

INSIDE AND OUT 8-2-15

A MEDITATION ON PSALM 63

(Psalm 63) I have had an interesting last nine days in Florida.The bulk of my time was spent in Orlando, attending the eighth and final class for my doctoral program with Reformed Seminary. This class was on the Psalms and each of us chose one particular Psalm to be the focus of our study and presentation. My choice was Psalm 63. It is a Psalm that I have loved for a long time. I memorized it many years back, but I have never taught on it. But, I have been immersed in it for a couple of months now. Somewhere in the near future I will probably do a couple of full sermons on it, but for today I want to just focus our attention on one aspect of it. It is not a long Psalm so we can read the whole thing. Psalm 63:1-11 (*A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah*) *O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water.*² *Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.*³ *Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You.*⁴ *So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.*⁵ *My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips.*⁶ *When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches,*⁷ *For You have been my help, And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy.*⁸ *My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me. But those who seek my life to destroy it, Will go into the depths of the earth.*¹⁰ *They will be delivered over to the power of the sword; They will be a prey for foxes.*¹¹ *But the king will rejoice in God; Everyone who swears by Him will glory, For the mouths of those who speak lies will be stopped.*

So – how are you doing? (pause) How many times a week do you hear that? Maybe nowhere more often than in church. How are you doing? Very common question. Most of us have a sort of stock answer. *Fine, thanks.* Or, *great!* Or *Could be worse.* Some times we hear the question: *How are you?* as a simple greeting – no different than “howdy.” *How are you? How are you?* We may not even feel the need to answer. We wonder whether the person asking really cares to know or is just being polite. Man! It can really get complicated. At my high-school reunion I am seeing people I haven’t seen for twenty or thirty years and they are asking, *Hey, Dan, how you been?* I mean – are we talking tonight? You want a report on the last three decades? What did you have in mind here and how much time do you have? But, let’s imagine someone asks the question in a way

that suggest they sincerely want to know. How are you doing? Even still that is a tricky question. I know I am prone to overthink these kinds of things, but I wrestle with what to say and upon what to base my answer. For most of us there are a couple of ways we can go. When we think of how we are doing we can think of our external worlds or our internal worlds. By external world I mean things like your health, your finances, your work, your family, your favorite team. How are you doing? *Great, I just got a promotion! Terrific, my daughter just married a great guy.* Or, *Well, our business is struggling* or *my father just had a stroke.* You see, those are external things. No mention of how your emotional world is being impacted – although often we can imagine.

So, that is one way to answer the *how ya* question – by reference to externals. The other way is to refer to internals. When you think, *How am I?* you ponder your emotional world. *Am I anxious, sad, angry, happy, excited, content?* (pause) When you truly answer the question – which way do you go? To externals or internals? And if you are asking the question – which one do you really want to hear?

Now, we all will recognize that there is an obvious link between one's external world and the internal world. If someone just found out their spouse has cancer we would anticipate that such an external reality will have significant impact on the internal world. But – but – that impact is not the same for every person is it? What you tell me is going on over here only suggests to me what might be going on over here, but it certainly doesn't make it clear or certain. So, I am asking you – what is the connection between your external world and your internal world? These two worlds come together in the elements of our personality that we call the heart and the mind. But, it is far from simple how these two correspond and it differs from person to person.

At the risk of oversimplifying let's consider just the categories of "good" and "bad" in the realms of the external and the internal. With just those two categories we have four possible arrangements. First, there is the situation of someone who is doing well over here in the externals and well in the internals. Meaning – for Heather, work is good, health is good, family is well and, corresponding to that, Heather is feeling well too, content, not anxious or depressed, generally happy. Good and Good. On the other end of things it is easy to imagine Jared who is doing bad in the externals and bad in the internals. In other words, he is not so healthy, work isn't going well, relationships are poor. As he would assess it life is tough. Jared's internal world reflects that. He is down and he is anxious, definitely not a happy man. Bad here. Bad here.

So those are two possible categories and easy to understand. But, we all know that human reality is such that some people are good in one dimension and bad in the other. For example –Brenda. In the externals, Brenda would seem to be doing well. No health problems to speak of. She has a quality job making good money. No particular crises in her family – but Brenda is struggling emotionally. She is depressed or anxious. Her internal world is not a positive one at all. Does this ever happen? Good externals, bad internals? Sure it does. Some of you are there this morning.

Our fourth category then is obvious. This is Roger who is experiencing some real problems in his external world. His job is coming to an end and he is facing unemployment. Back problems have kept him from doing some of the things he has usually enjoyed. He may even be dealing with difficult relationships with his children or his siblings. But – *How you doing Roger?* Roger is on the inside, truly happy. He isn't down, discouraged, or hopeless. His attitude is positive. He is at peace with God and himself. He certainly feels the struggles, but they aren't tearing him up on the inside.

Now, is it fair to say that, generally speaking, all four of these kind of folks exist? At some point in your life you may have been in each of these groupings, but you certainly have known folks in each category. And, if this is real and true, there is an important lesson to be learned. Your internal well-being is not determined by your external well-being. It is influenced. Affected. But not determined. Is that fair to say? (pause) And, if that is fair it raises the huge question – what makes the difference then in the condition of a person's internal world? If the internal is not just a result of the external, what determines the health and happiness of my heart?

So, this brings us back to Psalm 63. This is one of those psalms for which context makes a big difference. The opening subtitle is: *(A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah)*. Specifically, when this psalm was written, we believe David was running away from the forces of Absalom his son who had entered Jerusalem to overthrow the government of his father. It is in I Samuel 15. Get the story here. David had been king in Jerusalem for about 17 years. One of his many sons, Absalom, has recruited an army and marched upon Jerusalem. David's life and kingdom is under assault. And not just from anyone. But by his own son! I mean, this is a terrible, terrible thing. David the King has huge problems within his family, which was all wrapped up with huge problems at work. For him, work problems also meant an imminent danger to his personal health. David was experiencing a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad day like few of us have ever experienced. And he can't go home to count his woes. He is on the run to save his life and,

therefore, goes from the comforts of the palace to the austerity of nights in the desert. Dangers and desert is what he was facing. His external world then would be regarded as extremely bad. The psalm itself makes reference to this when it mentions the dry and weary land and particularly, when it mentions those who seek his life to destroy it.

But, but, but, what does this psalm suggest to us about David's internal world? It seems like David is in this place – bad externals, good internals. His son is out to kill him, but he is finding stability and even joy in his relationship with God. How can that be? What does the Psalm suggest to us? Verses 3-5 focus on God and His love. David says that God's love is better than life. He says the Lord satisfies His soul like steak and cheesecake satisfy his stomach. David bears witness to a never-changing spiritual reality that addresses the deepest human needs even when the circumstances of life stink.

That is really important. One of the most powerful ways we bear witness for Jesus is to walk in peace and happiness despite the negative external realities in our lives. When we do that, we are announcing to the world that God is the supreme treasure and the pearl of great price. John Piper says God is most glorified by us when we are most satisfied in Him and that satisfaction in God is most obvious when it survives the trials this world will throw at us. But then, David goes on to point us to something he actually does, an activity of mind and maybe body, that is part of the secret of contentment for the believer. It is in verse 6. Do you see it? *When I remember you on my bed.* Remembering may be the most underrated discipline of the spiritual life. But notice what he remembers. It is God. Out there in the desert, sleeping in tents or under trees, there were all kinds of thing vying for David's attention. He could have been eaten up with fears, or stewing with anger. He might have been plotting strategy for how to get his kingdom back. But his testimony is that in that moment he turned his heart and mind toward God. He remembered God and meditated on Him. Do you think that David's mental focus had anything to do with his positive internal condition?

In Psalm 63 we see a repeated theme of remembering. First, David (verse 2) remembers his experience of God, the vision of His power and glory in the sanctuary. It is out of this remembrance that he is able to worship despite his surroundings and circumstances. Then, in verses 6-7 he again speaks of his memories of the Lord that sustain and encourage his heart. He reflects on how the Lord has been his help in times past. The idea of remembrance and memorials is one that pervades the Scriptures. We see it in the activity of Old Testament saints. We see it prescribed in the Mosaic law. We read of Jesus calling on His followers to "do this in remembrance of me." Clearly, there is

something of magnificent psychological significance found in remembering the past and the divine rescues that have been experienced in it.

So, the lesson for those who seek to walk with God now is to take the remembering of God's goodness very seriously. The most obvious application of this idea is the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Jesus was so concerned about our mental focus, our remembering, that He established this ordinance for His church for all time. He said, *Do this to remember Me*. The Doctor of our souls knows there is nothing we need more, If we are going to let eternal realities, rather than temporal circumstances, control the climate of our internal world, it is imperative that those eternal realities own our thoughts and meditations. AW Tozer wrote this: *What we think about when we are free to think about what we will - that is what we will soon become. (R) Our voluntary thoughts not only reveal what we are, they predict what we will become.* What the externals of your world will be – well that is very hard to predict. But what your internal realities will be tomorrow is largely known by where your mind goes today. So, here is the table of the Lord. Let's do this in remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ, His righteousness, His sacrifice, His salvation, his love.

In a moment I will introduce our time of communion. As we share it today, we are going to provide an open mike time for those of you who will to share with us some time in your life when the externals were not good, but the internal was – and why, how that came to be.