of not being willing to deal with reality. They say religion is just a crutch or the opioid of the masses, as Marx said. The truth is that true and saving faith in Jesus Christ is the only thing that properly prepares our souls to deal with reality.

I. The King’s Enemies

David was not ignorant of the fact that he had many violent enemies who wished him dead and who opposed God’s calling on his life. We need to also not be blind to the fact that we have enemies, enemies of our soul who wish us dead and who oppose God’s call on our lives. The world, our own sinful nature and the devil all conspire against us daily, plotting treacherously against us. If we face these enemies in our own strength and wisdom, we are doomed to fail.

David could speak with confidence about the destiny of his enemies only after he had worshiped God, only after he had meditated on God and remembered that God alone was his help, his source of joy, his strength and support. In the light of God’s power, glory and steadfast love, David could confidently

speak of the future destruction of his enemies.

2. The King's Followers

And yet David is not just thinking about his own victory. He knows that the downfall of his enemies will not be for his benefit and blessing alone. He knows that even as he rejoices in victory, all who swear by him – that is, all who pledge loyalty to him – will also be rewarded. Perhaps David is lying awake in the desert, looking around at the 600 loyal men who surround him in this hostile wilderness as he sings these lines.

The True King & His Victory

David's song, composed in the Judean wilderness, is beautiful and confident, joyful and encouraging, but ultimately David's song must point us beyond David, to the true King to Whom we have sworn our allegiance and Whose final victory will bring eternal joy to all His followers.

Think about how much of Jesus we see in these lines, especially knowing where and when they were written. Jesus Himself was driven into the Judean desert wilderness, not by a rebellious son but by the Holy Spirit Himself. Jesus was alone in that wilderness, no food and no 600 men to surround and protect Him. At the end of those 40 days, Satan himself came and tempted Jesus three times.

As Jesus was tempted, He showed that His heart was truly aligned with this psalm, which sings of Him. He resisted the devil's temptation to turn stone into bread by proclaiming, "Man shall not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Thus, Jesus showed that the word of God was His bread, and he would satisfy Himself on His Father's words.

When Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple and tempted Him to throw Himself down, so the angels would come and save Him and show everyone who He truly was, Jesus said, "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.*" He would not take a short-cut. He would not force the hand of God to serve His agenda. He would not dishonor His Father.

When Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and offered them all to Him, if only he would bow down and worship him, Jesus said "*Be gone, Satan! For it is written,*

*"You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve."*

Jesus could not be tempted by all that the world had to offer. He knew the devil's offer was the offer of ashes to a man dying of thirst. Far from solving Jesus' distress, it would plunge Him into unspeakable horror. Jesus Himself looked at the kingdoms of the world with a holy disdain and looked to His Father alone with a holy desire, a desire to worship and serve Him and Him alone.

Furthermore, the very fact that Jesus' responses to Satan's temptations all came in the form of quotes from Scripture shows how Jesus was meditating on God and His word.

Jesus also knew that His victory over Satan's temptations would mean not just vindication for Himself but everlasting joy for all of God's people. When Jesus fully obeyed His Father to the end, He not only won the battle that ensured His enemy's defeat, but He also ensured that all who swear by Him will indeed exult for all eternity.

Hebrews 12 calls us to look beyond the human author of Psalm 63, to look beyond ourselves even, and to see the One whose victory brings joy and strength to all His people –

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2, ESV)

Jesus is the King who rejoices in God's victory, won through His suffering, and He is the only One in Whom we may indeed exult for all eternity!