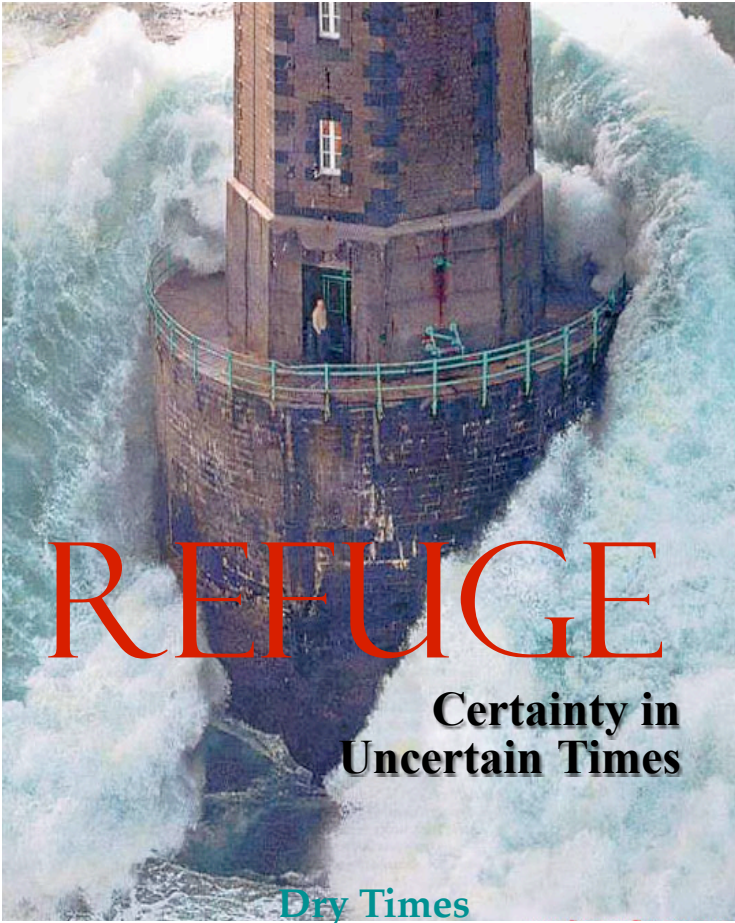


The Covenant Pulpit



Psalm 63

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The 63rd Psalm begins with these words:

“A Psalm of David. When he was in the desert of Judah.”

The king of Israel is a fugitive on the run, hiding out in one of the most desolate hellholes on earth; a trackless, waterless wasteland in the lowest regions of our planet, where temperatures soar to 120°. David cries out in anguish that he is desperately thirsty in both body and soul. There is no more horrifying way to die than of thirst.

In 1906 Dr. W.J. McGee published a graphic account of extreme dehydration. He found gold prospector, Pablo Valencia, crawling on hands and knees on an Arizona desert, having somehow survived seven days without water. This is what the doctor’s examination of Valencia revealed:

His saliva had become as thick and black as mud, and he was choking to death with a terrifying sense of drowning. His tongue was paralyzed, stuck to the front of his teeth and roof of his mouth. His head and neck were throbbing with excruciating pain. His mind had shut down, and he was hallucinating. He was reduced to moaning because speech had become impossible. His ears had ceased to function, and he could hear nothing.

Valencia was sweating blood and his body was already in the first stages of mummification. His eyelids were cracked and his eyeballs were weeping tears of blood. His lips had disappeared as if amputated, leaving behind blackened tissue. His nose had shrunk to half its length and his nostril lining was black. His skin was ashen grey with huge splotches of purple.

Most of us have never experienced desperate thirst. I saw it in a refugee camp in Sudan. Scarecrow figures as thin as sticks stood in long lines, clutching tin cans and waiting to be fed. An aid truck hit a pothole, spilling out containers of milk. As the liquid poured out into the sand, desperate refugees stampeded over each other and fell on their faces to suck the milk out of the earth before it disappeared. Thirst in the desert is horrifying.

But soul thirst is even more terrifying. David looks out over the desert of Judah and realizes that his heart is just as dry and desolate. His is a desperate cry in verse one:

“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 shelter.”

David is talking about spiritual dryness. Every believer goes through times like this. Maybe you're in an emotional desert today. Has your heart dried up? Like body dehydration, soul thirst has its telltale signs: weariness, worry; guilt and fear; hopelessness; resentment; loneliness; and insecurity.

A missionary friend saw the desperation of soul thirst in Albania when Communism fell. After years of enforced atheism, the doors were thrown open to evangelism. He saw a flatbed truck tip over. Hundreds of Bibles fell out of the truck, scattering all over the road. Thousands of Albanians rushed onto the street fighting tooth and nail for the Bibles as desperately as those Sudanese sucked milk out of the sand in the refugee camp.

A Jewish inmate of a Nazi concentration camp wrote, “A person can live about five minutes without air, around five days without water, and maybe forty days without food. But no one can live more than a second without hope.” Soul thirst is far more devastating than body thirst. Are you spiritually dry today? King David wants you to grab hold of this principle:

When your soul is dry and thirsty, visit the Well, and drink deeply.

The 63rd Psalm is written out of the anguish of David's soul. His world has imploded in upon him. He's been chased into the desert by his son, Absalom who has seized his throne. His best friend and trusted advisor has gone over to Absalom's side. His nation has rejected him as king. His wives have been raped. And he's a fugitive with a price on his head.

No wonder David's soul is dry. Notice in verse one how he connects *soul thirst* and *body weariness* together. David has absorbed one body blow after another. Wear and tear on the body dries out the soul. Two words come together at the end of verse one: “...dry and weary...” After fighting heroic battles for God for seven years, Elijah's body and emotions wore out. As a result, his soul dried up to the point of suicidal despair. After his disciples had spent days preaching, healing, and casting out demons, Jesus said to them, “Come away with me to a quiet place and I will give you rest for your souls.” Dryness of soul can especially happen when we are busy for Jesus.

Soul dryness can catch us by surprise. David says in verse two, “I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory...” The

original Hebrew language has the sense that David had just recently experienced this spiritual high in the tabernacle in Jerusalem. It's amazing how quickly we can go from the sanctuary to the desert. We can never take soul health for granted. It is urgent that we learn these truths from Psalm 63:

1. Deprive your soul of spiritual water and it will tell you.

Dehydrated hearts send desperate messages.

David says in verse one, "...my soul thirsts for you and my body longs for you..." He has no doubt that he is spiritually dry. And he responds in verse one, "...earnestly I seek you..." The Hebrew word for *earnest* is emphatic. It speaks of life-and-death urgency. David knows that he is in spiritual trouble. He doesn't know if he will ever get his throne back, or be reconciled with his son, but he knows that he has to get things right with God. For David, soul dryness is worse than death. David never stopped thirsting for more of God. Can you say with David, "...earnestly I seek you..."? As long as you assume that your well is full you will never thirst for more of God. But like David, you can know your heart's condition. Thirsting hearts send desperate messages in the same way dehydrated bodies scream for water.

What are the telltale signs of spiritual dryness? Spiritual apathy tops the list. There are times that we are just going through the motions. Our prayers are anemic and infrequent. We go through the motions at church. We can't remember the last time we had a dynamic quiet time with God.

Famous Kentucky basketball coach, Adolph Rupp got frustrated with one of his basketball players and yelled, "Son, are you ignorant or apathetic?" The guy replied, "Coach, I don't know, and I don't care." Sometimes we Christians are like that. One time Jesus came to a big religious ceremony at the temple in Jerusalem. It was a reenactment of the miracle when Moses spoke to the rock in the desert and water came gushing out. Every day for seven days the priest walked around the altar pouring water on it. On the seventh day they walked around seven times, drenching the altar with gallons of water. At that moment Jesus got up and shouted to the crowd,

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." (John 7:37&38)

Jesus wasn't talking to prostitutes or prodigal sons that day. He was speaking to priests and Pharisees. Most of them sniffed contemptuously at his offer. Religious folks can have the driest souls of all. They sprinkle ourselves with the holy water but never guzzle the living water. Jesus

doesn't asked to be sipped at like a cup of tea at some elegant afternoon soiree. He wants us to guzzle and chug; maybe even to get down on our bellies and suck his life-giving liquid out of the sand like those desperately thirsty refugees in the desert of Sudan. Are you apathetic, preoccupied, or self-sufficient? My friend, you are already dying of soul thirst.

There are other signs. I know that my soul is suffering from spiritual dehydration when I become impatient with others and suddenly find myself with a snarling temper. When waves of worry wash over me, my soul is not where it ought to be. I know things aren't right within when I am seized with a sense of hopelessness, sleeplessness, or loneliness. If I am bitter, or resentful, or irritable, or insecure then I know that my soul is screaming out to me, "I'm thirsty. I need a king sized 64-oz drink of Jesus."

Are you like David today? Do you need a drink of living water? Do you need to flush out some sin, or guilt, or anxiety? Do you need to soften what is crusty, and flush what is rusty? Is your soul in need of some lubrication? I think you can know whether you do, if you'll just be quiet and listen. Dehydrated hearts send out desperate and unmistakable messages.

2. What liquid does for your body, Jesus does for your soul. Only he can lubricate it, aquify it, soften what is crusty, and flush what is rusty.

David knows he is worn out and dried out. But he knows there's a well where he can drink deeply and be revived and refreshed. He says in verse one, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you..." The God that he was urgently seeking is the Jesus who came to Jerusalem a thousand years later and shouted in the temple, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." Jesus is the Well in the middle of your desert. David gives us five keys to getting to the Well of Living Water:

1) Go to the sanctuary as often as possible.

In the desert of Judah David remembers the sanctuary in Jerusalem. He cries out to God in verse two, "I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory." David is speaking about the tabernacle in Jerusalem, the place where God has called his people to gather for public worship. It's not that God can't be seen in other places. David says in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God." David can now see God's glory in the night skies of the Judean desert. In Psalm 139:7 David said to God, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" He knows that God's presence is inescapable even in the desert.

But David also understands in Psalm 63:2, that there is a special “power and glory” that is seen *only* in the sanctuary. God delights in showing himself to his people when they gather to worship together. Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three of you come together in my name, there I am with you.” In the words of the Old Testament, “God inhabits the praises of his people.” He has ordained that we set apart places to gather together each week to worship him. As the praises of his people go up, he comes down. He speaks through the preaching of his word. He shows himself in the celebration of the sacraments. He inhabits our corporate songs and prayers. He reveals himself as we gather together to love one another.

Pollster George Barna says that less half of those who claim to be Evangelicals attend church more than once a month. You hear it all the time: “I don’t need to go to church. I can worship God anywhere, even alone in nature.” When our souls begin to dry up we feel the least like going to the sanctuary. How often have we said to ourselves, “I’m just too tired to go to church.”? But David wrote in Psalm 122:1, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go up into the house of the Lord.’” Hebrews 10:25 says, “Let us not neglect meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.” Attending worship services is a habit. We don’t always feel like going, and a lot of things can fill up our schedule. Not only that, we can go away from church unfulfilled. But if we will faithfully attend, we will have those surprising moments when we see “power and glory in the sanctuary.”

2) Put things in perspective through intentional praise.

David is in anguish. But he will not allow his feelings to determine his future. He will rise above emotion and do what his weary and dry soul does not feel like doing. By sheer faith and determination, he says in verses 3-5,

“Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name, I will lift my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods, with singing lips my mouth will praise you.”

Praise is not just for joyful times of thanksgiving. In fact, it is most useful to us during the *down* and *dry* times of our lives. It’s not just something we do *after* we get up, but it’s how we manage to get up. David says, “I will praise you as long as I live.” Praise is an act of the will. “I will lift my hands up...” even though I am so weary that I just want to crawl into a fetal position. “My mouth will praise you...” although everything within me

wants to groan and moan, criticize and complain, and lash out in anger.

How can David praise God when everything in his life is falling apart? He says it in verse three: "Because your love is better than life..." Sometimes the only thing we can cling to is the dogged faith that he still loves us, and, because of that everything is going to work out in the end. St. John of the Cross wrote, "I never would have survived the dark night of my soul if I hadn't worshipped through it." Martin Luther said, "It is when I am most depressed that I determine to sing the loudest."

3) Sing when you can't sleep.

When the soul is driest, and things are darkest, the nighttime is the worst time. In our weariness we long to drop into bed and drown out our despair in sleep. But we wake in the night and our minds begin to race. We toss and turn in our beds, and our imaginations run rampant. Squeezed in the tightening vice grip of anxiety, we try every trick to turn our minds off and go back to sleep. David tells us what he did in the dark night of his soul:

"On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings." (vv. 6&7)

When I see this phrase, "in the shadow of your wings" I think of the words of Jesus to Jerusalem: "How often would I have gathered you like a mother hens gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me." (Mt. 23:37) Sometimes we don't let Jesus gather us in his wings. There are lots of other wells to run to when we are dry and thirsty: drugs, alcohol, media entertainment, pornography, material things, another job, a new lover, or exotic religious experience. The landscape is filled with wells offering a new drink for dry souls. But only Jesus can wrap us in his wings. He alone can deliver when he says, "Come to me, you who are thirsty..." David chose to go to the only well that could deliver in the dark night of his soul. When you can't sleep, lie on your bed and remember him. Or get up and sing hymns and praise songs to him. Recite Scriptures, creeds, and confessions that declare his glory and compassion. As you "sing in the shadow of his wings" you will begin to feel them wrap around you in love.

4) Cling to the only One who will hold you up.

Getting to this well is not always easy. It often doesn't happen in a moment. We may have to cross a long desert first. Job endured a long night of the soul. St. Paul bore the thorn in his life for 14 years. The way of the Cross is not always easy or short. There wasn't a drinking fountain at every turn on the way to Golgotha. Sometimes all we can do is pray the prayer of David in verse eight, "My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me." In the journey across our desert, sometimes we can only cling desperately on to God, knowing that we will surely fall on our faces if he doesn't hold us up. Little do we know that in the desert we have already arrived at the well when we are in his arms, for Jesus *alone* is the living water.

5) Because the scales will be balanced, rejoice now in your future joy.

David knows that dry times in the desert won't last forever. He refused to forget in the dark what he had seen in the light. Feelings may change but facts don't. Our Faith is rooted in the certain promises of a Sovereign God who never changes. Though David is defeated for the moment he can pray a prayer of triumph in the desert:

"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. But the king will rejoice in God; all who sear by God's name will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced."

The crucifixion takes place on Friday, but Resurrection Sunday is on the way. Weeping may last for a night, but joy *will* come in the morning. David is an outcast in the desert today. Evil liars sit on his throne right now. But deliverance is at hand. David *will* stand in the sanctuary again. He *will* be a king once more (he has never stopped being one in God's sight). Those who betrayed him, lied about him, mocked him, and abused him will face a God who judges all things perfectly. I don't where you are today, but, if you are in Christ you are the king's son and daughter. You reign with him right now no matter how desperate your situation, and you *will* reign with him in glory. Rejoice now in the desert for the throne you will occupy in the future.

Thirst is a terrible thing. Jesus met a thirsty woman at a well one day. She had plowed through five failed marriages trying to satisfy her thirst in love affairs with men. Jesus said to her in John 4:14, "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a stream of living water welling up to eternal life." Sometimes we think that the well is somewhere out there *beyond* our desert. If we can just make it

across, we will find refreshment. Or we think that we might find streams *in* the desert. So we run to all the other wells offering to satisfy our soul thirst. But they are only mirages in the desert. Jesus says that if we take him into our lives, then we already have the well within. He says that living water is within us. We simply need to ask the Holy Spirit to let it bubble up from within and possess our lives.

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