

## **“THIRSTING FOR GOD”**

*Psalm 63:1-11*

“Where is God? What is he playing at? Why does he seem so far away? What is happening to my relationship with him?” Have you ever found yourself saying things like that, asking questions of God? Of course you have. Anyone who is a Christian and claims not to have had such thoughts is less than honest. All of us at some time or other find ourselves in “*a dry and weary land where there is no water.*” Different people respond in different ways. Some give up and assume that God has simply abandoned them. Others feel guilty and assume that there is something deeply wrong with them that is preventing God reaching out to them. Some try to go on as if everything is normal: the last thing they want is other Christians to find out that they are not living “the victorious Christian life” (whatever that may be for them).

By the law of averages there are probably several of you here this morning who are struggling with just this issue. You’re seeking God and wanting, desperately wanting, to know more of his love, to experience his closeness in a way that doesn’t seem possible at present. You’re eager to know more of his plans for you, eager to feel the touch of his hand on your life. With David, in the words we have just read, you’d say, “*my soul thirsts for God.*”

David was out in the desert, having to cope with one of the many difficult political situations which punctuated his life. There was a coup, very probably the one led by his son Absalom (which you can read about in *2 Samuel 15,16*), and David was at the end of his tether. God had made so many promises to him, he had encountered him in so many ways – and now it seemed as though he was being abandoned. David’s reputation, his power, even his life, lay in tatters. “Where are you, God?” he cried. “Now I need you more than ever, and I cannot seem to connect with you.” He calls out that his body and soul are longing for God: spiritually, physically, emotionally he is all wrung out.

Are you identifying with that? It’s all very well singing happy songs and praising God, allowing yourself to be dragged along by other people’s supposedly heartfelt worship, but how does it connect with me? How do we tap into the wellsprings of God’s love and compassion “*in a dry and weary land where there is no water*”? There is that intense longing for him, a longing that is so real it feels as though it’s physical. You are aching for the reality of his presence, some sign that God is still there. Maybe you have a sense of lostness, you feel disconnected, no longer able to touch God or to experience his touch yourself.

Often we know why it’s happening. David certainly realised that, at least on the surface, his situation was caused by political factors. But there was also something rotten at the heart of the state, something that was affecting his relationship with God, and that of the people with God, too. Maybe in your life you can see that there are external factors that are exacerbating your sense of isolation from God, that are contributing to your deep thirst for God – anxiety, grief, illness, the insensitivity of others, the power of the system, even your own acknowledged but unconfessed sin. Where is God? How is your thirst for him to be quenched? What does David do?

### **1. HE RECALLS WHAT HE HAS ALREADY SEEN OF GOD (v2)**

Your thirst for God is not conceived in isolation. You want more of God, you want to know God more closely, you want to know his touch because you know it is possible, you know there is more than you are experiencing at the moment. David sought God because he “*had seen him in the sanctuary and beheld his power and his glory*” (v2). He knew the possibilities because he had already experienced them. He looked back to the times when God had really been close, when his power and his activity had been clearly visible.

David must have recalled those times when God had given him strength to see off the bear and the lions while he was out looking after his father's sheep. He would have remembered the anointing and the bestowing of the Holy Spirit when Samuel visited Jesse's house and proclaimed him king of Israel. He would have seen in his mind's eye the great warrior Goliath falling to the ground with his slung stone embedded in his forehead. He would have revisited in his spirit the great times of thanksgiving and dedication in the sanctuary as God's people worshipped together. His God was an active God, a God who had done things and made a difference in his life and in the life of his people. He knew God could do it, because he'd seen that God had done it before.

I know we should not dwell on the past, shouldn't seek to live today on the energy and victories of the past. But there are times when it is good to remind ourselves of just what a great God we serve, of the occasions when we have seen "*his power and his glory.*" When God seems far away, when your times of prayer seem sterile and stagnant, when the answers you hoped for don't seem to be forthcoming, when you don't seem to be making any progress at all in the development of your relationship with God, think back to those occasions when God's power was seen. Recall the time when you first encountered God, when you committed yourself to living his way. Remember the times when his Holy Spirit was so real and so powerful in your life that you felt you were going to burst with the joy of it all. Think of the times of worship when the glory of God has filled the place, when you and others have been lost in wonder, love and praise. Relive those moments when you have seen God at work healing and transforming. It may seem as though he is not doing anything in your life now, but you know he has in the past.

And look around at what he's doing in other places, in other lives. Don't make that an occasion for jealousy, because he appears to be blessing others but not you. Make it an occasion for rejoicing because he is still active, he is still changing lives and transforming situations. In *Matthew 11*, John the Baptist, languishing in prison because he has stuck to the message he believes God has given him, sends some of his friends to Jesus to check that he really is the Messiah, that he hasn't been mistaken, because now everything seems to have gone wrong. Jesus tells the friends to go back to John and "*report what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor*" (*Matthew 11:4,5*). "Look, John, it might not be buzzing in your life at the moment, but God is still active, so don't give up."

Whatever you might be experiencing now, God is still at work in his world, just as he has been in your life in the past. Deep down, David knew that. And so he praised him. Despite his longing and his desperation, despite the sense he had that God had given up on him, he praised him in the words of vv3,4. He praised God for his love and for who he is – things that do not change according to how we feel or how we respond. God is still God. God is still love. God is still worthy of praise. And sometimes praising God like that can actually make him seem closer again, can kick-start the relationship again.

## **2. HE ANTICIPATES IN FAITH WHAT GOD WILL DO (vv5,9,10)**

So, having acknowledged what God has done already, David looks forward to the possibilities for the future. David's faith in God, though severely tested at the moment because he cannot experience that touch of God that he wants, nevertheless allows him to anticipate an answer to his prayer. God **will** respond. He looks to the time that God will satisfy his longings, to the time when he will vindicate him.

In v5 David anticipates the satisfaction of his soul, not in any begrudging, miserly way, but "*as with the richest of foods.*" God never stints on his provision to us. He never gives us just a little to keep us quiet. His love and his grace are given us in abundance. Wherever you look in the Bible, there is reference to the lavishness of God's provision. The literal translation of the Hebrew words here is "*marrow and fat*". I know today such things are considered to be the very worst kinds of food, but in David's day – even in my childhood, it has to be said! – this was good stuff. The longing of David's body would be satisfied in

the most wonderful way possible. Here he is in the desert, fleeing from harm and with the very scantest of provision – and he can look forward in faith to a real feast.

And he looks forward, too, to the time when his trust in God will be vindicated, when his enemies will get their come-uppance in vv9,10. God does not neglect his people. Those who turn against them – and therefore against their God – will be punished in the long run. And, as we've said, deep down David knows that. He is hanging on to his belief that the God who has been active in his life in the past will indeed be active again.

Our response so often to the apparent absence of God from our lives is to assume that he is gone for good and all. He's forgotten us and nothing is going to cause him to remember us. But the response of faith is that God will respond. It may take a while. Things may even get worse. But God will come and touch you again. If you've been a Christian for any length of time you'll have experienced that in your own life already. God will bring relief. He will speak again. He will satisfy and vindicate.

Could any situation have been more hopeless than that awful Friday evening as the lifeless body of the Messiah was ripped down from the cross? As the sun began to set, ushering in the Sabbath day, the empty corpse of the One who had promised so much, was carried off to the cold stone tomb. Those who had seen his miracles and who had experienced the transforming power of his words, his touch, his presence, wept as their hopes for the future of Israel, for the future of the world appeared to have evaporated into the angry sky. Why had they bothered? Had they been taken in by yet another charlatan? How foolish now seemed their words of commitment? The one who had said he came to bring them life had lost his own.

And yet, a couple of days later, as the sun came up on a new Sunday morning, there was the awesome spectacle of the empty tomb and the angelic messengers. Jesus was walking in the garden. He spoke, he moved, he ate, he laughed, he promised. Their faith was vindicated. Their hopes were renewed in a way that even they could not have imagined. The God who did that is the God who had worked through his Son as he healed and taught and called and transformed. The God who did that is the God who had worked in the life of David, whose power and glory had been seen by the Shepherd-King, whom we know now, with hindsight, vindicated the trust of his anointed servant. And he can still do it. The resurrection wasn't a one-off: it was template. It wasn't the end of God's miracles: it was the beginning. And there's far more still to do, in your life and in the lives of others. Anticipate in faith what God will do. He's done it before: he'll do it again.

### **3. HE REMINDS HIMSELF OF GOD'S GOODNESS (v6)**

David's situation caused him some sleepless nights. So what did he do? Lie awake worrying about the consequences of what had happened? Agonise over his next move? Regret the mistakes he'd already made? Yes, I'm sure he did. But he also remembered God, That's what he chooses to say here in v6. He rehearsed what he knew of God. He told himself that God was good, that he had done great things and that he was going to do even more great things. He was in the habit – we know that from the rest of the Psalms – of telling himself about God.

When you're in the pits, other people will tell you that God is for you, that there are things you can look back on – they may even help to remind you of them – that there are bound to be things to look forward to. And often you will tell those people what a help they've been. So get into the habit of telling yourself, of reminding yourself of God's greatness. When you cannot sleep, use the time to think back, as David did, to the time when you've experienced God's touch, when you've seen his power and glory. When you find yourself getting anxious about the future and you're asking yourself what on earth is going to happen, try to imagine the ways in which God could intervene, and pray through them. God is there – and deep down, like David, you know it. Tell yourself. Remind yourself.

The NIV translates the second line of this poem as “*earnestly I seek you*”. It literally means “*at dawn*” or “*first thing*”. The point is that David was very serious about seeking God. It was at the top of his list of priorities. There were all kinds of other things he could have been doing, but he knew that this was the most important, this was the things that he needed to do above all others. Spying out the territory, consulting with his few trusted advisors and confidants, keeping his weapons clean and sharp, scavenging for food – they were all important in their own way. But above all those was the necessity of seeking God, pleading with him, praying to him, recalling his past mighty acts and anticipating his future saving grace.

It’s the kind of habit that it’s good to cultivate when things are going well. Remind yourself of God’s goodness. Read the Bible. Read the stories of God’s activity in history. Share with others what God has done and is doing. Keep talking regularly and frequently with God. Develop your fellowship with other Christians, who will be able to help you when things are rough for you as you will when they are going through the mill. Tell yourself that God **is** there all the time, even when it seems like he’s absent. And then when you truly plead with him, he will respond. With the same desperate grip that David used, “*cling to God*” and you’ll find that his “*right hand upholds you.*”