

**Psalm 63 (DHT)**

<sup>1</sup> A psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah  
    God my God, you are who I diligently seek;  
My soul thirsts for you; my flesh yearns for you  
    Like the famished in a dry land without water

<sup>2</sup> Thus, I have looked in your sanctuary  
    To see your strength and glory

<sup>3</sup> For your covenant-faithfulness is more pleasant than life  
    My lips praise you

<sup>4</sup> Thus, I will bless you while I live  
    I will lift up my hands in your name

<sup>5</sup> My soul will be satisfied with roasted fat  
    My mouth will praise you with lips of joyful singing

<sup>6</sup> I remember you on my bed  
    I meditate on you as night watches

<sup>7</sup> For you have been my helper,  
    I will sing with joy in the shadow of your wings

<sup>8</sup> My soul cleaves to you;  
    Your right hand upholds me

<sup>9</sup> But those who seek to desolate my life  
    They shall go to the lower parts of the earth

<sup>10</sup> They shall fall by the sword  
    Jackals shall be their portion

<sup>11</sup> But the king shall rejoice in God  
    All who swear by him shall praise  
For the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped

**Introduction**

The world around us is constantly battling for our attention. Direct your gaze on this; set your eyes upon that. The world around us addicts us to vices and wannabe-vices to ensure the ‘this’ and ‘that’ we are fixed on is anything other than God. When the puzzle pieces of your life seem to be coming undone, what do you do to put the pieces back together? When conflict abounds from seemingly all directions, how do you seek resolution? When your world feels like it's falling apart, what do you thirst for?

In our culture, ‘truth’ is losing its muster; truth is neither sought nor valued, postmodernly subjected to the whims of identity-politics. One of the driving presuppositions of the worldview of our day is that you are either the oppressor or the oppressed, but nobody wants to be an oppressor, so rather than appropriately working through our emotions with a therapist, counselor, or trusted friend, people across our culture manufacture marginalization to claim they are oppressed. They do this because they fundamentally thirst for the safety and protection normally

found loving relationships that their intolerant religion of tolerance precludes them from having. Another presupposition feeds off the first; it's the incessant need therefore to separate from anyone who is different from us in any sort of way; only those who think like me can be in my inner-circle; that way nobody questions me or pushes back against any of my revealed thoughts, words, or behavior. And another one is the virtue-ethic of autonomy. I *am* my own, says the world. I *am* my own, as determined by me. I *am* my own, which I have determined to be oppressed and therefore I need special safety and protections from 'them,' whoever the 'them' happens to be; and if you don't protect me then you are an oppressor, and a bigoted one at that. I *am* my own, and nobody can tell me otherwise.

Our culture faces an identity crisis; an identity crisis that requires the forsaking of truth. There is no 'my truth' vs. 'your truth;' there is only '*the* truth' and 'falsehood.' Someone can be wrong about something but really think they are right; they could have all the passion of being right, but though they do not intend it, they are still wrong. Sexual ethics is shaping to be the primary topic debated and reflected on by the Western Church in our century, but *the* fight Christians will face in this century is deeper than that; it is a matter of what is truth. 'Truth' is a hill we must die on, for without truth, there is nothing. When we tell *the* truth, not 'my truth' or 'your truth,' but *the* truth and we are punished for doing so, we are suffering for the sake of Christ who is himself truth; suffering for the sake of truth honors God.

As long as sin remains in the world, there remains suffering in the world and in our lives. Following Jesus never amounts to a freedom from suffering in this life, but following Jesus *does* give a redeeming value to our suffering in this life. We are told to suffer like Christ suffered if indeed we want to be glorified like Christ was glorified. That's essentially Peter's point when he writes, "For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God" (1 Pet. 2:19-20). Peter says there's nothing wholesome about suffering when we do bad things; that is the just consequence of our sinful actions. On this point, Jesus taught it is better to face the consequences of our sin in this life than for all eternity. However, Peter says there is something redeemable about suffering when we have done good or the right thing. When we tell the truth, for example, we honor God; and when we suffer for telling the truth and when we endure through that suffering, we honor God as well.

Lent is often a time when we reflect on what it means to suffer. When we suffer, it is natural and good to reach out our hands to cling to something that makes the boat rock a little less; to grab hold of something that brings chaos into order; to cleave to something that brings hope in the midst of hopelessness. We thirst for stability and order, because we were created to desire those good things. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent did not tempt our priestly progenitors with blatant disregard or a willful flipping the bird to God; no, the serpent tempted Adam and Eve through misdirected virtue. Eat this, and you will become *wise like God*.

It is not wrong for us to seek out or hold fast to that which is good while traveling through what seems like all bad. But are those good things really what you are after? Are those the end, actually able to satisfy the anguish of your heart? The problem comes when we take the good gifts God has given us to help us cope with our pain and turn them into idols as if they were the solution themselves. These gifts are not the ultimate source of satisfaction. Our use of these good gifts ought to drive us *ultimately* to the even more good giver of those gifts. There is a compulsion in us; a thirsting in us that lies underneath our pursuit of these things. Whatever the object is of that underlying compulsion or thirsting, *that* is the source of our satisfaction, *or at least where we think our satisfaction comes from*. When your world feels like it's falling apart, what do you thirst for?

### **The Setting of Psalm 63**

David begins Psalm 63 with what is called a superscription. If you look in your ESV, the bold print “My Soul Thirst for You” is the ESV heading for this psalm. The ESV translators added that in; it’s not actually part of the Bible. However, beneath that, you’ll see in all-caps “A Psalm of David when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.” This line is part of the psalm—that is part of the inspired Word of God—and in all Hebrew texts the superscription is actually verse 1. Not every psalm has a superscription—not even a majority have them do, so when one is given, it requires us to pay attention to it. It’s trying to tell us the setting the psalm takes place in. The superscription of Psalm 63 tells us David wrote this after he had fled but while he was still in hiding from his son Absalom who had conspired to take the kingdom away from David. You can read this narrative in 2 Sam. 14-18.<sup>1</sup> This means Psalm 63 is a follow-up to Psalm 3, another psalm David wrote while he was fleeing from Absalom. Psalm 3 says this:

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<sup>1</sup> There is a sharp divide among scholars as to whether Psalm 63 refers to when Dave fled from Saul or Absalom. There are good arguments for both, though I have been persuaded of the latter.

*A psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son*  
*O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me;*  
*Many are saying of my soul, ‘There is no salvation for him in God.’*  
*But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.*  
*I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill.*  
*I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.*  
*I will not be afraid of many thousands who set themselves against me all around*  
*Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God!*  
*For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.*  
*Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people!*

David’s world was turned upside down by an ungrateful son who thought he could do a better job than him. He was the anointed one—the king of Jerusalem—and he was driven out from Jerusalem for his own safety by allies of his son who were seeking his own life. Psalm 3 reflects the raw emotions of a man whose world felt like it was falling apart. Yet, in Psalm 3, we do not see a neurotic, erratic, sycophant praying to God in self-seeking desperation. Rather, David prays firstly that when his enemies question the worthiness of his pursuit of God, that their claim would be proven a lie. David refuses to accept their claim as truth. For David, in the turbulence of his life, God is his shield and refuge; God is the one who maintains David’s life. Before David prays for deliverance from his immediate enemies, David finds solace in the fact that God has kept him alive *through* the circumstance.

While Psalm 3 gives us a glimpse into David’s state of mind *while* he was fleeing from his son, Psalm 63 as a sequel of sorts, gives us a glimpse into David’s state of mind while he is ironically safe and sound in a cave somewhere hiding for his life. Just as David’s focus in Psalm 3 was on God’s reputation before his own, so also in Psalm 63 is David squarely fixed on God before himself. When David’s life felt like it was falling apart, his soul thirsted after God. While in the wilderness, probably in a cave, David uses the image of the land around him in that moment. As a dry land without water, so it is that the core of his being *thirsts* for God. For those of you who are married, when you are apart for a brief time, don’t you thirst for a reunion with your spouse? When you have experienced the joy of intimacy with God and then are separated for a time, don’t you thirst for God? This is precisely David’s experience. When your life feels as though it is on the brink of disaster, what is it that you’re turning to? Who or what are you thirsting for?

## The Reason for David’s Thirsting for God

This man is effectively on the run for his life from a son determined to take the crown away from him, yet David’s gaze remains fixed on God. David recalls his unique encounter with God after the ark was brought into Jerusalem. Despite being from the wrong tribe, David wore the priestly ephod and led the nation in worship, a royal-priest. In doing this, David *saw* the glory of the Lord in the sanctuary, Psalm 63 tells us. His encounter with the glory of God made a lasting impact on David, for it enabled him to forfeit the glory of his own life for God’s glory instead. David’s lips praise; he blesses the Lord as long as he lives; he lifts up his hands in worship because he came to know that the covenant-faithfulness, or the steadfast-love, of God was better than life itself. How many of you, in the midst of grief, can declare that knowing God is *worth* the grief? How many of you, while sitting on the cold seat of what feels like a prison cell, can muster the words, ‘God is still good’?

“Count is all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces *steadfastness*” (Jas. 1:2-3). The only way we can possibly worship and lift praises in the *middle* of seasons of suffering is if in spite of that suffering we can declare the everlasting goodness of God. When you’ve tasted and seen that God is good, not even the most intense sorrow or anguish of your heart can knock you off your feet.

A few months ago, I went to Backdoor Bistro in downtown Vacaville with a friend. I ordered Duck Carnitas Tacos, and this was one of, if not *the* most flavorful plates of food I’ve ever had. I’ve talked about this particular plate of food quite a bit in the months since then. When we taste something that is so good, or when we experience something that captures and captivates us, it is difficult for us to contain ourselves. Sometimes we stumble on our words because we just want the people who we love to love the good things that we loved. Of course, I’m no longer talking of mere tacos. David has already told us in vs. 3 that his lips will praise the Lord, and yet in the aftermath of his recognition of the total satisfaction found in God alone, in vs. 5 David repeats himself with superfluous words; he stumbles on himself. A more literal translation would be: My mouth will joyfully sing to you with lips of joyful singing. David stumbles on his words—he repeats himself unnecessarily—because the praise of God is all he can do and wants to do. When he’s tasted and seen the intimacy of God’s glory he cannot help but lift praises to God because of it.

## David and God between the Wings

Even when David lays his head down on the dry, dusty ground, David places the *love* of God squarely in his mind. In the deep hours of the night, a few soldiers would normally be the only ones awake, keeping watch for sneak attacks from an enemy. David finds himself awake during these hours and *meditating* on God. In the book of psalms, meditation is not the new age practice of contemplative player where you free your mind of everything in order to hear God speak to you. Because, of course, prayer is about us speaking to God, not God speaking to us; God speaks to us through his Word. In the book of psalms, meditation is not a mindfulness exercise with cymbals and crisscrossed legs; meditation is reading and more significantly *digesting* God’s Word. In the wee hours of the night, David calms his restless heart by reading and mulling over God’s Word. This is what it means to meditate.

Just as David thirsts for God in the first paragraph, David meditates on God’s Word for the same reason—David remembers his royal-priestly encounter with the glory of God. Throughout this psalm, David has repeatedly said he lifts praise or sings with joy; and by the parallelism of vss. 7-8, he tells us that he sings for joy in the shadow of God’s wings. Since he has already made mention of the sanctuary, it is critical to point out here that God does not actually have wings. He doesn’t fly around in some mystical way. Rather, in the Holy of Holies are gold-hammered cherubim whose wings come ever so close to one another, and in between and behind the cherubim is where the ark of the covenant is. The place between and behind the wings of the cherubim is where God’s presence is. David’s specific remembrance from his unique allowance into the place where heaven and earth meet reminds us that God’s saving-presence is in the shadow of those cherubim’s wings; this is where God’s reigning footstool is; the place where the one who sits at God’s right-hand reigns.

In Psalm 3, David calls upon God to save him from his enemies, in Psalm 63, he has called God his helper. This is the same word used in Genesis 2 to describe Eve as a suitable helper for Adam. Clearly David thinks God is *inferior* to him, right? No; quite the contrary. The word helper does not suggest inferiority. Just as Adam was incomplete without his helper, so also is David incomplete without his helper, who David repeatedly throughout the whole book of Psalms designates as God alone. The marriage imagery continues, for the first line in vs. 7 is paired with the first line of vs. 8. God has been David’s helper, and David’s soul thus cleaves to God. This word is the same word used in Genesis 2 to describe the first marriage. For this reason, a man will

leave his parents and *cleave* to his wife. David has *wed* himself to God, for his encounter with God’s glory transcended in loveliness all other glories the world has to offer.

### **Quench Your Thirst through Jesus – John 4 and 7**

Psalm 63 is filled with language of joy, yet the superscription, and the prequel of Psalm 3 tell us this language of joy comes in a season of immense sorrow. When the anguish of loneliness intensifies, only someone who has experienced the love of God can proclaim in their heart that his love is better than life. When betrayal enters a friendship, only someone who has been filled with the life-changing faithful-love of God can cling to the promises of God with a thirst nothing else and none other can satisfy. What do you thirst for?

Relational anguish was certainly known by the Samaritan woman who Jesus encountered at a well in John 4. Jesus asked her, ‘Give me a drink.’ But she fired back, ‘How can you ask me that when you are a Jew and I am a Samaritan?’ ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who has asked you for a drink, you would have asked for living water and he would have given it to you.’ ‘What are you talking about?’ she said, ‘Without a bucket, how and where are you going to draw up living water?’ Jesus told her, ‘Everyone who drinks the water of Jacob’s Well will certainly thirst again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again, for it will well up within you into a spring of eternal life.’ They continued speaking, first about who she really was and then about who Jesus really is. She said to him, ‘I know that the Messiah is coming,’ and Jesus told her, ‘I am the Messiah you’ve been waiting for.’ Upon hearing this, the woman dropped her water jar and began preaching to her people that the Kingdom of God had arrived, resulting in a great many who came to acknowledge Jesus as the Savior of the World.<sup>2</sup>

John did not need to tell us that this woman left her water jar, but he did. It is such a stirring image of what happens when you come to know Jesus as your Savior; when the needs and wants of your life and reprioritized around the person of Jesus as the source of *all* that is truly satisfying. When Jesus is the source of what stirs your soul, no material good can quash the joy of such an intimate communion. This does not mean drinking water or eating food is evil; it rather means the items on our lists of needs vs. wants is reorganized by the one who can *and will* supply every need. After her encounter with the true source of safety, protection, and love, she was a changed woman. Her past was no different than it was before, but her present and her future were never the same.

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<sup>2</sup> The dialogue in this paragraph is a highly condensed paraphrase of John 4:1-42.

She drank that living water; in her welled up a spring of eternal life. When the living water of Jesus enters your life, it cannot help but overflow into the world around you. What’s the old children’s line? “Hide it under a bushel... NO!” If we can easily tell people—and with urgency too—of great plates of food, or great restaurants, or great concerts, or great music, or great wine because we want them also to experience it, know it, and love it, all the more should we tell with great urgency the wonders of Jesus and how he has transformed our lives. When the living water of Jesus enters your life, how can you not tell those you love who do not yet have it? It is a supernatural spring that naturally flows out of us into the world around us.

Jesus says as much a few chapters later in John 7. Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive” (7:37-39a). Just like the Samaritan Woman, Jesus offers living water to all who thirst. Do you continue to chase after the material goods of the world? Do these things fail to satisfy you? Are you thirsty? Jesus says to you, “Come.” Satisfy your thirst in him.

Jesus says the living water is available to all who believe in him as the Scriptures have said. The Scriptures tell us that everyone, everywhere must repent of their sins, which means to feel truly sorry for the wrongs, evils, wickedness, and abominations that we have done, but also to turn away from them turning rather toward the faithful-love of God. The Scriptures tell us that everyone, everywhere must bow in worshipful submission to Jesus as Lord, which means that we hand over the autonomy of your lives to Jesus as your new master. No longer can we say ‘I *am* my own,’ but we say ‘I am *not* my own; I belong *body and soul* to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Scriptures tell us that everyone, everywhere must believe in their heart that Jesus died and was raised from the dead by the Father to be forgiven of their sins, restored and reunited to our God. Have you done this? Have you repented of your sins, have you submitted your life to Jesus, have you believed in his death and resurrection by which his amazing love was showcased for all the world to see? Have you done this? If you have, then Jesus says the Holy Spirit has come to live in you, changing your earthly frame into a place where heaven and earth meet; transforming you into a temple of the living God. And if all of you—body and soul—is a temple, this also means the Holy Spirit has disrupted the worldly priorities of your life, making the pursuit of holiness your primary, priestly obligation. When the Holy Spirit enters your life, the Holy Spirit transforms *who* you are and *what* you do, shaping and preparing you for eternity to come. In our identity-crisis-



stricken culture, the Church needs to be the beacon for the prioritization and value of truth. The Church needs to be the beacon of what it means to have a vision for the body that selflessly gives life, rather than a vision that selfishly breeds death. The Church needs to be the beacon for what it means to have an identity that is neither oppressor, nor oppressed, but free.

There are many things in this world that bring us joy, but only God brings us the *ultimate* joy that quenches all other thirsts. It is the one David calls in vs. 11, “the king.” The king is the one who sits at God’s right hand in vs. 8; the one who reigns in the shadow of the cherubim’s wings. Despite the griefs that awaited Jesus; despite the sorrows he carried on the road toward the cross—Jesus cleaved to the promises of God. The stricken, smitten, and afflicted Jesus was undeterred, for he knew he was suffering for the good and true will of God. In this season of Lent, as we reflect on what it means to suffer like Christ, let us be shaped by Jesus who did not cower in fear at the prospect of his death; who did not face suffering like a defeated messianic-pretender, but who faced it with more resolve than even David did in Psalm 63, that truth will prevail over liars, and the mouths of the king and all who call upon him will rejoice in his faithful love.

Amen.