

“My Soul Thirsteth for Thee”

Psalm 63

The title of this psalm gives us only that David “was in the wilderness of Judah.” David was repeatedly driven into that wilderness (east side of the territory belonging to Judah, lying along the Jordan) during the times of persecution under King Saul, but the mention of “the king” in verse 11 (clearly speaking of himself in the third person) would place this later than that, most likely composed in the time of Absalom, the period when David was driven away by the rebellion, and compelled to seek refuge in that wilderness.

2 Samuel 15:28

²⁸ See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me.

2 Samuel 17:16

¹⁶ Now therefore send quickly, and tell David, saying, Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that are with him.

This occasion mentioned gives us great insight into the content of the psalm. As we’ve seen before (Psalm 42 for instance), the psalmists, whether David or someone else, were in constant need of knowing the closeness of God, and their intense desire for the closeness often drove them to both earnest prayer and, as is the case here, an earnest confession of yearning for His closeness and confidence that it was there.

This psalm is dominated by a desire for God, praise from knowing Him, and trust in Him. It is a prayer in form, but the focus is communion with God rather than asking things from God.

Spurgeon said this of the psalm: “This Psalm has been

called the Psalm of early rising – but it is even more the Psalm of the earnest heart. If we would be satisfied, we must first be thirsty.”

Alexander Maclaren made this observation: “The Psalm begins with longing and ends with triumph; for the heart that begins with God ends in peace.”

The psalm is easily divided into three sections. It’s not quite the same structure as the last (three verses of four verses each) but the content is easily divisible.

I. THE DESIRE FOR OF THE THIRSTY SOUL – VS. 1-2

Seeking after God

A. Personal relationship (vs. 1a)

“O God, thou art my God”

1. “O God” – Elohim (אֱלֹהִים)
2. “My God” – El (אֱלִי) – the name of God that implies strength (a strong and mighty One).

“It was the divine attribute of power on which his mind mainly rested when he spoke of him as his God. He did not appeal to him merely as God, with no reference to a particular attribute; but he had particularly in his eye his power or his ability to deliver and save him” (Barnes).

B. Passionate pursuit (vs. 1b)

“...early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;”

1. The word for “early” (שָׁחַר) comes from a root word that is associated with dawn or daybreak – literally, *the early light*.

- a) The verb form used here originally meant *to go out searching at dawn*, because dawn was the time when one began the day's pursuits.
- b) From that imagery, it came to mean not merely *chronological earliness*, but earnest, eager, and diligent pursuit – to rise early *because* one is intent on seeking something.

Proverbs 8:17

¹⁷ I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.

- c) It is certainly wise and scriptural to seek God early in the day, but David's point in this psalm is not merely the hour but the desire.

Psalm 5:3

³ My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up.

Mark 1:35

³⁵ And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

2. The parallelism – “My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee”

- a) “Thirsteth” (תָּשַׁק) – means to thirst or be parched. Physically (literally), it speaks of dehydration. It indicates a strong desire and need for water to drink.

Exodus 17:3 [Israel thirsted in the desert]

³ And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore *is* this *that* thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?

Judges 15:18 [Samson nearly died of thirst]

¹⁸ And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

Figuratively, it speaks of a deep spiritual yearning. In Hebrew, the word expresses painful want – the body’s cry for that which alone can sustain life. Used in this psalm by David, it’s used when thirst reaches that kind of desperation. In other words, God is to him what water is to a person dying of thirst.

- b) “Longeth” (כָּמָה) – this word means to faint, languish, or yearn with exhaustion. The parallelism is intensifying – this second line amplifies the first.
 - c) By pairing “soul” and “flesh,” David is showing that his entire being, both physical and spiritual, is consumed with desire for God. Even his body feels the ache of spiritual separation.
3. “In a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” – David was not just *in* a dry land; he *was* a dry land. His soul was cracked and parched for God’s presence, the way the desert is when needing rain.

C. Perceptive vision (vs. 2)

1. “To see thy power and thy glory” – perceive with understanding. It’s not a longing for a vision but for a vivid awareness of his God. He desires not only to know about God’s power and glory, but to see it at work – to experience it as he did in worship at the sanctuary, all while he is in the wilderness.

- a) "Power" (עֶזֶר) – often denotes God's mighty acts

Psalm 21:13

¹³ Be thou exalted, LORD, in thine own strength: so will we sing and praise thy power.

- b) "Glory" (כְּבוֹד) – literally, heaviness – metaphorically, honor, splendor, presence. In worship, it signifies the manifest presence of God.

Exodus 40:34

³⁴ Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

2. "So as I have seen thee in the sanctuary" – it wasn't the *place* of worship that he yearned for but the *Person* he encountered there.

The same should be true of us when it comes to church. It isn't the *place* of worship but why we go and what we learn that should be the driving force behind it.

II. THE DELIGHT OF THE SATISFIED SOUL – VS. 3-8

Rejoicing in God

A. He praises God for His lovingkindness (vs. 3-4)

1. "Because thy lovingkindness *is* better than life" (vs. 3a) – this is the motive for the praise. This is the heart of the psalm.

- a) The word for "lovingkindness" (חֶסֶד) is a common term in Hebrew (used over 240 times) but one that is difficult to translate by a single word in English. Myles Coverdale (the 1535 English Bible translator) coined this English term (originally two words) precisely to express

this Hebrew concept.

- (1) The word combines the ideas of love (deep affection and mercy), loyalty (steadfast faithfulness to a covenant), and kindness (gracious action flowing from that of love).
- (2) The word means faithful love expressed in God's covenant mercy – His unwavering commitment to those to whom He has bound Himself.

b) "Better than life"

- (1) "Is better" – it's more excellent, more valuable. What David is saying is that knowing God's steadfast love ("lovingkindness") is worth more than life itself.
- (2) "Than life" (מֵחַיִּים) – this word represents all that makes life enjoyable and meaningful: health, safety, family, success, etc.

c) God's lovingkindness reaches its fullest expression in the New Covenant with Christ.

Romans 5:8

⁸ But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

d) The believer who understands the "lovingkindness" (steadfast love) of the Lord will say with the Apostle Paul: *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (Phil. 1:21).

2. "My lips shall praise thee" (vs. 3b) – David is saying that he could do nothing other than to simply praise God with his "lips" for His lovingkindness.

- a) The verb phrase “shall praise thee” (יִשְׁבְּחוּךָ) is in a form that indicates continued, open-ended praise.
- b) It is used for audible, exuberant praise. David is promising vocal testimony, not just silent gratitude.

Psalm 106:47

⁴⁷ Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, *and* to triumph in thy praise.

- 3. “Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name” (vs. 4)
 - a) “Thus” (כֵּן) – in this manner, or because Thy lovingkindness is better than life (vs. 3b)
 - b) “Will I bless thee while I live” (vs. 4a) – this shows that it is a lifelong, settled vow David was making.

B. He partakes of God’s satisfaction (vs. 5-6)

- 1. “My soul shall be satisfied as *with* marrow and fatness” (vs. 5a)
 - a) “My soul shall be satisfied” is the answer to “My soul thirsteth for thee” in verse 1. It denotes complete satisfaction after hunger or thirst.

Psalm 22:26

²⁶ The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.

Psalm 103:5

⁵ Who [the LORD] satisfieth thy mouth with good *things*; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

- b) "As with marrow and fatness" – a vivid image of rich, luxurious foods. The "marrow" was the richest part of meat (a symbol of abundance) and "fatness" was often used of fertility or richness of the land.

Psalm 36:8

⁸ They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.

Isaiah 55:2

² Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which* is not bread? and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which* is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

2. "And my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips" (vs. 5b) – the satisfaction in his heart naturally flowed in outward praise.
3. The colon at the end of verse 5 means that verse 6 explains *how* verse 5 happens. David's satisfaction and joyful praise come through remembrance and meditation.

- a) "When I remember thee upon my bed" (vs. 6a)

(1) "When I remember" (אֶמְנֶכֶּה) – this is understood as "When I lie down, I remember you."

(2) "Upon my bed" (עַל־יְצוּעַי) – this implies restless nights (as it does in Ps. 77:2-6). David was a fugitive and was having trouble sleeping, but instead of anxiety, he filled the night with meditation on His God.

- b) "And meditate on thee in the *night* watches" – synonymous parallelism of the first line.

- (1) "Meditate" (הגה) – this shows David is not simply thinking about God, but is whispering (what the term "meditate" means here) his praise in the darkness.

A classic Puritan statement reads: *"The meditation of anything hath more sweetness than bare remembrance. The memory is the chest in which you lay up a truth, but meditation is the digestion of it."*

In other words, "Remembering brings God to mind; meditation keeps him before the heart."

- (2) "In the *night* watches" – the night was divided by the Israelites into three watches, and later by the Romans into four. The expression here means through the successive hours of the night.

C. He perseveres in God's strength (vs. 7-8)

1. "Because thou hast been my help" (vs. 7a) – the tense of the verb here (perfect tense – past action with continuing significance) shows this as, "You have been (and still are) my help."
2. "Therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice" (vs. 7b) – as seen before (Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4), this symbolizes divine protection and safety because we are close to the heart of God.
3. "My soul followeth hard after thee" (vs. 8a) – the verb "followeth hard" (דבק) means to cling, cleave, join with, stay with, stick closely to. It expresses fervent attachment, loyalty, and love.

It might be said, "My soul clings closely to You

– I will not let you go.

4. "Thy right hand upholdeth me" (vs. 8b) – the parallel competes the picture: David clings to God ("followeth hard after Thee"), God supports David ("Thy right hand upholdeth me").

III. THE DELIVERANCE OF THE SECURE SOUL – vs. 9-11

Trusting in God

A. God deals with the wicked (vs. 9-10)

1. "Those that seek my soul" – these are David's pursuers (likely Absalom's forces).
2. "Lower part of the earth" – the realm of the dead; their rebellion ends in ruin.
3. "Portion for foxes" – a vivid way to say their defeat will be complete.

- The one who clings to God (vs. 8) can leave vengeance to Him (Rom. 12:19).

Romans 12:19

¹⁹ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

B. God delights in the righteous (vs. 11)

1. "But the king shall rejoice in God" – this is the final contrast. David's joy rests in God Himself and not in triumph over his enemies.
2. "Every one that sweareth by Him shall glory" – those followers of the LORD will share the king's rejoicing.

3. "But the mouth of them that speak shall be stopped" – deceit and rebellion will be silenced.

Conclusion:

This psalm began with David being chased into the wilderness where he was parched because there was no water (literally speaking), but it ends with David praising and confident in the presence of God.

His thirst for water became an illustration he used to demonstrate his thirst for the living God, and in seeking Him he found what nothing else could supply – satisfaction for his soul.

The psalm the opens with desire and rises through delight, closes in deliverance. When the believer seeks God Himself above all else, every "wilderness" becomes a sanctuary, every trial becomes a place to worship, and every fear gives way to praise, for the soul that "followeth hard" (clings) after God will always be upheld by His right hand.