

Text: Psalm 63:1-11 (Pew Bible pg.568)

Title: “Faith Sings ... When I Long for God”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles with me to Psalm 63:1-11. Follow along as I read our text today.

I want to talk to you today about those seasons in life when you feel like God is a million miles away. You know He's there somewhere in the heavens, but that's a million miles away. Right now He seems so far from you, and you long to feel His presence, His nearness. Perhaps it comes when you've been serving God and giving yourself away, and one day you wake up and realize you've been doing more and enjoying it less. And then you hit the wall; a disaster happens, and you feel all alone. Where is God?

It must have been a similar situation that caused David to write this psalm before us today. The inscription written over this psalm tells us that David wrote it, “When he was in the Desert of Judea.”

It appears that this psalm is written during the events that are recorded in II Samuel 15-17. David, who is Israel's king has become aware of the plot of his own son Absalom to take over the throne of Israel. Absalom's scheme appears to be working and David fears for his life. He gathers his family and the people who are loyal to him and they leave Jerusalem trekking down into the Kidron Valley on the east and up on to the Mount of Olives. The priests have brought the Ark of the Covenant with them; it is the visible representation of the glory and the presence of God. But David stops and sends them back into the city with the Ark, it must have saddened him to watch it disappear from his sight. David turns and leads his followers out into the Judean desert where they stop for a while.

PHOTO OF JUDEAN WILDERNESS – I've visited this area. The last time we were there I took this photo. You can see what a desolate, barren region it is.

By now the king and the people are exhausted. II Samuel 17:2 says that David is weary and weak. It's a disgraceful thing that has happened. His own son is leading a revolt that forces David to flee. He's been run out of his palace, out of his city, but more significantly he is separated from the place where he worships, the temple. He's in a desert wilderness, and his own soul feels like a dry and weary land where there is no water. And David longed for God.

David must have been filled with all kinds of self-doubts. Where did he go wrong? His family life was a mess. He's devastated. He's embarrassed. Is there any way he can sort this out? Can he find peace and satisfaction in the midst of the chaos?

It is at this point that David probably composes this psalm ... this “Faith Song.” He's been embarrassed and disgraced. God seems far away and he longs to feel Him near again. But here in the desert David collects himself and out of this tragedy his faith begins to sing.

There's a progression at work here in these verses and I want you to see them. You and I will all be where David is at some time, David shows us how to work through it ... how to worship through the spiritually dry times in your life.

1. THIRSTING FOR GOD

Out there in the wilderness David's broken heart cracks open and out pours a desperate cry.

Psalm 63:1 - O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

In the desert there are no distractions. He is left alone with himself ... and with his God.

David turns to God: "Elohim, you are my El. Mighty One, You are the one true God."

"earnestly I seek you..." = literally means "early I seek you."

Notice he doesn't say, "Earnestly I seek a way out of this mess," or "Earnestly I seek to get my throne back and my son put in his place." No, David is not seeking the blessings of God ... he's seeking God Himself.

"my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you..." = David longs for God with his whole being.

Question: It's pretty easy for us to recognize when our body is longing for something. Do you recognize when your soul is thirsty? You long for something when it seems to be missing. One of the most important things in life is to be able to recognize what's happening in your soul.

And this all happens "in a dry and weary land where there is no water." David looks around. He studies his situation. He's physically thirsty and hungry. He was physically thirsty, but more importantly he recognized that he was thirsty for God.

Now David didn't *choose* the desert, he was *chased* there. But God was waiting for him there.

God loves the desert. He does some of His most important work in our lives in the desert experiences. Moses was on the backside of the desert when he heard the call of God upon his life. The Israelites learned to trust God and live day by day by faith in their 40 years of wilderness wanderings.

ILLUSTRATION – The location of this episode in David's life was just a short distance from where hundreds of years before God met another one of his men running into the desert. Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau and his father-in-law Laban when he stops at brook Jabbok. And there he wrestles with an angel of the Lord in the night. He said, "I will not let go until you bless me." And there God gave Jacob a new name, the name Israel. It was a real turning point in this life.

God loves to meet his people in the desert.

Then David remembers...

Psalm 63:2 - I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.

Some translations begin this verse with the word “Yes!” It’s as if David is saying, “Yes, I remember. There were times when you seemed very near and glorious. I have seen you in the sanctuary. I was aware of your power and your glory.”

Thank God for the times He is that close and that real to you. Mark it down. Write it in your journal. There will be times when He doesn’t feel that close, when the vision of God is not as clear. Then you can draw on the memory of when God was overwhelmingly present.

And this happened for David in the sanctuary. O God loves to meet us in the desert, and He loves to meet us in the sanctuary as well. And when we’re in the dry places of life, we draw on the memory of the times when He’s been real in our worship.

So we are thirsting for God. Where do we go from there? It is followed by ...

2. TREASURING GOD

Our thirsting for God must drive us to dig deep and remember why we need God to begin with.

Psalm 63:3 - Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

“your love...” = There’s that towering word again. It is the Hebrew *khesed* ... the steadfast love of the Lord ... the unfailing love of the Lord.

And this is the most important thing in life to us. It means that you want God more than anything else in life ... and the experience of His love sustains us.

Now there are things that we think are most important in life ... good health, good food, good income, good sex, good job, good friends, good times, good stuff. And God is good to give us good things.

But what happens when any or all of that disappears? That’s where David was. He came to a place in his life where food didn’t matter, family didn’t matter, his job was gone ... but he knew what really sustained him ... the steadfast love of the Lord.

Psalm 63:4 - I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.

Thirsting gives way to treasuring ... to worshipping. That’s what we are to do when God seems far away. And as he worships his faith begins to emerge stronger.

Psalm 63:5 - My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

You've reached a great place in your walk with God when the pleasures that come from treasuring and worshipping God surpass any earthly pleasure and treasures you can imagine.

We move from thirsting for God to treasuring God. Then we go the next step to ...

3. TRUSTING GOD

David clings to God.

Psalm 63:6 - On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.

Now David must have had trouble sleeping through all of this. In OT times the night was divided into three "watches." The "watches of the night" are like the chiming of a clock every hour reminding him that he's still awake.

ILLUSTRATION - Have you noticed how everything seems worse at night? Pain is always worse at night, whether it is physical or emotional. Everything seems worse at night, doesn't it? You can't sleep because you're worried about something or something seems so overwhelming.

When worries and fears are keeping you awake at night, try this. Start thinking about God and all the things you know are true about Him. Sing songs that help you remember God. That's what David does.

Psalm 63:7 - Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.

"I sing in the shadow of your wings..." What is that? He's remembering his worshipping in the temple. Remember, as David left Jerusalem fleeing from Absalom, the priests followed David out of town with the Ark of the Covenant. David sends them back to Jerusalem with the Ark, and he watches with a sad heart.

On top of the ark were cherubim (angels) with outstretched wings over what was called the Mercy Seat. What a powerful reminder of the grace and the mercy of the Lord! David took his place there. He's trusting God.

Psalm 63:8 - My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

Faith is clinging to what you know is true about God. And it's not just with your head ... "my soul clings to you." And the result is that His right hand upholds or sustains us.

So there's thirsting for God that gives way to treasuring God that gives way to trusting God. And that gives way to ...

4. THRIVING IN GOD

Remember what David said earlier:

Psalm 63:5 - My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

QUOTE: C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* says this: "God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

Now we can trust God to take care of the enemies or the circumstances that have pushed us into the desert. David said,

Psalm 63:9 - They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth.

Psalm 63:10 - They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals.

In other words, God will fight my battles.

Psalm 63:11 - But the king will rejoice in God...

God, I'll not rejoice that my problems go away ... I rejoice in You.

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION – One of my heroes in the faith is Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission in the 1800s. As he arrived on the field in China Hudson Taylor was met with one devastating experience after another. One of those came when his wife, who had just given birth to their son, contracted cholera and was so sick she could not nurse their newborn son. After a week the little boy died. Mothers, imagine how she felt knowing her son had died because she could not nurse him. They were both devastated. Mrs. Taylor grew weaker and weaker from the cholera. Within a few weeks Hudson Taylor had to bury, not just to his son, but also to his wife. These two deaths left him devastated! Soon after than Hudson himself became sick and was confined to his room. During those days he wrote in his journal:

“How lonesome were the weary hours confined to my room. How I missed my dear wife and the voices of the children far away in England. Then I understood why the Lord had made that passage so real to me. ‘Whoever drinks of the water that I give him shall never thirst.’ Twenty times a day, perhaps, as I felt the heart-thirsting coming back, I cried to Him, ‘Lord, you promised! You promised me that I should never thirst.’ And whenever I called by day or by night, how quickly He came and satisfied my sorrowing heart!”

There's a soul thirsting for God ... and thriving in God.