

A Dry and Weary Land

Scripture Text: Psalms 63

Introduction

Few Americans have influenced our country like the pastor, philosopher, and Protestant theologian Jonathan Edwards. He was an intellectual prodigy, entering Yale University at the age of twelve. He authored dozens of works, both theological and inspirational. His biography of David Brainerd has inspired countless missionaries to accept the call of God to minister in other countries. He sparked America's First Great Awakening with his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Whereas George Whitfield was the preacher of the Great Awakening, Edwards was the theologian of that movement. According to one writer, Edward's legacy traces back to a defining moment in his life. On January 12, 1723, Jonathan Edwards made a written consecration of himself to God. He wrote it out longhand in his diary and revisited it often over the years.

"I made a solemn dedication of myself to God, and wrote it down; giving up myself, and all that I had to God; to be for the future, in no respect, my own; to act as one that had no right to himself, in any respect. And solemnly vowed, to take God for my whole portion and felicity; looking on nothing else, as any part of my happiness, nor acting as if it were."

Edwards made this solemn consecration to God. He made a vow to pursue God wholeheartedly and dedicated his life to developing a deeper relationship with God. That is something we all should do. We do that by getting to know Him through studying His Word. We develop a deeper relationship with God through corporate worship where we share our faith in Christ together. We also, and maybe most importantly, get to know God better through prayer, by spending time with Him. We are going to look at the topic of prayer in the weeks ahead. Prayer is an essential part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ; unfortunately, it can become either a much neglected part of our lives, or a ritual that becomes rote or meaningless. Prayer should never become an item on a list of things to check off for God. Prayer should never be a religious task, but rather a natural part of our relationship with God. He is more interested in your heart than your actions, although your actions usually indicate your heart. Before we look at prayer, though, I wanted to first lay some groundwork concerning our need to long for God.

Earnestly Long for God

James Montgomery Boice once wrote that there are three types of people in any Christian gathering. There are those who are Christians in name only. They say and seem to follow after God and Jesus Christ, but it is a false following. They are like the ones who will one day find out that Jesus never knew them (Matthew 7:21-23). The second type are those who are following Jesus but are following "at a distance", like Peter when Jesus was arrested. The third type are those who cleave to God and enjoy Him daily. This third group wants God intensely, because they know He and He alone will satisfy the deep longing of their souls. David was one who desired God above

everything else and Psalm 63 is a classic expression of this longing. David wrote it to reflect on his own personal desire and heart felt longing for God in a great time of need. Look at the first two verses of this passage.

Psalm 63:1–2 ¹ *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.* ² *So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.*

While this psalm expresses the heart felt longing of one person, it also invites us to respond to this longing. What do you desire more than anything? Is it to be recognized for your work? Is it to be promoted to some important position? Is it wealth or fame? David desired God more than anything. In fact, David declared a sense of ownership of God. He said, “You are my God”. Do you own God? Does He belong to you, or more importantly, do you belong to Him? There are several references in this psalm to “my soul” (vv. 1, 5, 8) that point to the intensely personal devotion to God that David had. This is a personal declaration of need and desire for God. David described his longing for God in several statements. He *sought* God. This statement presumes that we are seeking and searching for God. Are you seeking Him? If He seems far away from you, are you looking for Him? David also described a *yearning* for God. This was like fainting for God. He was weak for God because he so intensely longed to be in God’s presence.

David also described his longing for God as a great *thirst*. The company which produces Gatorade once had a slogan for their product. They called it “The Thirst Quencher”. Having gone to a gym once or twice in my life, I can attest to Gatorade’s ability to quench my thirst. I have drunk it many times when I was thirsty. David, though, thirsted for something else. He longed for God as someone who longs for water in a dry, parched land. Have you ever thirst so badly that you desired nothing but for a drop of water. David was in the desert of Judah, one of the most barren regions on earth. The arid conditions of that wilderness give an image of a dry and weary land where there is no water. It reminds me of a trip my wife and I took to the Southwest region of the United States. We drove through Death Valley, which is appropriately named, for everything there looked dead. What was fascinating was just over the mountains was the Sequoia National Forest. There was a land rich with life, but in the desert, it just seemed void of life. Trees were scarce. Lakes were completely dried up. I can imagine someone traveling through the desert for days in the scorching heat just wanting a drop of water. The sons of Korah also described a similar thirst for God. Look at the following.

Psalm 42:1–2 ¹ *As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.* ² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*

David was longing for a sense of the presence of God as a friend longs for one from whom he is separated, or as a lover longs for his beloved. This makes Psalm 63 almost a love song for God. We were made for God, therefore it makes sense that we should long for Him. David clearly missed God; but in particular, he missed his experience of God in public worship, as he mentioned in verse two. The sanctuary was the place of

corporate worship. God's glory was His special presence with His people, which was given and enjoyed in the sanctuary. Today, we do not have to meet in a particular place or building, for we are the Temple of God and God dwells within each one of His people. However, there is something special about gathering with God's people for corporate worship. When God's people gather to sing, to pray, to proclaim and to hear God's Word, and to fellowship in His name, we behold God's power and presence. Therefore, do you, like David, thirst for God? Do you thirst for His presence with His people?

Find Satisfaction and Joy in God

We sometimes get our purpose mixed up. We sometimes think we were created to enjoy life for ourselves. That statement is partially true. We were created to enjoy God forever. We were created to find our ultimate fulfillment in Him. Yet, we spend most of our lives filling it with things that never fulfill us. We spend our lives praising ourselves when we were created to praise Someone else. It is like something that seeks to do what it was not designed to do. It will always come up short. If a dog tries to jump off a cliff to fly like an eagle, he will be disappointed, and probably dead. A dog was designed to run, bark, and be loyal. We were created for God and to worship Him forever. Verses one and two of this psalm remember past worship with David declaring, "I have looked upon you in the sanctuary." In verse three, he shifts from remembering the past to committing himself to praise God in the future. Look at the following verses.

Psalm 63:3–4 ³ *Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.* ⁴ *So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.*

What is better than life itself? Not much, I suspect. For nearly everyone, life is the most precious of all things. We will do almost anything to keep it, as Job wrote, "A man will give all he has for his own life" (Job 2:4). But, there is something that is better than life. God is faithful and loving and He makes life worth living. He is the Life-Giver. David praised God with his lips, which could be through prayer or singing. We praise God with our mouths, but oftentimes we use our mouths for anything other than praising God. David also praised God by lifting his hands. Lifting up our hands may actually be a gesture for praying. There is nothing wrong with showing God praise in this way. We have let the fear of what others may think or the fear of being disingenuous from keeping us from praising God openly. He alone is worthy to be praised, yet we spend much of our lives holding back, or believing that it is really all about us. God is the only One worthy of worship. David indicated another reason why we praise God — because of His unending and faithful love for us. His love is better than life itself. He alone is the great love of our lives. Is it not strange, then, that God has such a great love for us, and we spend so much time trying to find satisfaction elsewhere, and so little time with Him?

There is a saying that has been ascribed to several people, and it reads, "The young man who rings the bell at the brothel is unconsciously looking for God." You might think that is just a nice way for a man to justify his lust. It could be like saying, "Yep, I saw the red light, but really, I was just looking for Jesus!" There is some truth to it, though. We search for all sorts of things to satisfy us that are really, deep down, longings for God.

The woman who has a hundred pairs of shoes in her closet is longing for more than foot fashion. The one who reaches for another drink toward drunkenness is longing for more than just an alcohol-induced coma. The one who eats way too much is hungering for more than food. The one who takes another pain pill after the original pain is gone is trying to fix a pain that will never be cured with medication. The one who goes from one disappointing relationship to another and another is longing for *the perfect relationship*. Perhaps it is not that the person has not met Mr. or Mrs. Right yet, but the One he or she longs for is above them all. Each one of us has a God-shaped hole in our lives that only God can fill, and yet we try to fill it with other things. Every longing we try to satisfy apart from God will always fall short. As Saint Augustine once wrote, “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.” Look at the following.

Psalm 63:5–7 ⁵ *My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,* ⁶ *when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;* ⁷ *for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.*

David was satisfied with God, as if he had eaten a great feast. Fat and rich food are a way of saying he was satisfied beyond his need. It also represents prosperity in the Old Testament. David’s point here is that true satisfaction in life is only found in God. There is no reason for us to seek satisfaction anywhere, indeed it is futile to do so. In response, David praised God with joy. When you find what satisfies your every desire, then there is nothing else to give you joy. It is like the man who finally finds his wife; there is no one else who can compare. There is no one else who can satisfy you. God should be our satisfaction. He alone is the real joy giver. He should fill every thought we have. He should captivate every moment of our lives. Even in the watches of the night, a time we normally devote to sleep, we can deal with sleeplessness by meditating on God and His love for us. Like David, we ought to find our greatest satisfaction in God.

Trust God as The Ever-Present Help

The last few verses of this psalm bring us back to where we started, in the desert with David. They remind us that this is a real world with pain and suffering. Life is like a dry and weary land. It can feel like a desert, especially when we think God is not with us. We may feel like we are experiencing our pain and suffering alone. That is what Satan wants you to think. He also wants you to think that there is no justice. The title of this psalm seems to indicate that David was a refugee, but it is not clear who he was fleeing. It could have been Saul or it could have been his son, Absalom. Either way, David had to flee from those who wanted to kill him, and yet, David knew that God was with Him. He knew that God would vindicate him. Look at the last few verses.

Psalm 63:8–11 ⁸ *My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.* ⁹ *But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth;* ¹⁰ *they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals.* ¹¹ *But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.*

In verse eight, David wrote, “His soul clings to [God]”. That word “cling” is the same one that God used to describe the bond between a husband and wife (Genesis 2:24), or of other close relationships, such as Ruth’s attachment to her mother-in-law, Naomi (Ruth 1:14). If you are satisfied by God, would it not be true that you would want to cling to Him too? If you are not clinging to God, perhaps it is because you have never sought Him enough to be truly and deeply satisfied. David was satisfied with God and clung to Him in the midst of many troubles. His troubles came from those who sought to destroy his life. Being the one God chose to be king of Israel and being the one who was after God’s own heart put a target on David’s back. People attacked him. Many wanted him dead. While we may not go through something like that, the disciple of Jesus Christ should understand that there are people hostile to God’s purposes. Satan is a murderer seeking to kill and destroy God’s people. We ought to have confidence, though, that God’s enemies will fail in their goal of destroying God’s faithful. Those who cling to God will not fall prey to His enemies, though His people may suffer for a time. We should rejoice in the Lord because our God is faithful and He has clearly defeated our enemy.

Conclusion

In closing, do you have the desire for God that David described in this psalm? Probably not! But do you want to have this desire? Are you willing to develop it? God knows you and He knows your weaknesses. He chose to send His only Son to die for you knowing that you would resist Him. If you do not have this longing for God, perhaps you can begin by trusting Him. David declared a faithful trust in God. No matter what life brings us, we can trust God to lead and guide us. We can trust God to always be there. He is the Father Who never abandons His children. He is the faithful Husband who never cheats on His Bride. He is the constant Protector Who never leaves nor forsakes us. He is the ever-present help in our time of trouble. If you struggle desiring God, maybe you can start by trusting Him. You can start by believing the promises He has made for you. Can you commit yourself today to trust God and to follow Christ?

What if you do trust God and you do desire Him (a little), but not as you should. What can you do? How can you become like the deer that pants for flowing streams? How can your soul become one that thirsts for the living God? Maybe today can be your defining moment, like it was for Jonathan Edwards. Maybe today you can commit yourself to take God for your whole portion, looking to nothing else for your happiness. I believe there is no better way to develop this desire than to earnestly seek God’s face through personal Bible study, meditation on His Word, and quality time in prayer with Him. Set aside time for getting to know Him. Realize that He is your greatest need. Stop looking to other people or things to fulfill your desires. Look to the Lord. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13–14). Jesus is the only one who can satisfy our thirst and our longing. Do you thirst for Him today? May it be so. Amen!