

Psalm 63

Desire

Sight

Delight

So just to set the scene here in Psalm 63, before we even get to verse 1, we're told that this is a Psalm of David written when he was in the Desert of Judah.

Well you might ask, what was he doing in the desert? Wasn't King David Israel's greatest King? Shouldn't he be in his palace, or visiting his kingdom, or in the temple worshipping God? Why is he here in the wilderness?

Well David spent different times of his life in the desert and the wilderness, including before he became King, when he was on the run from King Saul who was trying to kill him.

However, in verse 11 of our passage here, David refers to himself as 'the King' so this wilderness experience of Psalm 63 almost certainly refers to when he was King, in a period of time described in 2 Samuel in chapters 13 to 18, where his son Absalom had risen up against him, usurped and overthrown him as king and was hunting him down in order to kill him.

And this is the situation as King David writes this Psalm - he's in the desert, in the wilderness, on the run, hiding away from his own son, at risk of losing his own life and the lives of his men and his loved ones with him.

Imagine the hurt, pain and sorrow David was feeling - his own son's betrayed him, his family situation's messed up, he's all but lost his kingdom and kingship, his own previous sins and failings as a king, man, husband, father are perhaps coming home to roost. Most likely physically hungry and thirsty, worn out, drained, the effects of being on the run and in hiding from his own son taking its toll on him...

And almost a couple months into the New Year, this morning, how are YOU feeling? How are things for you and with you?

Maybe 2018 was a great year for you and you've had a really good start to 2019 too! You've experienced God's goodness in your life and yes there've been some tough times and some struggles but it's been a season of progress in faith.

Maybe you've started coming to the church here and have been blessed, maybe your walk with the Lord has really deepened and got closer. Maybe you've made some real progress in fighting and putting off particular sins that you've been struggling with for years. You're feeling blessed in your faith and following after Jesus - wonderful!

Or maybe you're feeling a bit like King David at this point in his life. Facing real trials and difficulties and problems as your 2018 ended and this new year has started in seemingly the same vein. Family concerns, trouble and strife with relatives or friendship groups, marriage trouble, your children or teenagers are hard work, or if you're a teenager maybe you've been falling out with your parents. Bullying at school, maybe for others struggling with singleness, financial worries, employment concerns, illness - feeling that you're down in the mire, lacking hope for tomorrow, let alone the rest of 2019...

Or maybe the desert, the wilderness is a picture of where you feel spiritually right now - struggling with a particular sin or sin in general that seems to be getting the better of you and bringing you down. A dryness in our relationship with God, maybe we're trying to put on a good front when we're with our brothers and sisters at church but they don't know how we're really feeling inside. Our love for the Lord has gone cold. We just don't really desire to spend time with God in prayer or his Word or worship. It's just about all we can do to drag ourselves to church once a week on a Sunday morning.

Or maybe if you're not a Christian here this morning, this picture of a desert and wilderness is a reflection of your spiritual life. Not just dry and shrivelled up but spiritually dead as the Bible describes it. Maybe you're hungering and thirsting after something and you're not quite sure what it is? You feel there's something missing? A satisfaction and contentment you don't have? Maybe you have lots of what the world offers, or maybe you don't, but either way you feel that something's not quite as it should be in your life. There's a hunger and a thirst you can't quite put your finger on.

Wherever you're at right now in the range of human and spiritual experience, I hope and pray that as we study God's Word together this morning, that we'll all benefit from and be blessed by Psalm 63...

So now we've considered where David was at in this point in his life, and maybe where we are right now, let's get into the passage, which I'd like us to consider under 3 headings:

1. Desire (and seeking!) - V1
2. Sight - V2
3. Delight (and worship!) V3-5

1. Desire

V1 - King David says "O God, you are my God". This opening phrase kind of sums up this passage - I think it speaks of three things - worship and desire and relationship...

On the one hand "O God" - worship, reverence, adoration, honour, majesty, acknowledgement of who God is, how awesome He is. Reminds me of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6 hearing the seraphim flying and crying out to each other "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory" and then Isaiah's response ..."Woe is me... I am ruined... my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty"... This sense and knowledge of who God is...

And on the other hand "O God" - a sense of longing, of desire, of yearning, an inner urge deep within David for God...

This isn't some distant deity, some unknown power, some out there mystical spirit - not fuzzy or vacuous or abstract... But knowable. Close.

In fact so close that David's next words after "O God", are "you are my God"...

You are MY God.

Now I just want to take a moment to ask you a question - Is God YOUR God? Do YOU belong to Him? Is He YOURS?

I first decided to speak on Psalm 63 when I read it a week or so before Christmas in my 'Bible in a year' devotional, which for each day of the year has an OT passage, part of Psalms, part of Proverbs and part of the NT in a daily reading, so the idea is you get through the whole bible in a year. Only problem was that these readings were from the 19th May...

Anyway, the NT passage which went along with this Psalm was from John chapter 4 where Jesus meets the Samaritan woman who's going to draw water from the well, which I thought was

perfect given that here we're presented with the desert and wilderness, and if there's one thing you need in the desert, it's water!

Well Jesus meets this woman coming to draw water in the heat of the day (not the done thing, but there's a back story to that which I haven't got time to go into now, ask me later if you want!) and he asks her for a drink, and as they chat, Jesus determines that this woman has a soul thirst which she's been trying to satisfy in relationships with men, which has left her with a string of broken marriages and relationships, unsatisfied and unfulfilled.

She's a thirsty woman. She's tried to quench her thirst in something or someone other than Jesus. She's failed miserably. The sources of 'water' she's gone to - human, physical relationships with guys - have been broken and given her dirty water as it were, which has left her in a worse place than when she started - even more thirsty, empty, desperate.

What about you? Have you been searching for fulfilment, satisfaction, excitement in something or someone other than Jesus?

The things of this world, shiny and attractive and exciting as they may well appear to be - and make no mistake, they do appear bright and shiny and attractive and exciting - that's how sin and distractions attract us - they'll only leave us more thirsty and empty and desperate than we were when we first started searching.... Just like the Samaritan woman that Jesus goes out of his way oh so deliberately to meet with...

And so Jesus says to the Samaritan woman that she needs the living water only he can give, as whoever drinks the water she's given to him from the well will be thirsty again, but the living water he gives will satisfy and quench her soul thirst and give her eternal life...

Then she goes off and tells the townsfolk and they come to meet Jesus and at the end of the chapter they say to the woman...

John 4:42: "We no longer believe just because of what you said, now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world".

Do you know Jesus as your Saviour?

Because that's why he came to earth, into human history, some 2,000 years ago - not just to be a good teacher, or be a good example, or be a good friend, all of which are nice, but not absolutely necessary. But to save. And we all need saving. To save us from our sin, which is a Word the Bible uses for us going our own way, turning away from God and as Frank Sinatra famously, or perhaps infamously, sang, doing it our way...

And the Bible says that our sin results in God's judgement and ultimately eternity in hell. Because God is holy and just and righteous and can't just turn a blind eye to sin.

We might perhaps like God to turn a blind eye to our own sin, but if we're honest, we wouldn't even expect that from a human judge - we expect right and just judgements and sentences to be delivered by the judges in our high court, so shouldn't we expect even more - perfect justice - from the very highest court - from the judgement seat of Almighty God?!

And so we all need a Saviour. The Bible says Jesus is that Saviour - the only one who lived a perfect life, died as a perfect sacrifice for our sins to forgive us, make us right with God and give us eternal life in heaven.

I'd urge you, if you don't yet know Jesus as your Saviour, come to Him today. Confess your sin to him, ask him to forgive you and come into your life as Saviour and Lord. Find out more, ask me, ask anyone from the church, or the friend that brought you how you can really know him. There's nothing more important in this life and the next than knowing Jesus as your Saviour.

Anyway, back to our passage Psalm 63:1 - David says O God, you are MY God...

It's Relationship isn't it? This isn't religion David's talking about here. There's no religious language. There's no religious icons or symbols. This isn't form or tradition or pomp and circumstance or ceremonies or rituals... Or doing religious stuff or trying to be good enough for God and earn our way into heaven.

But when he says "O God, you are MY God"? This is relationship. Personal. Knowing. Intimate. Fellowship. Closeness...

And so David knows God, he has a relationship with him.

He may be in the wilderness, far from home, far from his palace, far from the temple and the opportunity to worship God there, and yet...

He says that he earnestly seeks him - he wants more of God!

And I think this is an encouragement to us all. Maybe we feel like we're in the wilderness in our lives, spiritually. Maybe low, far from God, discouraged, depressed even. Like everything's against us, that God doesn't love us or care about us, that he's abandoned us. Or we feel that we've messed up and failed God and sinned so many times that we're losing hope, losing the will to live as it were, it's too hard this Christian life.

Well here's what to do. Do what David did. Get on your knees and seek after God. Confess your sin and failings to him - he knows already - nothing is hidden from his sight. Cry out to God. Be honest with him. The Psalms are full of honesty and crying out to God and pouring out complaint to God as it were. Get it all out. Tell God everything. He knows how you feel...

Hebrews 4:14-16 says this: 'Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of GRACE with confidence, so that we may receive MERCY and find GRACE to help us in our time of need'.

And repent and turn away from your sin, from yourself, know the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ and the forgiveness he purchased for you on the cross, and seek after and pursue God...

And how does David seek after his God?

Earnestly - seriously, intently, ardently, fervently, eagerly, intensely, zealously... Seeking after, pursuing, going hard after God...

And look how earnestly he's seeking after his God. He likens his desire for God to a desire for water in the desert - my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, IN A DRY AND WEARY LAND WHERE THERE IS NO WATER.

He's in the desert wilderness, it's hot, there's a shortage of water, he almost certainly knows what it's like to be without water for a long period of time - "where there is no water" he says.

Have you ever been in a desert and been desperate for water? I've not, but I've run races in 20 plus degrees heat and run hard and really wanted a good few cups of water afterwards. Or maybe played football in heat approaching thirty degrees and needed a long cold drink of water during and afterwards. Useless examples I know but being honest I've not really known the physical thirst David would've had whilst in the desert.

Can you imagine if you'd gone hours on end without water in 40+ degree dry desert heat, the sun beating down upon you - mouth parched, your tongue sticking to your mouth, how dry it feels, how you'd gasp and long for water.

Then you stumble across an oasis, palm trees and a pool of crystal clear water - you'd run as fast as you could towards it and jump into the water desperate for refreshment, for a drink, for that which will sustain you and keep you alive. That's what David's talking about - that's how earnestly he's seeking after his God. As if his very life depended upon it. He NEEDS God.

Do I? Do you? Do our daily lives and schedules and what we do with our time reflect that? Do they look any different to non-Christians who don't have a relationship with God?

And notice it's not JUST a soul thirst and desire. There's a physical element to it too - David's body longs for God. It's like his whole being - soul, spirit, heart, mind, body - everything within him is desiring after and longing and fainting after God. Inside and out. Internal and external. Pursuing, desiring, going after God.

Just as you need water to survive in the desert, so David needed God, and more and more of Him to survive, for life itself.

Wow. Is this you? Is this me? I found that as I was preparing to speak on this passage I felt that perhaps I was reading and studying about it more than I was actually thirsting and longing for and desiring after God... And there's been many times in my own Christian experience when I've been far away from this desire for God... Even when I started looking at this preparation for this morning's sermon...

Oh that the Holy Spirit would do a work deep within us and make us feel this way about God, that we would desire him, want to spend time with him in his Word, in prayer, talking with him, listening to him, worshipping and praising him... In fellowship and relationship with him.

It's not something we can drum up, it's not a natural desire, it comes from God himself, so let's ask him for it more and more...

But this desire, this appetite for God can be spoiled...

It's like when you're a parent and your child comes up to you at half 11 in the morning and asks you for a snack - some pringles or a couple of the heroes or quality sweets left over from Christmas or maybe a yo-yo bar... Or maybe for your kids it's a vegan bar I don't know... And what do you say? No because it's nearly lunchtime! Because you know if they snack it'll spoil their appetite and they won't eat their lunch!

And actually these things are quite nice snacks and if it was at a different time of the day we might allow them to have them - in the same way, perhaps even good things can spoil our appetite for God, distract us from him, take up our time so we don't have time to spend with Almighty God, our Heavenly Father.

What are the 'snacks' in your life that are spoiling your appetite for God? It is TOO MUCH OF, OR AN UNHEALTHY EMPHASIS OR PRIORITY ON social media, gaming, sport, hobbies, food, money, wealth, possessions - the 65 inch TV, the new car, the investment property, our career, family even?

And it's not like your child's asking you for ricin or novichok or cyanide as a snack!!! But I guess sin is the spiritual equivalent of having poison for a snack! It really messes us up and spoils our relationship with God.

How will you desire to spend time with God in prayer or reading his Word or in worship if you've been on the internet looking at images or videos you shouldn't be looking at as a child of God? Or if you've had an attitude of hate or bitterness or unforgiveness in your heart towards someone? Or if you've been angry all day at your wife (or husband!) or kids and have been mean and unkind. Or if you've been gossiping all day at work or with your friends? Or if you're just lazy and can't be bothered?

Let's pray and ask God to help us to get rid of those sins, those things in our lives at the moment which are spoiling our appetite, our desire for him...

It was this same King David in Psalm 63 who also wrote Psalm 139:23&24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive or wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"...

So David has this desire, this longing, this appetite for God...

But why?! Why does David feel this way about God?

After all, would you ever describe seeking after and thirsting and longing after an idol, a statue of a god, a religious leader or prophet, a shrine in this way?

1. Sight

V2 - David says 'I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and glory'. What's he talking about? Has David actually seen God physically face to face? No. He's talking about spiritual sight - seeing with the eyes of faith.

That we may see God for who he really is. To behold his power and glory. I mentioned Isaiah chapter 6 earlier, where the prophet Isaiah has a vision of God for who he is in his holiness, "Holy holy holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory".

And as we seek God and desire after him, we'll see him more clearly, we'll know him more deeply. The Bible says in Jeremiah 29:13 "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart". Wholehearted seeking after God and desire for him leads to a clearer spiritual sight of God...

David remembers when he's seen God as it were and got a taste of him and worshipped him in the sanctuary, in the tabernacle, in the temple in Jerusalem before he had to flee from his son Absalom.

David will also have remembered great victories and blessings, how God had chosen him as the youngest and therefore most unlikely of all of his brothers to be king, how he'd given him victory over the giant Goliath, how he'd given him the kingdom, how he'd given him victory upon victory over the Philistines and the enemies of Israel. How God had blessed him with peace in his kingdom, with wealth, with reputation, with family.

And yet he doesn't mention any of this - he just talks about seeing and remembering God himself.

And sometimes we need to be reminded of who God really is, not the small God who our limited view of Him can perhaps sometimes create, but the awesome God He really is. Not just the good things He's given to us, but the good God, Creator, Giver himself.

We were in the car on the way to bowling in Orpington early January time and there was a worship song on that I'd never heard before by a Christian artist called Kristian Stanfill - it was talking about how awesome and great and powerful God is and yet how we can know him as a friend.

It just made me think - I'm a child and a friend of this amazing, all-knowing, all-powerful and Almighty God who's created and who sustains all things, who's so holy and pure and glorious and reigns in majesty with all the angels and heavenly beings worshipping him 24/7 crying out "Holy Holy Holy the whole earth is full of his glory".

And yet I live so often seemingly unaware or not appreciating that I can talk with this God, I can sing and praise and worship him in song and that he loves that, that I can hear from him, hear his voice speaking to me in his Word by his Holy Spirit, know him, be in close relationship and fellowship and friendship with this God. That he delights over me with singing as the prophet Zephaniah says!

Yet instead I often seem more interested in watching the TV or wasting time on my phone or sometimes almost looking for anything to do rather than spend time with God...

It's absolutely crazy isn't it?! It's nuts! It doesn't make any sense!!! When we seek after God, when we desire him, we'll see him. And we'll love and enjoy the presence of God. And we'll enjoy coming to seek his face. And just being with him. There can be nothing better - 'one day in your presence is far better to me than gold, or to live my whole life somewhere else' as the song goes.

((Spurgeon: "God's people do not always know the greatness of his love for them. Sometimes, however, it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us. Some of us know at times what it is to be almost too happy to live! The love of God has been so overpoweringly experienced by us on some occasions, that we have almost had to ask for a stay of the delight because we could not endure it any more. If the glory had not been veiled a little, we should have died of excess of rapture, or happiness"!!!!))

It's what Ephesians 1:17&18 talks about - the spirit of wisdom and revelation that we may know God better. That the eyes of our heart may be enlightened that we may know the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and his incomparably great power for us who believe'.

We need the Holy Spirit to give us this sort of spiritual sight that we will see and know more of God. And that he'll be all our heart and soul desires and needs.

David talked about seeing God in the sanctuary, the tabernacle, the temple.

Where's today's equivalent of the temple? Here. You! Me! WE are the temple of the Holy Spirit! Let's allow him to have his way in us that we too might see God more and more as the awesome God he is...

And what does this seeking after God, this desire for God and this sight of God bring about?

1. Delight (worship?)

V3,4,5:

V3 - Because your love is better than life - David knows that God's love is better than even life itself! Which means that our ultimate purpose in life must be to know God and his love and then to worship and live him! Because there's actually nothing better!

There's a higher purpose to our lives than simply existing, simply going through life, even enjoying all the good things in life and then dying... We're created to know, to worship God, to live for him, to bring him glory and then to be with him enjoying his presence, sharing in his glory for ever and ever and ever! Purpose and meaning in this life and for eternity!

And it's not just a King David or an OT thing! It's what the apostle Paul says in Philippians chapter 3:7 "But whatever was to my profit (all the good things he had in life - career, reputation, wealth, family background and upbringing, religiosity) I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider EVERYTHING a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him... I want to know Christ"...

And "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"...(Philippians 1:21)...

And there's such security in knowing God and his love. It means we don't have to be like everyone else and seek our meaning and fulfilment in this world or the things of this world which we know don't satisfy, we don't have to chase after things that will just leave us ultimately unfulfilled. We can rest in the knowledge and love of our God and chase after him, who will fill us more and more with himself.

And what's the result of this sight, of this knowledge of God and his love?

V3&4 - Worship. "My lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands" - signifying a posture of prayer, of worship, of adoration, of surrender to God, and of open-handed and open-hearted receiving from him.

And ultimately delight and deep satisfaction and fulfilment - V5 - "My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods, with singing lips my mouth will praise you".

Again David uses a physical example, just like the thirsting for water in a dry and weary

land where there is no water in verse 1, here he's talking about eating the choicest food, feasting on a banquet.

And with David in the desert, I'm guessing choice food was in short supply, maybe desert rodents and plants were on the menu when rations ran low. And so even the thought of choice food, let alone the taste of it to David at this time would've made him salivate, to yearn for a return to eating such food glorious food.

And so David's talking about that feeling he would've got once he'd feasted on a rich banquet, a delightful meal and is full, satisfied, happy, contented.

Well that's just something of a picture of the feasting on, the deep satisfaction of knowing God, his love, of worshipping him, of being with him... A satisfaction of the soul, of our deepest needs and desires being met in God. Of being completely at home, at rest, at peace, fulfilled, a sense that all is well with our soul as we sometimes sing...

Tim Keller points out that this isn't just about cognition, about head knowledge or cold hard facts - knowing about God. It's about experience - seeking, thirsting, longing, seeing, beholding, tasting, feasting. Experiencing him with our senses, not just in our heads! Really knowing God in intimate fellowship and relationship.

And again the natural response is worship - "with singing lips my mouth will praise you" - does our life, do our lips, our mouths praise God, speak of him, tell others about him and how good he is, of our salvation that we have in Jesus?

When we delight in something, we want to share that with others don't we? If I see a great goal on MOTD I sometimes cry out "what a goal"!!! And maybe say to Em whoa you should've seen that goal! Or maybe text a what's app group chat to share my enjoyment and appreciation of it. Or if we see something great on facebook or instagram etc, we want to share it, to let our friends know about it, to share our enjoyment of it... Sharing great experiences and things with others is so much better than keeping it to ourselves, of only experiencing them on our own.

Well we've got a wonderfully good God haven't we - amazing good news about a Saviour who loves us and gave himself for us to rescue us, to save us from our sins and bring us peace with God, relationship with him, eternal life in heaven... The one who is the source of love and joy and peace and glory and majesty and just everything that is good and beautiful! So far and immeasurably better than a goal, or a meal, or a facebook post!

And so we should be the same, that as with the help and the filling of the Holy Spirit we seek after God, as we spend time with him, as we desire him more and more, as we see him for who he is, as we delight in and worship him, that we share this relationship with others, that we share the good news of Jesus with others, that they may also come to enjoy God and his love and salvation as we do...

May God help us to seek after him, to desire him, to see him, to delight in him and to worship him... And may our lives be transformed for his glory.