

Psalm 63.1-4
The Glory of Thirsting for God
Sermon #2 in a Series on Psalm 63

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on August 20, 2006.

This transcript may be downloaded and/or copied for reading and personal use,
provided it is not changed, sold, or quoted without credit,
and that this note and the following copyright notice is included.
©2006 by Glenn Durham. All rights reserved.

Main Idea: *Even in the wilderness satisfaction is found only in God.*

Introduction

When Theodore Roosevelt was President, his big-game hunting trips were famous. I especially like the story of his return home from an expedition in Africa in 1905. Prior to the development of commercial aviation, the President sailed into New York aboard a huge steamship. As the ocean liner docked, he was received with great fanfare. Bands played, crowds cheered and excitedly tried to get a glimpse of Teddy Roosevelt, and reporters took down his every word.

Remaining completely unnoticed were two other passengers: Mr. and Mrs. Henry Morrison. After 40 years as missionaries in Africa, they were returning America for their well-earned retirement. But no one met the faithful missionary and his wife. No one cheered; none sought a record of what he would say. Disembarking after the president and crowds had left, Henry Morrison felt quite depressed and bitterly remarked to his wife that they should get some recognition for coming home after forty years in the Lord's service. To which his wise wife said, "But Henry, we're not home yet."

We are not home yet. We still wander, somewhere between the Garden and glory. At times we feel we could touch heaven here on earth—so wondrous are life's blessings. The call to "taste and see that the Lord is good" goes forth and we can almost touch it to our lips.

Then a moment passes and we are dismayed. The transition from tasting and seeing to dry and thirsty requires but an instant and we move from grasping heaven to wondering if it was a mirage. Sin turns the sweet bitter while still on our lips and we again wander in the wilderness. Disappointed by failed expectations, we are never quite satisfied.

Psalm 63 is written for us.

Chrysostom (the famous preacher of c. 400 AD) said: "It was decreed and ordained by the primitive Fathers, that no day should pass without the public singing of this Psalm."

Charles Spurgeon said: "I know of no time and no season in which this Psalm would sound unsuitably from a believing tongue! It especially, however, belongs to any who, by their circumstances or by their state of heart, feel themselves to dwell in a desert land.... That stage of spiritual history which may be well described as a wilderness experience wherein we have little rest, much temptation and consequent proving of heart and discovery of inward weakness...."

David, like many saints, finds he must stir up faith while in a spiritual desert. Thus the inspired title: "A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah." King David is far from home, physically in his case, but his literal wilderness applies to all who know times of spiritual dryness.

Matthew Henry: "This world is a weary land; it is so to the worldly that have their *portion in it*—it will yield them no true satisfaction; it is also to the godly that have their *passage*

through it—it can promise them little.” How do we survive in a dry and weary land? Psalm 63 tells us.

1. When In the Wilderness, We Must Recognize God’s Claim on Us (Psalm 63.1)

It is natural to believe, when troubles abound, that our problem is the outward circumstance. But God’s people have found (with David) that the absence of comforts can be met with confidence and serenity when we walk with God; likewise, even the most lavish multiplication of ease cannot help our souls when God withdraws.

The first key to life in the wilderness is to Recognize God’s claim on us. It is God for whom our souls long; it is heaven which is the home that our hearts desire.

Augustine correctly wrote to God: “You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

David (here in Psalm 63) recognizes God’s claim on his life and soul; not everyone can.

1.1. The Unconverted CANNOT Recognize God’s Claim on his soul

David prays to the God who made heaven and earth and begins by swearing his allegiance: “You will be my God; you and no other! You have awakened my soul so that I know it is you and you alone to whom I belong and for whom I long.”

Such a profession cannot be made truthfully by those who have not been born again. O yes, every soul thirsts for God—just as surely as every physical body hungers for food. And every person, in one way or another, seeks to satisfy that thirst. But like a survivor of a shipwreck, surrounded by the ocean, the drinking of saltwater never quenches.

Similarly, those who have *not* been awakened to the all-surpassing pleasure of delight in God’s glory, *will* sinfully seek satisfaction elsewhere. The soul thirsts, but rather than earnestly seek God, they pour on the salt of worldly pleasures. Wealth, ease, power, prestige—these and a thousand other idols will be pushed toward the soul that was made to know God alone.

When Jesus was with us, a rich man asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him that everything we do drives us away from God; we must lay all we have and all we are at the feet of Jesus. At these words, “he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” In that interaction, God made clear his claim on the soul; but this man could not recognize that God was his true desire. His commitment was to his works and his attainment.

As Jesus said to that man, so I say to you: God made you for himself; you will not rest until you rest in him. Pray with David: “God, my soul thirsts for you. Will you not free me to seek satisfaction in you? Allow me to come to the Living Water so that my soul might thirst no more.”

Until you are converted to a disciple of Jesus Christ, you *cannot* recognize God’s claim on your life.

1.2. The Sinner DOES NOT Recognize God’s Claim on his soul

God has a claim on *all* people as Creator; he has a greater claim on *his* people through his covenant. And yet, because even those who know God retain their sin nature, we refuse to recognize that it is God whom we desire.

When our bodies are hungry, we feed them. When sick, we nurse them back to health. When an ankle is sprained, we favor it. We cut our hair and floss our teeth and trim our nails. We are good at caring for our physical bodies.

Unfortunately we prefer cheap substitutes for our souls. Instead of feeding the spirit on Scripture and prayer, we eat brownies or watch TV. Instead of meditating on Christ through a soul-stirring book or conversation, we play computer games and surf the web. None of those is necessarily evil; yet each can be used to avoid God's claim on our soul.

Pastor Kris Lundgaard well explains this struggle: "You can feel the hostility of the flesh whenever you approach God—it makes real love for him into work. Digging around the Bible to find a juicy new insight to impress your small group is like sailing the Caribbean, but pouring over the Scriptures to find the Lover of your soul is like skiing *up* Mount Everest. Conjuring up a happy mood with some music you don't even know the words to is like solving 2+2 with a calculator. But savoring the glory of Christ and his tender love until your heart is softened toward him is like using mental math to calculate pi to the thousandth place. And giving a birthday present to your best friend is like forcing down some double-fudge brownies. But giving up your extra bedroom to a homeless person in the name of Jesus is like eating the Rockies for breakfast."

It is easier to do just about anything other than earnestly seek the One for whom my soul longs. Why? The Bible says it is because I have a "sin nature"—the very thing which my soul most wants is that which I refuse to give. This is precisely **C. S. Lewis'** point: "Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Those who are not Christians cannot recognize God's claim on their lives; those who are believers often do not recognize his claim, but...

1.3. Everyone Should Recognize God's Claim on his soul

We love the Psalms because they are *expressive* of our faith. **Thomas Brooks** rightly observes that David does "not say my soul thirsts for water, but my soul thirsts for thee; nor he does say my soul thirsts for the blood of my enemies, but my soul thirsts for thee; he does not say my soul thirsts for deliverance out of this dry and thirsty land, where no water is or that his soul thirsts for a crown and kingdom, but my soul thirsts for thee, my flesh longs for thee."

David longed for God; God graciously records his song that we might have perfect words to *express* our experiences and feelings when we find the same longing welling up in us. The Psalms are *expressive* of our faith.

But what do we do when the feeling is not there?

Dr. John Collins, Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Seminary, "I'm not sure I can sing something like, 'my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you' on Sunday just because the pastor who picked the song on Wednesday thought I should. After all, I only rarely feel even a little this way.... I don't want to lie to God—he'd know it anyhow—and I don't want to lie to my fellow believers by singing this; so I might as well keep silent. The trouble with that approach is that it misses the point. The Psalms are not *primarily* expressive—that is, to express what I now feel. They are instead *formative*—that is, they show me how I ought to feel, and if I honestly offer my worship to God, he will enable me actually to begin to feel such things. That is to say, we worship God properly when we sing the Psalms by faith, not by sight."

So what shall we do when we find ourselves in a spiritual wilderness? We memorize Psalm 63 and pray it by faith. We sing it because we know that it was Christ's experience while

here and it can be ours because I am in Christ. We recognize God's claim on our souls and respond as believers in the Word.

2. When In the Wilderness, We Must Remember God's Acts of Redemption (Psalm 63.2)

Central to worship is the retelling of the story of redemption. Israel's calendar was built around the Passover, the redemption from Egypt. Their sanctuary services focused on sacrifices which redeemed sinful men and pointed to the coming of the Lamb. So David remember when he has "looked" upon God in the sanctuary (the Hebrew verb is clearly past tense and he is not there now). He remembers when he saw reenacted the story of God's power and glory—the grace of redemption.

Worship after the cross has the same point: we begin with how great is God, which convicts us of our falling short of his glory, and leads us to look to Christ, his powerful redeemer. Jesus himself taught us to eat this bread and drink this cup to proclaim his death (which is his means of redemption) until he comes. The Lord's Supper is central to public worship and the proclamation of God's redeeming work.

Five things this verse asks of us when in the wilderness.

- 1) Believe that our happiness is to see more of God's power and glory.
- 2) Remember God's saving acts in our life.
- 3) Believe that we can know Christ through prayer and praise.
- 4) Devote ourselves to preparation for, attendance on and participation in public worship.
- 5) Proclaim these truths directly to God for the sake of our own souls. Eighteen times in eight verses the second person pronoun is used: David is not talking *about* God, he is speaking directly *to* God. Nineteen times the first person pronoun appears: he is not talking *about* someone else, he is expressing *his personal* faith and desire.

To encourage our obedience, let me give you examples of the effects of these acts of faith in the wilderness:

- 1) You will become less enchanted by the world and less controlled by your circumstances.
- 2) You will be renewed in your Christian walk.
- 3) Your lusts will be crucified and your holiness increased.
- 4) You will become more humble before God and gracious toward others.
- 5) You will be better equipped for and delight more in fighting Satan in the Spirit rather than in the flesh.
- 6) You will become more like Christ.

Spurgeon: "Our misery is that we thirst so little for these sublime things, and so much for the mocking trifles of time and sense. We are in very truth always in a weary land, for this is not our rest; and it is marvelous that believers do not more continuously thirst after their portion far beyond the river where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; but shall see the face of their God, and his name shall be in their foreheads. David did not thirst for water or any earthly thing, but only for spiritual manifestations. The sight of God was enough for him, but nothing short of that would content him. . . . Oh, my soul, imitate the psalmist, and let all thy desires ascend towards the highest good; longing here to see God, and having no higher joy even for eternity."

Let us remember God's acts of redemption as we look for him in the breaking of bread and in the praise of his people.

3. When In the Wilderness, We Must Respond to God's Lovingkindness (Psalm 63.3-4)

When the Cornhuskers are again national champions, will you not speak of it? If you are blessed with a wife, will you not tell of her beauty? When you have children, will you not advertise of their excellence? When you visit the Grand Canyon, will you not describe to us its grandeur?

Do we not have greater reasons to bless our God? Has he not provided better provisions and greater possessions to his children than all the wealth the world can offer? Is it not better to serve in his kingdom than to rule a mighty nation? Is not communion with him more important than life?

If our lips are not praising God, if our speech is not characterized by thankfulness to God, if we are not women and men of prayer, who lift heart and hands to commune with God, how then can we claim to know him?

It is not hypocritical to respond to God's lovingkindness even if we do not feel like it. Hypocrisy is when we praise and pray and proclaim God's greatness when we do not believe it. David believes it because he remembers experiencing it. Though he is now in the wilderness, he responds *by faith* to the lovingkindness of God.

We must not entertain the question of whether we feel like worshipping—often we will not. We worship in the wilderness because we believe that God hears our prayers, that he delights in our praise and that he meets with us when we offer ourselves to Him in Jesus' name.

4. Conclusion

C. S. Lewis likened our worship services to the tuning of an orchestra in preparation for something much grander: "The tuning up of the orchestra can be itself delightful, but only to those who can, in some measure, however little, anticipate the symphony. The Jewish sacrifices, even our own most sacred rites as they actually occur in human experience, are, like the tuning, promise, not performance. Hence, like the tuning, they may have in them much duty and little delight; or even none. But the duty exists for the delight. When we carry out our religious duties, we are like people digging channels in a waterless land, in order that when at last the waters come, it may find them ready. I mean for the most part. There are happy moments, even now, when a trickle creeps along the dry beds; and happy souls to whom this happens often." (*Reflections on the Psalms*, 97).

May God give us the courage and faith to dig channels for his grace to pour through, even when we are in a dry and thirsty land where there is (yet) no water. Amen.