

January 15, 2023

A HEART FOR GOD

Psalm 63

(11 of 12 in a series of selected Psalms)

All the way through college (and a bit beyond college) if I were to share my testimony with someone, I would mark it by people who have shaped me—parents, friends, fellow church members—who encouraged me and challenged me to know and love Christ more. People can play a powerful role in our lives, even if we don't have conversations with them. I've been moved numerous times by reading Christian biographies, as I read stories of men and women who seem to live a life that I don't see in myself, and I yearn to imitate their faith. Well, I think that's how Psalm 63 can work in our hearts. David writes this psalm in such a way that he unveils his heart to us. But it's not like we saw last week in Psalm 55 where David unveils his struggles and fears. In this case, he shows us his longing for God, his satisfaction in God, and his hope in God. And it may be that what we see we can't relate to. Or perhaps we see in David something that once characterized us as we hungered for God with our whole beings, but that we just don't recognize in ourselves anymore. It may be—as one author has put it—that we “have nibbled so long at the table of the world” that our souls are “stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great.”¹

You see, if we look at this psalm and feel like we just don't hunger for and treasure the Lord like David shows in this psalm, I don't think it's because Psalm 63 is some picture of super-Christianity. David is picturing for us what should be the heart of any believer who's been born again and understands that Christ has lived, died, and been raised so that we are forgiven children of God. He's showing us the reasonable appetite of anyone who has tasted and seen that the Lord is good.

Therefore, here is my hope for us this morning and the approach I want to take to get there. My hope and prayer for us is that if our hunger for and earnest desire for the Lord has become a bit dormant that this psalm would awaken our souls and make us eager and longing to know, delight in, love, trust, and enjoy our God more. And let me explain the method I want to take to get there by giving you an illustration. Imagine there's a married couple that have grown so apart from one another that they've begun simply looking out for themselves and not the other. When they speak their tendency is to bite at each other. There's no real expression of affection anymore. And though there's no great animosity or the like, they've just kind of settled into this as the norm. Then, one night they go to a couple's fiftieth wedding anniversary, and they watch this elderly couple speaking to each other kindly, seemingly adoring each other, and enjoying one another. And on the way home, one of them says to the other, “I want what that couple has and want to do whatever it takes to get there,” and the other responds, “I was thinking the same thing.” And they spend the night repenting to each other, forgiving each other, talking about how they want to approach things differently, and so on. But—and this is key—it all started

¹ John Piper, *A Hunger for God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 21.

simply by looking at another couple and seeing something in them that they themselves didn't have. Their desire to better picture the gospel in their married life was awakened as they beheld someone who pictured what they wanted to be true of themselves.

That's the method I hope to employ today. I want to hold up David in this psalm like that old married couple held up before that struggling couple in hopes that we will see in him something that we want to be true of ourselves and that will awaken our souls to pursue that reality. Particularly, I want us to grow in our desire for the Lord, satisfaction in the Lord, and hope in the Lord. So, let's take the first of these as we look at verses 1-4 and see David's earnest desire for the Lord.

David's earnest desire for the Lord

The superscript of the psalm tells us that the psalm was written by David when he was in the wilderness of Judah. We don't know exactly when this was. It could be when he was hiding from Saul, but verse 11 suggests that David is already king when he writes this, so it's probably a later time. It could be when his son, Absalom, rebelled against him, and David fled during that time. Regardless of precisely when this psalm was written in David's life, it is written when David is in the wilderness. Now, what this means is that as he writes—and we'll see this—about a dry and thirsty land, it's quite likely that he's describing the setting around him. But more importantly this means that David is away from the tabernacle—the place where the Lord manifested his presence among his people and the people worshiped. He's removed from that, and so David feels a longing in his soul.

He writes, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (v. 1). As David looks at the dry and thirsty land around him, he thinks that it is a fitting picture of his soul. His soul is thirsty for the Lord. As one's flesh can grow weak and faint without nourishment, so David feels that way with regard to the Lord—as if he is too weak to go on without fellowshiping with the Lord. He wants to know God's presence, delight in him, and enjoy him. But he feels distant and is longing.

Then he writes, "So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory" (v. 2). This may be him remembering times of worship in Jerusalem, or he may simply be imagining this scene in his mind. But it stirs his soul. He remembers God's love and determines that he will praise God, as he writes, "Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you" (v. 3). And, finally, he determines that he will worship the Lord. Lifting one's hands is a posture of worship, and so David writes, "So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands" (v. 4).

It's not just that David finds himself longing for a greater and deeper fellowship with the Lord; he also seeks the Lord—earnestly. He thinks on who God is in his glory and power, he meditates on his steadfast love, and he remembers days of deeper and more intimate fellowship so that he might be moved to delight in the Lord. He determines that he will worship the Lord.

Now, if David has fled into the wilderness and is away from his throne and all that is his—with his future life and reign hanging in the balance—isn't it interesting that the thing he wants and longs for most is the Lord? He could crave his nice house that he's away from, the powerful position he's gotten used to, or a hundred other comforts. But he's longing for the Lord. It's obviously because he has a relationship with God. We see that in the psalms as he spends his life interacting with the Lord in prayer (whether praise, lament, etc.). It's why he begins this psalm by acknowledging that the one true God is *his* God—the one whom he knows, loves, and delights in.

But it's also helpful for us to ask if this is our longing. Do you find yourself in life longing for the Lord like this? Do you ever feel like your soul is thirsting for the Lord like the dry ground is thirsting for water? And if you do feel these longings, do you just ignore them and allow your soul to be fed with many lesser satisfying things—like snacking on junk food—until the desire and longing is squelched? Or do you just not have these longings for deeper fellowship with the Lord at all?

If we don't have these longings, I think that's a troubling sign. As one pastor has observed, "The strongest, most mature Christians I have ever met are the hungriest for God."² In other words, if we look back at years past and see that we had a greater zeal to commune with the Lord and find our hearts delighting in him, we shouldn't look at our present state and think that we're simply giving evidence of greater Christian maturity. Like we've grown out of the stage of longing deeper fellowship with the Lord. No, this is what should characterize all believers. It's impossible to read the psalms—and particularly see David in this psalm—and think otherwise. It's more likely the case that we've allowed the busyness of our lives to crowd out and suppress our longings for the Lord.

So it may be that our response to this psalm today needs to be to pray that the Lord would give us a hunger for him and awaken a thirst in our soul for him that's been lacking. Or it may be that we need to act on the hunger that is there—that, perhaps, we've ignored—and respond to it by saying to the Lord, "Earnestly I seek you," and cry out to the Lord in prayer to know a deeper fellowship with and delight in him. We see in verses 1-4 David's earnest desire for the Lord. Second, we see David's satisfaction in the Lord.

David's satisfaction in the Lord

David writes in verses 5-6, "My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night." Notice what David is saying here. He's imagining lying on his bed and meditating on the Lord in the night, and as he does he proclaims that meditating on the Lord will cause his soul to be satisfied as if he's eating the finest of foods so that he joyfully sings and praises the Lord. One reason for that—he tells us in verse 7—is that as he meditates on the Lord, he'll remember how God has been his help. He writes, "For you have been my help, and in

² Ibid., 22.

the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.” As he meditates on the Lord, contemplating how God has helped and cared for him again and again, he sings for joy. And it seems that he is so determined to know this satisfaction in God that he pictures himself clinging to the Lord until he experiences it—of course upheld by the Lord the whole time (v. 8).

Can you relate to this? Can you think of experiences you’ve had in the Lord’s presence, communing with him where you thought, “This is as satisfying to my soul as a delicious meal is to my mouth”? Have you thought about the Lord, how he has cared for you and helped you, and felt that you could not help but sing for joy because your soul is so satisfied in him? Have you tasted such satisfaction with the Lord that you were determined to cling to the Lord, restless until your soul knew that satisfaction again? These are David’s experiences, and I think he’s picturing something that should characterize us as well. And should we settle for anything less than what we see here when the greatest commandment the Lord has ever given us is the clear command to love him with our heart, soul, mind, and strength?

Where do you find your satisfaction? Is it in having sufficient money to cover your foreseen expenses, work going smoothly, or relationships being peaceful? Consider that in Psalm 63 David is in the dry and weary land of the wilderness, perhaps fleeing from his son who wants to seize his throne from him and kill him, and he’s talking about finding such delight in God that his soul is so satisfied he can’t help but sing. Doesn’t that picture create a longing in you to know what David knew and experience what he experienced? Let’s make it our prayer to ask God to help us find our satisfaction in him and set aside times where in our prayers we declare that we are seeking him until our souls are satisfied. After all, he must be our treasure. But there’s one more thing we see in David. We also see that David hopes in God.

David’s hope in the Lord

In verses 9-11 David expresses great hope in God. He’s out in the wilderness, most likely because his enemies are pursuing him, and yet he trusts in God fulfilling his good purposes. He writes, “But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.”

How can David be so sure of these things? I think it’s simply a case of him believing the promises of God. You see, the Lord had promised David (in 2 Samuel 7) that he would never allow David’s line to be removed from the throne. Ultimately, as we discussed on Christmas day when we gathered, this was fulfilled when Christ came and was raised from the dead to live and reign forever as David’s great and glorious son. Therefore, I think that David finds himself in a situation where his throne is threatened, and he thinks, “God will keep his promises, which means my enemies will be destroyed if they don’t relent, and I will rejoice in God as I see him fulfilling his promises.” That’s precisely what David envisions in verses 9-11—his enemies are destroyed and the king (David) rejoices in God.

So, in that way, it's not altogether unlike Abraham when he went to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22. According to the author of Hebrews, the reason Abraham was willing to obey God and go sacrifice his only son, Isaac, is because he reasoned that in light of all that God had promised to do through Abraham's offspring, Isaac had to live. Therefore, even if God had to raise Isaac from the dead after Abraham sacrificed him on the altar, he'd do it. Now, of course, God didn't need to raise Isaac from the dead because the Lord had an angel stop Abraham right before the sacrifice of his son. But you can understand Abraham's logic. If God's promise is true, then this can't end poorly ultimately. I think that's how David is able to hope in God.

And, though we might not have particular promises about our particular situations we might be facing today—whether you'll get that great job, pass your exams, or the like—I believe that we can be prone to underestimate all the promises of God that we can hold to in our difficult situations. In fact, I think that the best way we can encourage one another in our struggles is by reminding one another of what God has said and promised.

For example, I was just talking to a brother the other day who was going through a hard time in light of some struggles he was facing. And, of course, I felt bad for him as he shared these struggles. He was certainly in a place that we wouldn't want to find ourselves. Moreover, I wasn't able to say, "I know exactly how all of this will turn out." But I just started recounting all that we knew to be true. The Lord loves him and gave himself for him. His Father wrote down all the days of his life before any of them had been lived, and that included these days. The Lord has promised that all would work for his good, making him more conformed to the image of Christ. The Lord owns the cattle on a thousand hills and—as we like to say in the office—all the money too. God has reminded us that he knows what we need and tells us not to be anxious about those things but to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things we need will be added to us by our Heavenly Father.

Now, that's just a taste. If we forced ourselves to keep thinking through the Scripture, we could go on and on. And so by the time we ended our reflection together, I think my brother was strengthened to hope in God. His trust in God was deeper because—like David—it was rooted in the promises and declarations of God in his word.

So, do you hope in God? Do you take time—in the midst of your struggles—to meditate on his promises and realize you have so much reason to hope and trust in him? One of my favorite bits of writing comes from a letter that Luther wrote to his understudy, Melanchthon. One of the opponents of the Reformation had stated that what Luther and Melanchthon were teaching was heresy as they were professing that we are justified by faith alone, and this sent Melanchthon into a deep struggle with depression and anxiety. So, Luther wrote to him a letter to encourage him to hope in God, and I want to read a decent chunk to us. He wrote:

"With all my heart I hate those cares by which you state that you are consumed. They rule your heart, not on account of the greatness of the cause but by reason of the greatness of your unbelief. The same cause existed in the time of John Hus and many others, and they had a harder time of it than we do. Great though our cause is, its Author and Champion is also great,

for the cause is not ours. Why then, are you constantly tormenting yourself? If our cause is false, let us recant. But if it is true, why should we make Him a liar who has given us such great promises and who commands us to be confident and undismayed? . . . I too am sometimes downcast, but not all the time. . . . What good do you expect to accomplish by these vain worries of yours? What can the devil do more than slay us? Yes, what? I beg you, who are so pugnacious in everything else, fight against yourself, your own worst enemy, for you furnish Satan with too many weapons against yourself. . . . I pray for you very earnestly, and I am deeply pained that you keep sucking up cares like a leech and thus rendering my prayers vain. Christ knows whether it comes from stupidity or the Spirit, but I for my part am not very much troubled about our cause. Indeed, I am more hopeful than I expected to be. God, who is able to raise the dead, is also able to uphold his cause when it is falling, or to raise it up again when it has fallen, or to move it forward when it is standing. If we are not worthy instruments to accomplish his purpose, he will find others. If we are not strengthened by his promises, where in all the world are the people to whom these promises apply? But more of this another time. After all, my writing this is like pouring water into the sea.”³

May we all hear that this morning. If God’s promises don’t apply to us, then where in all the world are the people to whom his promises apply? So, let us trust him and hope in him, even when we are in circumstances like the one David finds himself here.

Isn’t this a glorious picture of what should characterize the Christian? We live our lives earnestly desiring the Lord, finding our utmost satisfaction in the Lord, and hoping in the Lord even in trying times. Or at least that is what *should* characterize us. So, let’s end our time together today asking the Lord to give us the grace to be characterized in this way. And let us trust that the one who already gave his Son to live, die, and be raised for us will surely give us all we need for life and godliness as we come to the table this morning. Amen.

³ Martin Luther, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, Vol. 18 of *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. Theodore G. Trappert (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 146-7.