

## **Thirsty for God: The Christian Experience of Longing for God**

**Psalm 63:1-11**

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Psalm 63. David is in the wilderness. This is probably not the time of his wilderness flight from Saul. Our best hint at that comes from verse 11, which tells us about those whose mouths are speaking lies against him, [and] apparently indicates the time from the revolt of Absalom. You'll remember his own son, Absalom, drove David out of Jerusalem, out of his palace, out of his capital, out of the place of worship of the people of God, away from the temple, away from the courts of Zion and out into the wilderness. And this is probably the occasion in which David sings this Psalm. It's as if all the legs had been knocked out from under him, all of the support, all of the blessing are withdrawn and he's in the wilderness. You even see it in the title, "*when he was in the wilderness of Judah.*" And it's in that setting that this beautiful Psalm comes from the heart, from the mouth of David (of course, ultimately by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit). Once again we see God bringing the best out of David in the worst of times. Few other Psalms match the devotional expressions of this Psalm, and certainly no Psalm surpasses the devotional expression of this Psalm. Let's devote ourselves to it for a few moments tonight. Before we do so, let's look to God in prayer and ask Him to help us. Let's pray.

*Our Lord and our God, this is Your word and there may be some of us tonight who feel as if we are in the dry and weary place. We may be in a place of trial or of testing. We may be in a place where all the circumstances point to a distance from You and yet we may find our hearts crying out to You, reaching out to You, longing to know Your presence. And You have supplied us with words for our experience in this Psalm because it so beautifully expresses the Christian's longing for God, and we would long for You like David longs for You in this word. We ask, O God, that You would help us to embrace the truth of this Your word, to learn its lessons, to be motivated by its encouragements, to believe its promises and prospects, and to rejoice in the history of your dealing with David; knowing that You are the same yesterday and today and, yes, forever. And, therefore, as an unchanging God who is good and loving in His purposes towards His children, we may expect from You the answers which You gave to Your servant David. Now help us then embrace this Your truth, draw strength and encouragement*

*from it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Hear God's word.

1. 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. 9. 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.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

In this Psalm David expresses to us his thirst for God, his satisfaction in God, and his trust in God. In fact, each of the three stanzas follow along those lines. In verses 1-4 (in the first stanza, if you will) you will see David's thirst for God. He expresses his desire for God in verses 5 through 8. In the second portion you'll see David express his satisfaction in God. He not only longs for God, but he is satisfied in God. He finds all his longings met in God. And then finally in verses 9 through 11, the third portion of the Psalm, you'll see David affirm his trust in God. God is the One in whom he trusts. And David has words for us today in whatever wilderness we may find ourselves. David again is being tested, and once again God is using the worst circumstances to bring about the best in David.

### **I. The Christian thirsts for God (1-4) [David wants God—The things that we're after]**

I wonder if you can possibly imagine where David is as he says these words. David has been reigning for many years as king in Jerusalem. David has been extraordinarily blessed by God, but ever since the sin of David with Bathsheba, there have been trials in David's life. You realize that after David's sin with Bathsheba he would lose four children. There would be many trials in David's life after that great sin. Though he was forgiven of God, and though he was welcomed back into fellowship, and though in God's mercy the joy of his salvation was restored—there were many testings and this is one. Because one of

David's own children turns against him, rallies some of the leading men of his kingdom against him, and David has to flee from Jerusalem. His son takes some of David's concubines up onto the rooftops of the palace and has relations with them. It's an absolutely horrifying thought. You go back to the pictures of David's own lusting that day on the rooftop and all of David's sins...surely he must have felt they're being visited to him in triplicate. And he's driven out from the land. He's not king on the throne. And worst for David is not just that he's in the wilderness, it's not just that he's been separated from His power and rule; it's that he's been separated from the worship of God, from the temple of God, from the praise of God.

And it's there in the wilderness with his rebellious son reigning in Jerusalem that David sings the words of this song. All the props have been kicked out from under David. Everything has gone wrong. All the blessings seem to have been lost and it's in this circumstance that David says, *"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."* David is telling us that having lost everything, the one thing he longs for is God. He thirsts for God. What David wants is God.

Now you think about it. If you had lost everything, what would be the one thing that you would want? You know it really tells you a lot about a person how they respond in this kind of adversity, doesn't it? John Calvin makes a very interesting comment. He said, "There are some people who are religious on the exterior but they lack a true knowledge, a true saving knowledge of God. And the closer they are to religious ceremonies, the more spiritual they feel and the more they seem to long after God. But remove them from those religious ceremonies and their zeal for God vanishes." And then he points out, Look at David. David is separated from the religious ceremonies of Jerusalem and yet his heart still longs for God. It's a testimony to the reality of the grace in David's life. He longs for God. Notice the very first words of the Psalm: *"O God, You are my God."* The "I / thou" relationship between David and God is at the heart of his devotion. This is the covenant promise you remember. "I will be your God and you will be my people." And David is here affirming that: 'Lord, You are my God.' Religion is all about the personal pronouns, isn't it? 'Lord, You are *my* God.' It's not just you're *our* God; You're *my* God. And David professes that here and it's at the very heart of this Psalm. In fact the statement here in verse 1 and then the statement in verse 3 give us anchor points for the whole Psalm. *"O God, You are my God,"* verse 1. *"Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You."* David will bless God because of His covenant love, because of His lovingkindness, because of His loving faithful loyalty to David to stay with Him and to be with Him in every circumstance. And David's longings force upon us a question.

What are we after? What do we want? David says he wants God, but what do we really want? And circumstances like David's, when you've lost everything, call out

for a real answer to that question. Billy and I today were talking with a farmer who has lost everything, literally. Twenty-two years of farming, borrowed millions of dollars and paid back millions of dollars, and in 2001 everything went belly up and literally he lost everything. He lost his farm. He lost his house. He lost his furniture. He lost his car. He has nothing. And he's asking the same question. What does the Lord want to teach me? What do I need to do to follow after the Lord? How would the Lord have me respond to this? And David having lost everything says, 'The one thing I want is God.'

And, my friends, that's what worship is about. You worship the one thing you really want. A person has said this, "Worship is about saying, this person, this thing, this experience, this whatever is what matters most to me. It's of highest value in my life." That thing may be a relationship or a dream or a position or a status or something you own or a name or a job or some kind of pleasure, but whatever name you put on that thing, this thing is what you have concluded in your heart is what is worth most to you. And what is worth most to you is what you worship. Worship, in essence, is declaring what you value the most.

As a result, worship fuels all our actions. It becomes the driving force of all that we do. Every person on the planet worships something. There's a multitude of souls proclaiming with every breath what is worthy of their affection, their attention, and their allegiance, proclaiming with every step what it is that they worship. Some of us attend the church, professing to worship the living God above all. Others rarely darken the doors and they might say that worship isn't a part of their lives because they aren't religious. But everybody has an altar and every altar has a throne.

And so how do you know where and what it is you worship? It's easy. You follow the trail of your time and your affection and your energy and your money and your allegiance, and at the end of that trail you'll find a throne. And whatever or whoever is on that throne is what is of highest value to you. On that throne is what you worship. Sure, not too many of us walk around and say, "I worship my stuff" or "I worship my job" or "I worship this pleasure" or "I worship her or him" or "I worship my body" or "I worship me"...but the trail never lies. We may say we value this thing or that thing more than any other but the volume of our actions speaks louder than our words. We worship what matters most to us and David is telling us here, 'The thing that matters most to me, the thing that I want most is God. You can have my kingdom; you can have my throne, but what I want is God.' And his words are so important for us. Here in the worst circumstances God brings out the best in David and David expresses His thirst for the living God.

## **II. The Christian is satisfied with God (5-8) [David enjoys God—The things that we treasure]**

But he doesn't just thirst for the living God. David tells us in verses 5 through 8 that he's satisfied in the living God. He not only longs for God but he enjoys God. God is the thing that we treasure, and again David presses that question on us: What do we treasure? David says he treasures God. He's satisfied in God. Verse 5, "*My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth offers praises with joyful lips.*" Have you noticed the contrast? Verse 1, "*My soul thirsts for You*"; verse 5, "*My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness.*" He longs for God on the one hand, but he is satisfied in God on the other. He finds all of his longings met and more in God. That's why William Guthrie says, "It's the experience of the Christian to be able to say of Christ, less would not satisfy, more is not desired." And David is saying that...he's saying, 'I long for someone (God), and I am satisfied in someone (God).'

John Piper says this is the authenticating, inner-essence of worship. "It's the essence of worship to be satisfied with Christ, to prize Christ, and to cherish Christ, and to treasure Christ." And he says, "This definition of the inner-essence of worship encompasses all of life that flows from the heart." And so in our worship services, what are we about? He puts it this way, "Worship services are about going hard after God. When we say that what we do on Sunday mornings is to go hard after God, we mean that we are going hard after satisfaction in God. We're going hard after God as our prize. We're going hard after God as our treasure, our soul food, our heart delight, our spirit's pleasure, or to put Christ in His rightful place. It means that we are going hard after all that God is for us in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen." David is telling us that he treasures God.

What do we treasure? Do we find our satisfaction in God? We don't simply long for Him but we find our satisfaction in Him? David is telling us that He is satisfied in God and David's own experience is a testimony to us. The Christian thirsts for God. The Christian longs for God more than anything else. And the Christian is satisfied in God: He enjoys God. Our first answer to *The Shorter Catechism* says that "[we] glorify God and enjoy Him forever." That's what we're made for. That's the chief end of man. And David is speaking of this here. He longs to glorify God and he finds enjoyment in Him.

### **III. The Christian rejoices in God (9-11) [David trusts God—The things that we trust]**

And so David thirsts for God and he's satisfied in God, but he also trusts God. David says, "*Those who seek my life to destroy it,*" verse 9, "*will go into the depths of the earth.*" He says three things about his enemies: They're going to go to the place of the dead; they're going to be slain in battle; and they're going to have their lying mouths stopped by the Lord. Now David has no circumstantial assurance of this but he trusts in God. David does not conspire in this Psalm to think out how he's going to regain his kingdom. He simply trusts in God.

And I want to ask you this question: What do you trust in? When things really go bad, who do you trust? What do you trust in? Do you trust in your own wisdom? Do you trust in your own plan? Do you trust in someone else to get you out of it? Or do you trust in God? David trusts in God in this circumstance, and because he trusts in God he's able to rejoice in God. He contrasts himself in verses 9 to 11 to those are scheming against him. He says, "The king will rejoice and glory in God." Why? Because David knows that divine grace always gets good out of evil. He's seen it happen in his life over and over. He knows that God's grace always gets good out of evil. He knows that He's going to do it in this circumstance, and so he's able to trust God. He longs for God. He longs for the right thing, the right person. He's satisfied in God. He's satisfied in the right person and he trusts in God.

And notice that these longings of the heart are not kept to himself; they're expressed publicly. So you see, for instance, in verse 3, *"My lips will praise you. I will bless you as long as I live, I will lift up my hands in Your name."* And he declares again that the king will rejoice in God in verse 11. David is not satisfied simply in his heart to long for God and to be satisfied in God and to rejoice in God, but he's going to express it publicly in the corporate worship of the people of God.

Now this Psalm shows us the experience of longing for God when all the props have been taken out from under us, when everything else has been taken away. The great trial that we have because we have so much is that we confuse the gift with the Giver, and we so enjoy the gifts that have been given to us by the Giver that we begin to prefer the gift over the Giver. In this circumstance all the gifts have been taken away, and David says this, 'Give me the Giver even though You have taken away every other gift, because the gift of the Giver is the one thing I want and it's the only thing that will satisfy me.'

And that's how God has built us, friends. Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Him, because the Giver did not make us to be filled up by the gifts but only by the Giver. May God help us to be able to distinguish between the two and to want the right one, because we cannot serve both God and Mammon. Let us love and serve and long for and be satisfied in God. Let us pray.

*O Lord God, thank You for Your word. How searching it is, how beautiful it is, how convicting it is to see David bereft of everything and still praising You. And we have so much and yet our hearts are filled with complaints. And do we love gifts more than the Giver? Grant that we would long for You more than any other gift. Grant that we would find satisfaction in You more than any other gift. Grant that we would trust in You more than anything else and that we would praise You in the assembly of the saints, because You are our God and Your lovingkindness is better than life. We ask these prayers in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Would you stand for God's blessing? Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God

the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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