

“THIRSTING FOR GOD IN A DRY AND WEARY LAND”

PSALM 63

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INTRODUCTION

This is surely one of the most beautiful and touching Psalms in the whole Psalter. The psalm was the morning psalm of the church—it introduced the Sunday service (L. 463; so Del. 1322, note). Chrysostom stated “that it was decreed and ordained by the primitive fathers, that no day should pass without the public singing of this psalm,” and that “the spirit and soul of the whole Book of Psalms is contracted into this Psalm” (*Sermon*, lxvi.; *Works*, vol. iii. pp. 156-57). All the Psalms serve as soothing ointment on all sorts of sores humans experience, but some Psalms are broad enough in their reach to have a “command over all affections, and spread themselves over all occasions....This is one of those” (P. 486). The psalm is related to Psalms 61 & 62 in occasion and circumstances and has several resemblances—especially to Ps. 61: David longs for the sanctuary (61:4; 63:2) and calls himself “king” (61:6 with 63:11).

The psalm expresses a deep personal affection and tenderness toward God, and at the same time manifests the “energy” and even at times the “abruptness” so characteristic of its author, David (P. 487). Such tenderness and depth of feeling are understandable in one who had suffered such deep personal hurt in human and family relationships as evident in the rebellion of his son, Absalom and the conspiracy of some of his formerly loyal friends and co-workers. David’s deep wounds pushed him even closer in his relationship with his God, causing him to cleave with even “more intense, devoted love” (P. 487). This Psalm is the Davidic original, or counterpart, to the pair of Korah in 42-43. David was “in the wilderness of Judah” according to the title; the wilderness of Judah refers to the arid region to the south and mostly east and southeast of Jerusalem. It extends along the western shore of the Dead Sea and continues up along the west bank of the Jordan. In this case David was in the part of the wilderness between Jerusalem and the Jordan.

One of the interesting features of this psalm are the various personal references of David to parts of himself: “soul” (1, 5, 8, 9), “body” (1), “lips” (3, 5), “hands” (4), and “mouth” (5). Kidner remarks that this psalm once again is evidence that “the worst has brought out David’s best”—in both words and deeds (p. 224). The desolate location where David found himself (II Sam. 15:23) and the weariness caused by the journey (II Sam. 16:14) were no match for the greatness of David’s God! Kidner is correct when he notes that “there may be other psalms that equal this outpouring of devotion; few if any that surpass it” (224). As in Psalm 62, this psalm has no personal petition from David—not one word of asking for physical or even spiritual good; see comments on Ps. 62). David praises, gives thanks, speaks of communion with His God and expresses a longing for an even more intense communion.

YOU MUST FIND YOUR COMPLETE SATISFACTION IN GOD!

We may give the following outline to the psalm:

- 1) Desperate Desire for Intimate fellowship with God as in former days (1-4)
- 2) Finding Satisfaction in Such Fellowship (5-8)
- 3) The Miserable end of those who seek to ruin him (9-11).

I. DAVID’S DESPERATE DESIRE FOR INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (1-4)

The powerful words of this psalm and the longing for God which they express are not “the groping of a stranger feeling his way towards God, but the eagerness of a friend, almost of a lover, to be in touch with the one he holds dear” (K. 224).

- A. God (Elohim) is “my God” (El). In David’s weakness, he finds his strength in Elohim/El—names for God emphasizing His strength—especially the latter; in fact, Alexander notes that “the very use of it involves a direct appeal to God’s omnipotence” (271). David feels keenly such longing for God precisely because

he already knows it and has experienced such in the past (cf. v. 2). The physical aridness of the wilderness suggested to him “the utterly dry and arid state of the soul that is deprived of God”

B. Passionate desire for God (1)

1. Earnest and early search for God—since v. 6 looks back upon the night, it [the verb] appears to be chosen with reference to the dawning morning (relation with noun meaning “dawn”)
2. Thirsting of the soul for God [his whole person]-- himself as a whole seen from the side of his spiritual being, and himself as a whole from the side of his physical being—next term.
3. Yearning of the body for God [again the whole person]—**In that intense worship in which every thought, feeling, desire, affection are centered in the One true Object of Love, body and soul both take their part. It is as a living man, every pulse of his being filled with the love of God, that he responds to that love. The fact that David can thus speak of both his “soul” and his “flesh” having such ardent desire for God shows that “the spirit has the mastery within him” and has even drawn the flesh “into the realm of its own life.” Trouble has a way of bringing such to reality more so than prosperity; trouble helps to mortify “our carnal nature”** (Del. 1324).
4. Parched natural and spiritual environment without God—“dry and weary land—no water.” The real application is to David’s spiritual thirst for and longing for His God and for His presence, especially as manifested in the sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant was found (v. 2). “In a region where he is surrounded by sun-burnt aridity and a nature that bears only one uniform ash-coloured tint, which casts its unrefreshing image into his inward part, which is itself in much the same parched condition, his soul thirsts, his flesh languishes, wearied and in want of water..., for God, the living One and the Fountain of life” (1324).

C. Reminiscence of past times of worship and fellowship at the Sanctuary (2)

Clearly David implies that as he in the past has “beheld” the Lord in his sanctuary so as to experience the divine power and glory, so he would now like to experience the same. David is not asking here for some outward manifestation more than the usual evidences of grace grasped by the faith of the believer; he does wish for tangible evidence of divine “power” and the resulting “glory” in his experience of divine help. —“in holiness”, i.e. the sanctuary; stark contrast in his present experience with “in a dry land.”

- The verb “beheld” speaks of a more focused and intent observation.
- Seeing or looking on God is to “see” [a different Hebrew verb more general but still with the same basic meaning; the second “see” shows the purpose of the intent gazing to discern the nature of the object—here God’s nature.
- The focus is on God’s “power” and “glory.”
- The “power” is the “terrible”/**awesome** side of God’s nature, and the “glory” is the “light and loving side.” All of this was seen in its sacrificial ceremonies and sacramental self-statements.
- David needed God to manifest His strength and might at this crisis period of His life, and thus to experience His “glory” and splendor as God defeated His and David’s foes and restored David to his throne. In the past David had “looked on” God in the sanctuary, and as the result had been enabled to see evidence of the divine power and glory. How David now longs to see the same. He longs for his God to manifest His loyal love in exhibiting His power and glory on David’s behalf. As Kidner notes, God “is not the prisoner of His sanctuary.” David’s words here match his actions mentioned in II Sam. 15 when he had sent the ark back to Jerusalem.

D. Recognizing that God’s Loyal Love is “Better than Life (3).

1. *Better than the fullness of life and all its blessings.*
2. Compare Paul in Acts 20:24: “Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy.”
3. All victorious believer, including the martyrs, have discovered such a truth. God’s loyal-love is the highest good and the true life.

4. “Loyal-love” is the overarching attribute governing the covenant relationship with His people and surely encompasses the divine display of power and glory also.
 5. *Chesed* becomes practically the equivalent of “fellowship” with God. Such meaningful fellowship and experience of God’s loyal love was more important than and “better than” even “life” itself; for, life would have no real value or meaning apart from such a relationship. To have such a meaningful relationship with God means that one actually lives—experiences life in reality, life that will continue till death and beyond death into eternity.
 6. As the result, “My lips will praise Thee.”
- E. Determining to Praise God—“bless Thee”—as long as life lasts (4).
1. Man “blesses” God by acknowledging what is already rightfully His.
 2. Such praise to God is to endure throughout life.
 3. Such praise may be accompanied with outward demonstration of fervor and dependency—lift up hands.
 4. Such praise should be in “His name”—all that God is in His self-manifestation.

But, can one really find peace, contentment, and satisfaction in such a relationship with God?

II. FINDING SATISFACTION IN SUCH FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (5-8)

David’s response to his expression of “thirst” in v. 1 is surprisingly strong; instead of merely confirming that God will quench his thirst, he speaks of being fully sated with food—completely satisfied, like one who has been filled and then rises from the table. The picture here is likely from that of a “splendid banquet”. It is less likely that David here thinks specifically of the sacrificial meal accompanying the thank-offering.

- A. The soul is satisfied as with “fat and fat”—no word for “marrow” here (5a).
- His soul, his person, cannot ask for more!
 - David cannot be literally speaking of sacrificial offerings with which he would be satisfied, for the “fat” portions were burned on the altar and removed from the part that was to be eaten by the offeror.
- B. The mouth offers praises with joyful lips (5b)
- He has already stated that his lips will praise God (3b), he will bless God as long as he lives (4a), and that he will lift up his hands in His name.
 - The verb has the idea of making a ringing cry—or as NASB has it in v. 7 “I sing for joy.”
- C. The Nighttime is sweet with remembrances of God (6).
- Both in stanza 1 (vv. 1-4) and now in stanza 2 (5-8) David appeals only to God Himself; he has no lesser goal or recourse. In both stanzas he praises God, and in both, he humbly depends upon God. The wilderness mentioned in v. 1 had “sharpened his appetite for God,” and now ‘his wakefulness through *the watches of the night* ... enlisted time and thought for the same Lord. Both kinds of hardship yielded ‘streams in the desert’ and ‘honey from the rock’” (K. 226).
1. Remembrance of God at night on the bed—the sweet privilege of the believer.
 2. Such remembrances lead to meditation on God.
 - The plural noun carries the idea “watches/periods of the night.”
 - The plural indicates that David did not sleep throughout each night, but frequently was meditating and praying and praising the Lord during the various watches/periods of time of the night.
- D. The soul joyfully remembers God’s help and protection (7).
- This verse embraces all of David’s past, present, and future; in the **present** distress, finding support in the **past**, and from that sure ground looking forward with confidence and joy to the **future**. In this statement David does not envision an immunity from all enemies nor an exemption from all harm that

the enemy might do; nor does David focus on vengeance that he might do to his enemies. What he does foresee is “a refreshing, a respiration...under the shadow of God’s wings” (Perowne).

1. God has been David’s “help.”
 2. God will be David’s shelter and protection—“in the shadow of His wings.” [like that of a mother bird]
 3. David will thus “sing for joy”; this is his 5th expression of praise!
- E. What David does and what God does in their relationship (8).
1. David “clings” to God
 - The first verb “clings” speaks of the attraction due to loyalty or affection; see Gen. 2:24 and the “clinging” of the husband to his wife in the original marriage ordinance, and especially see references of men clinging to Yahweh as here: Dt. 10:20; 11:22; 13:14; 30:20; Josh. 22:5; 23:8. The idea conveyed is that of a permanent, binding union. Ruth gives a powerful example of such clinging to her mother-in-law out of loyalty and affection (1:14).
 - The preposition used here with clinging is “strenuous”—literally “cling after you” “as if in hot pursuit” (K. 226). The KJV renders it well with “my soul follows hard after you.”
 2. God “upholds” David with the right hand of His strength.
 - Once again Scripture balances divine sovereignty and power with human responsibility; compare the powerful human striving by Paul in Phil. 3:8-14 that is fully dependent upon God’s unmerited grace (9).
 - Out of that Hand of Power and Love neither man nor devil can pluck him (cf. John 10:28-29).

III. THE MISERABLE END OF THOSE WHO SEEK TO RUIN DAVID (9-11).

David’s absorption with God in vv. 1-8 has kept thought of his adversaries in the background until now. The threat is real, and “its dark shadow brings out the solidity of his faith which has nothing ‘fugitive and cloistered’ about it” (K. 226). David knows that the loyal-love of God spoken of in v. 3 also is strong with justice (see 62:12—he recompenses them; cf. Rom. 2:4-6). It is important to remember that opponents of the divinely appointed king are also God’s opponents.

- A. The wicked will go into Sheol (9).
- B. They are delivered into the power (hand) of the sword and are eaten by scavengers (10).
- C. The mouths of those who speak lies will be stopped (11c).
- D. By contrast:
 1. The king “will rejoice” in God [6th mention of joy and praise].
 2. Everyone who “swears by” God [takes oaths]—commits life to Him in the covenant—will “glory—praise.”

CONCLUSION

YOU MUST FIND YOUR COMPLETE SATISFACTION IN GOD!

You have everything to gain, and nothing to lose.

Desire Him more than life; find complete satisfaction in Him. Those choosing their own way find utter ruin!

