

Psalm 63
The Glory of a Deep Thirst
Sermon #1 in a Series on Psalm 63

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on July 23, 2006.

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Main Idea: *Satisfying our soul with God necessitates cultivating an ever deeper thirst for God.*

Introduction

Blaisé Pascal philosopher and mathematician, wrote: “All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves” (*Pensées*, thought #425, quoted in Piper, *Desiring God*, 16).

Pascal was not the first to note that seeking pleasure is hardwired into human nature. Paul assumes we know this truth when explaining to husbands how to love your wife: as you love your own body, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it (Ephesians 5.28-29).

In Psalm 63, God motivates us to seek him by the same means: “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips” (verse 5). God appeals to your desire for happiness, laying before you the all-surpassing satisfaction of knowing him. The question answered in Psalm 63 is not, “*Will* we seek our own happiness?”—that is a given. The question God would have capture our imaginations is: “*Where* will we turn for joy?” Will we seek pleasure in God and in all that he is for us in Jesus Christ? Or will we look for delight elsewhere, in the things which blunt our thirst for God?

In speaking of the desire for happiness by which God motivates us to passionately pursue him, **C. S. Lewis** wrote: “If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. 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” (Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, quoted in Piper, *Desiring God*, 17).

This is a key theme in Dr. John Piper’s writings. Commenting on this Lewis’ quote, **Piper** says: “That’s it! The enemy of worship is not that our desire for pleasure is too strong but too weak! We have settled for a home, a family, a few friends, a job, a television, a microwave oven, an occasional night out, a yearly vacation, and perhaps a new personal computer. We have accustomed ourselves to such meager, short-lived pleasures that our capacity for joy has shriveled. And so our worship has shriveled.”

There is an ever present danger of seeking to satisfy elsewhere what was made for God alone. I need Psalm 63 to stir my passion for God and to sensitize my soul to pleasure in him.

Today is an overview. In August I am scheduled to preach for 3 weeks. My hope then is to return to Psalm 63 and carefully work verse by verse into the glories of thirsting deeply for God. But for this morning, since I have an isolated week, my intention is to present the main idea. This Psalm teaches us that satisfying our soul *with* God necessitates cultivating an ever deeper thirst *for* God. In order to do that, please notice four things about thirsting for God.

1. Thirst for God Can Never Be Too Deep (Psalm 63.1)

When I first became a Christian, one of the older men at work offered his “insight.” He said, “Durham, religion is good. You needed some. But don’t get carried away; stay balanced. There are a lot of religious kooks out there.” In other words, “Thirst for God can get too deep, to serious, too consuming. Stay away from that or it will begin to control your thoughts and behavior.”

Maybe you agree? There is an old saying, “She is too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.” Is that your perspective?

It was **not** David’s. When he wrote Psalm 63, he was far from the place of God’s special presence—he was in the wilderness. In spite of his physical separation from worship, however, he rose early to stir up a greater longing for the God for whom his soul thirsts. For David, the desire to know God could never dive too deep. He would rather *die* than *not know* fellowship with God (Psalm 63.2a). This is the man who embarrassed himself and his wife in front of everyone, because he was so excited about God that he raised his hands and danced in the middle of street as he worshipped.

Some of us may be too embarrassed even to sing in church, much less to speak with affection of the love and friendship we have with Jesus. But David’s lips praised God and he sang and danced for joy!

I love chocolate. But gorging on chocolate can make me sick. The same is **not** true of God—true possession of him only increases satisfaction and desire. The more we experience grace, the more satisfied we are, and the more we want to possess and be satisfied. Why is it so different for chocolate? Because we were made for God, not for fudge.

Augustine, the great African-Christian thinker of the fourth century, wrote, “You awake us to delight in your praise; for you made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

The gospel is good news—good news that *you can reject the soul deadening lie that too much of God is dangerous*. You can drink deeply and unendingly at the fountain of God’s grace. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” “Delight yourself in the Lord.” He is the One for whom your soul thirsts; and because Jesus reconciles people to God, you can now love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.

Fear not; the fountain of his favor never runs dry. The more you thirst, the deeper will be your enjoyment of the streams of His grace. Thus Jesus promised: “whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4.14).

Let us early and earnestly seek God, thirsting deeply for His presence and grace. No thirst is too deep for him to satisfy.

2. Thirst for God Can Be Deepened (Psalm 63.2-4)

David is in the wilderness, having been chased there by his own son, Absalom, who wants to murder David in order to claim the throne. So what does he do?

He stirs up his passion for God. He *remembers* the *past joy* of worshipping God in the sanctuary and he *anticipates* the *future joy* of returning to public worship. The “man after God’s own heart” is *not* fretting over how he will escape this difficult and stressful situation; he is *not* focusing on the strength needed to survive another trying time; David is intentionally deepening his thirst for that which he cannot have—the joy of entering the sanctuary for God-centered worship!

Matthew Henry (a pastor from an earlier time), “All the straights and difficulties of a wilderness must not put us out of tune for sacred songs; but even then it is our duty and interest to keep up a cheerful communion with God.”

In the gospel, Jesus teaches that whatever thirst we have for God will be satisfied with living water. If that is true, then we should long to deepen our thirst! The more I thirst, the more joy I experience in God’s satisfy my thirst! **Lewis**: “The Lord finds my desires not too strong, but too weak.... I have been far too easily pleased.” God aims to make me thirst like a dry and weary land where there is no water—then the floodgates of his grace can be poured upon me, for only then will I want them!

John Collins, Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Seminary: “David has put these words into our mouths for us to sing to God, to teach us to lift our sights higher than ‘getting out of this’ or just ‘getting through it’—to the thing that matters most, to the highest privilege a mortal can enjoy, the worship of our Lord; and to yearn for it.”

It seems to me that a great hindrance is our fear that God will not come through. We become anxious when we imagine turning off the television, closing the internet browser, shutting out the distractions and shutting off the diversions—we become anxious that God may not be near.

I think this is a main point of God’s dealing with Elijah. The prophet did great things and then hid in a cave. God came to him and said, “‘Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.” (1Kings 19:11-12).

It was in the quiet that God met Elijah. Maybe we like distractions because then we are not sure God will be near. The Bible says that our thirst for God can be deepened. But third, we need to know that our...

3. Thirst for God Can Be Distracted (Psalm 63.2-4)

The same verses which teach us to deepen our thirst for God can be turned against us. By doing the opposite (i.e., by refusing to meditate on the past joys of worshipping God and the future hope of worshipping God), I can distract my thirst.

Pastor Charles Bridges, c. 1700, “All that we could add from the world would only make us poorer, by diminishing that enjoyment of God, for the loss of which there is no compensation.”

Maybe some of us have been “far too easily pleased”?

In relation to Psalm 63, this is the terror of what it means to be fallen creatures living in a fallen world. We are *fallen creatures*: which means, because we naturally love sin, we are willing and able to seek other pleasures to fill the desire of our souls which can only be satisfied by worshipping God. And our danger is multiplied by our living in a *fallen world*: a world which deadens our desire for God the more we seek satisfaction in anything other than God. *The world never fully satisfies; it always reduces the potential for God's satisfying us.* Thus the New Testament warns, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1John 2.15).

We will expand this in a few weeks, Lord willing, but let me give two practical examples of how thirst for God can be distracted. The first is from another pastor, so you will see that I struggle with working the Gospel into my soul just as you do.

David Hansen (*The Art of Pastoring*, 48-49), after explaining the essential place of beginning each day in prayer, writes: "But I am not very good at morning prayer. First thing in the morning, morning prayer doesn't seem very important. Reading the sports page seems more important. Listening to the morning news seems more important. Anything can capture my attention when it's time for morning prayer. The propaganda on the box of cold cereal will do just fine.... **Neglect of morning prayer is not caused by distractions.** Distractibility is a symptom of a deeper infection. The infection in me is my desire *not* to be set apart for ministry, *not* to be directed by the Spirit, *not* to be empowered by God. My sinful desire is to swerve from the Way of the Cross, to set *myself* apart, to set my *own agenda* and to gather power from *other sources*. My refusal to pray is the 'Old Adam' inside me, kicking against the sanctifying work of the Word and the Spirit."

Every day I feel the desire of my flesh to distract my soul's thirst for God.

Here is an example for all of us. **Kris Lundgaard**: "Which is easier, to sit with a bucket of butter-soaked popcorn and watch Tom Cruise on the big screen for two hours, or kneel and pray for five minutes? Tom Cruise wins hands down, because there is literally no competition. What the flesh hates is God, so it resists anything that smacks of God—especially communion with him. The flesh can curl up by your side and watch mindless movies all night long. But let even the barest thought of meditations flutter into your mind, and the flesh goes to Red Alert—your eyes sag in sleepiness and your mind remembers a thousand distractions."

Whatever the means, whatever the reason, this text demands that we discern *where* our thirst for God has been distracted. One final point:

4. Thirst for God Can Be Satisfied (Psalm 63.5-8)

These are most encouraging promises. Though we may fear God will not come through, we are here reminded that the still, small voice is always there under the busy din of distractions. Those with faith to seek God always *find* him and always *fill* their souls.

Jesus said that the work of God is to believe the One whom God has sent. "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." All who come to Jesus are satisfied! And how do we know that we can trust his Word? Because he "suffered once for sins, that he might bring us to God" (1Peter 3.18). His life and death bring his people into the delight of God's presence. Will you not come to Jesus and be fed?

There is one further application we can make. If this Psalm is true, then would you covenant with God to deepen your thirst for him?

The other day I was walking and wondering about my purpose in life. Suddenly it popped into my head that my purpose in life is to lose weight. It feels that way because I am having

always to diet. Well, actually, not really dieting; I am at the age when must make substantial and permanent changes to my eating habits. I have discovered, through exacting scientific analysis, that I cannot lose weight while eating brownies and fudge. I must virtually eliminate dessert. In doing so, I have found something interesting. Infrequent consumption of chocolate actually makes it taste better. When I cultivate desire, I increase enjoyment.

All analogies about God break down at some point and this one is no exception. We do not cultivate a deeper thirst for God by infrequent communion. But in this way it is the same: *by actively deepening our thirst for God, we find ourselves enjoying God's power and glory all the more.* And if you are a Christian, that is the joy for which your soul was made.

5. Conclusion

Yogi Berra was the well-known catcher for the New York Yankees when Hank Aaron came to bat. As usual Yogi kept up a ceaseless chatter while catching, intended to pep up his teammates on the one hand, and distract the Milwaukee batters on the other. As Aaron came to the plate, Yogi tried to distract him by saying, "Hank, you're holding the bat wrong. You're supposed to hold it so you can *read* the trademark." Aaron didn't say anything, but when the next pitch came he blasted it out of the park. After rounding the bases and tagging home plate, Aaron looked at Yogi Berra and said, "I didn't come up here to read."

Hank Aaron knew what he wanted and would not be distracted. Will you respond to your soul's thirst for God and feed it with the fullness of joy that is found only at God's right hand?