

Love that is Better than Life – Psalm 63

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There was a song written in 1965 by Jackie DeShannon that most of you my vintage or older know: “What the world needs now is love, sweet love; it’s the only thing that there’s just too little of...” I’m guessing that most of you would agree that this song could have been written in 2016. Look at some of things that have happened the first 205 days of this year: There has been 136 mass shootings (with deaths of 4 or more people) in U.S. already this year. We have been shocked by recent attacks on police, especially in Dallas and Baton Rouge, over 30 police deaths so far this year. What the world needs now is love... North Korea claims successful H-bomb test. 1000s jailed after failed coup in Turkey. What the world needs now is love... There is distrust and anger among races and religions. Christians have been raped, set on fire, or beheaded in the name of religion. Most recently 84 were killed, including 10 children & babies, as a delivery truck was deliberately run into a crowd of innocents in Nice France during Bastille Day. Worldwide there has been 218 terrorist incidents from Jan – June this year. What the world needs now is love... Even within the church it is sometimes hard to see love. At the recent Synod convention I attended as a delegate there was rampant distrust, anger, sarcasm, and misplaced emotion. What the world needs now is love...

The problem is that love is sometimes hard to detect or experience in a world that is infected by sin.

As we read Psalm 63, it is easy to see that sin and its effects. King David was on the run. His son Absalom had set up a rival throne in Hebron and declared himself to be king. Instead of choosing to fight, David fled to the wilderness. Verse 30 reveals that David left Jerusalem weeping, his head covered in shame, the hot sand of the desert burning his royal feet as he ran for his life.

David was probably wondering what was going on. This was his son! This wasn’t supposed to happen! It didn’t make sense. He was lonely, sad, broken hearted, and afraid for his own life. He was betrayed by his boy, exiled from his throne, and humiliated in the desert. Are you experiencing something similar today? Are you faced with something that just doesn’t make sense? Have you been rocked by some bad news? Has someone pulled the rug out from under you? Do you feel like you’re just wandering in the wilderness?

I have some good news for you this morning. It’s not always bad to be in the wilderness. Wilderness wanderings create a thirst for God because when He’s all we’ve got, He’s all we want. David has lost everything and now he’s able to find the only thing that will truly

satisfy - God Himself. Psalm 63 is a song that will lead us to true satisfaction no matter what has happened to us. We could say it this way. Before David was forced into the wilderness he was obsessed with his own comfort and the satisfaction of his own needs. It's only when everything is taken from him that he becomes obsessed with God Himself, finding full satisfaction in his praise of Him.

When we're wandering in the wilderness, we're often forced to admit that what the world offers doesn't last because it promises more than it can deliver. When God is all we have, then He's all we want. Or, to say it another way: When we allow the Lord to totally possess us, we will be obsessed with Him.

Psalm 63 shows us 3 ways we should focus our faith and attention.

Focus Inward - Am I longing for God? (1-2)

David begins by taking a look on the inside and recognizes that the only thing he has left is God in verse 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." Notice that David uses the personal pronoun to describe relationship and attachment: "My God." He uses two different words for God to show that Elohim (the general term for God) is his El, (the mighty and strong God).

David is seeking God earnestly, which is a phrase that refers to the early dawn. It's the idea of seeking God as the first thing we do. Proverbs 8:17 in the KJV captures it this way: "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." One way we can tell if we're really longing for God is if we are turning our thoughts to Him as soon as we wake up. Psalm 5:3: "In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation."

David is in a desert with no water and yet He longs for God more than he does for a drink. David was dry and weary in his spirit. He wasn't as close to God as he was when he was a shepherd boy. As he focused inward he could tell that something was missing. He craves for intimacy with the Infinite as he reflects back to his worship experiences in verse 2: "I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory."

David is not longing for the temple building or even his fellow worshippers. He treasures the privilege he has to see the power and glory of God. That should be our aim in worship as well. We don't come here to see others or to listen to music, or to sing songs, or even just to hear a message. We should come with the expectation of praising His power and gazing on His glory! The elements of the service should point us to God's glory, which means, "weightiness," allowing us to savor in His supremacy. David

is echoing the words of Moses in Exodus 33:18: "Now show me your glory." We should be obsessed with nothing less.

As you take a look inward can you honestly say that you are thirsting and longing to behold God's glory and power? Are you eager to seek Him early every day? Maybe the Lord has allowed a dry time in your life in order for you to find out how much God you really want in your life. As you focus inward, ask yourself this question, "Do I want God or do I want me?" After focusing inward, the next sign in the wilderness urges us to focus upward.

Focus Upward - Am I living for God? (3-8)

Verse 3 gives us the summary of David's search for satisfaction: "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." David never got over the fact that God loved him with a covenant-keeping commitment and as a result he valued the favor and friendship of God above everything else. Friends, never forget that life is not worth living unless it is lived in full recognition of God's love for you. The word "life" actually means, "lives," and could be translated, "Your love is better than lives." God's lovingkindness is superior to all the various things in life. Whatever life you have chosen, whatever you've given yourself to, whatever your obsession is right now, God's love is much better.

Picture "life" in my left hand and God's "lovingkindness" in my right hand. This verse teaches us that God's love is far greater and of much more worth than life itself. [Raise right hand higher] But, in the deepest sense, God's love is life itself. [Bring both hands together and lift up] In order to really live, we must receive love from above. Jesus put it this way in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Life is more than just eating and drinking. Even if we use Botox to get rid of wrinkles, or exercise so that we live a few years longer, if we don't possess the love of God, it doesn't matter what we obsess about. We may improve our looks or lengthen our life but what does it really matter if we never experience the love of God? It is better not to exist at all, than to live without the lovingkindness of God. Do you savor the favor of God?

Because David knew the love of God personally, the last part of verse 3 says that he glorified God with his lips. He responded to God in praise and he gave testimony of God's love to others. We who are recipients of God's favor are constrained to share it with others. 2 Corinthians 5:14: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died."

As David continues to look upward, he struggles to find a metaphor that would come close to describing how satisfied he is with God. As king, he put on some fabulous

feasts. As he thinks back to the best banquet he ever had, it pales in comparison to the contentment he experiences on a daily basis with God. Look at verse 5: “My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods...” In the Bible, a satisfying meal is often representative of heavenly happiness. The pleasure found in God is equated to the pleasure found in eating. That’s why church potlucks are really religious experiences!

Isaiah 25:6: “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples...” Jesus broke bread with his disciples and Revelation 19:9 promises blessings to those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Is your soul satisfied as with the richest of foods? Or, are you consuming spiritual junk food? Is your spiritual diet filled with fast food, or do you take the time to feast on the richness of God’s Word? Did you hear about the class-action lawsuit that was filed last month against four fast-food chains? The litigants claim that these restaurants misrepresented their products and drew people into a dangerous diet that can cause obesity and significant health problems. While this lawsuit seems absurd I wonder if we have some unhealthy believers in the church today not because of fast-food restaurants but because of inadequate spiritual diets.

We’re called to drink the milk of the Word of God in 1 Peter 2:2: “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.” Hebrews 5:13-14 challenges us to add solid food to our spiritual diet so that we can mature in our faith: “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” Friend, can I ask you a personal question? What are you eating spiritually? What are you putting into your life? Are you drinking deeply from the Word of God? Are you chewing on Scripture? Are you seasoning your life with meditation and prayer?

The last part of verse 5 shows us that since David was fully satisfied with his bountiful banquet, he couldn’t help but break into praise: “with singing lips my mouth will praise you.” Even though he is in the desert with nothing to eat physically, his soul is satisfied with God Himself. He chooses to praise God even though his present situation is not very good. I talked to someone yesterday who has gone through some very tough things this week. I loved her response when I asked her how she’s doing. This is what she said: “I’m not going to let Satan steal my joy. No matter how bad things look, God is still good and I have chosen to praise Him!”

In verse 6, David’s mind goes to those times when he’s lying awake at night and can’t sleep. This psalm is really cool because it covers all of life - it begins with a focus on seeking God in the early morning, enjoying Him as we eat our meals, and then remembering Him at night: “On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the

watches of the night.” God should be in the first and last thoughts of our day. As someone has said, when you can’t fall asleep at night, don’t count sheep but instead talk to the shepherd. At night, when your mind is filled with fear and worry, praise God on your pillow! Remember what He has done and meditate on His goodness.

David is probably thinking here of the times he joined the Levites in their shifts of praise through the night when he writes of the “watches of the night.” He can’t join them physically but he can still praise God in the middle of the night. When you can’t sleep, maybe you need to get up and read your Bible and pray instead of just tossing and turning or flipping on the TV.

David has full confidence that God will help him deal with his situation in verse 7: “Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.” The picture here is of a baby chick running for refuge under the wings of a hen. In describing His love for people, Jesus said this in Matthew 23:37: “...How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”

God’s love is also compared to that of an eagle with its young in Deuteronomy 32:11: “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.” The wings of an eagle can be up to nine feet long and provide a wonderful hiding place. And because they are so strong, eagles can effortlessly up their young and carry them to safety. Because David has experienced this protection, he sings in the shadow of God’s wings.

In verse 8, David not only sings; he also clings to God: “My soul clings to you...” David is holding on to God with everything he has. The KJV translates it this way: “My soul followeth hard after thee.” I like that. The idea is to catch something after a long pursuit. We’re to be vigorous, not lazy or apathetic. Once we find God, we’re to be glued to Him. The Hebrew literally means, “to stick fast.” But we don’t have to do all this on our own. Look at the last part of this verse: “...your right hand upholds me.” We cling to God and He’s holding us in His powerful right hand. That reminds me of what Jesus said in John 10:29-30 when speaking of the security that His sheep enjoy: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”

And so, we’re to focus inward and ask, “Am I longing for God?” Second, focus upward and ask yourself this question, “Am I living for God?” That leads us to the last sign in the desert: focus forward and ask, “Am I looking for God?”

Focus Forward: Am I looking for God? (9-11)

After longing for God and living for Him, David now looks ahead to the battle in front of him. The order is significant. When we sing and cling, then we can handle anything! Notice how David is expecting God to work in verses 9-10: "They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth. They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals." The army commanded by Absalom would attack the next morning but instead of fearing, David was looking for God to do His work. These prophetic words were literally fulfilled when God routed the enemies of David in 2 Samuel 18:7-8: "There the army of Israel was defeated by David's men, and the casualties that day were great--twenty thousand men. The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest claimed more lives that day than the sword."

Several years ago, a book came out that challenged Christians to go on a "God-hunt" by looking for Him to do His work in the course of our everyday lives. Many times we're so busy that we don't stop, look, and listen for God.

The psalm ends in verse 11 with David expressing confidence, "But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God's name will praise Him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced." There's an enemy out there for each of us. Maybe it's a person. Maybe it's a situation or an addition. We know that Satan and his wicked forces are at work. Can you look forward and say, "God will do His work and I will rejoice in God?" When you put Him first and go after Him hard, you can rejoice in His supremacy.

God's side will win and those on God's team will glory in His victory. In three weeks I'm going to begin a new sermon series called, "Don't Be Left Behind" as we walk through the books of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. One of the exciting things about focusing on Christ's return is that we know who wins! No matter what you're going through right now, if you sing to God and cling to Him with all you've got, you'll be ready for a big celebration.

Conclusion

When God is all you've got then He'll be all you want. That might be why you're in the wilderness right now. God wants you to long for Him, to live for Him and to look for Him. True faith often begins in the desert when all of our props are knocked out from under us.

What do you obsess about? Solomon, another one of David's sons, learned the hard way that nothing is worth giving your life to, unless it is God himself. He threw himself into his career, pleasure, building projects, relationships, possessions, and education. He found no fulfillment in the things that many of us still think will provide us with meaning. I encourage you to read his diary of despair preserved for us in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. Nothing satisfies but God. His conclusion is stated in

Ecclesiastes 12:13: "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man."

Have you ever fully surrendered to God? As you focus inward do you have to admit there's not much there? Are you ready to focus upward and forward? Are you ready to go hard after God? Cling to Him and allow Him to hold you in His righteous right hand. Let Him possess you fully so that you can become obsessed with Him.

This psalm uses several words to describe that we must pursue God with the totality of our being:

Soul and body (1) , Lips (3), Hands (4), Mouth (5), Mind (6), Voice (7), and Will (8)

Seek him with everything you've got. Whether you feel like you're fainting or feasting, pursue Him. Thirst for God. Long for the Lord. Gaze on His glory. Savor the favor of God. And learn that His love is better than life. Only Jesus can quench the thirst of your soul. Jeremiah 29:13: "You will seek me and

The Power of Love

Human history and literature is filled with stories of the challenges and failures of people in love. Love has produced great tragedies, as well as great achievements. The Bible speaks extensively about the great power of love:

- It can be "better than wine" (Song 1:2).
- It is "as strong as death" (Song 8:6).
- It is greater even than faith or hope (1 Cor. 13:13).
- It is the root of great evil when its object is money (1 Tim. 6:10).
- It "covers all sins" (Prov. 10:12).
- Perfect love "casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).
- The love of Christ "passes knowledge" (Eph. 3:19).
- It is the only debt we ought to owe each other (Rom. 13:8).
- It "does not envy" (1 Cor. 13:4).
- It makes believers capable of blessing those who curse them, and doing good to those who hate, spitefully use, or persecute them (Matt. 5:44).

- It is the essence of the commandments of God (Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8).
- Its absence is evidence that one does not know God (1 John 4:8, 12, 20).
- It empowers people to give their lives for someone else, even as Christ did (John 15:13–17; Eph. 5:25–28).

God is the source of love. Sinful human beings have often twisted and abused it, and even reduced it to destructive fits of passion and lust. But God wants to help us rediscover love, so that we bring restoration and healing to ourselves and everyone we touch. This is basic to the message of Christ.