

Psalm 63 – Better than Life

Friends, I've mentioned a couple of times now how reading through the Book of Psalms is kind of like looking at someone's Facebook page.

In the same way that people post their thoughts and photos on Facebook to give us a glimpse of what is going in their lives – the writers of the Psalms have recorded their thoughts and feelings and descriptions of their experiences in these poems and this gives us a glimpse of their everyday life and relationship with God.

And just like looking at someone's Facebook page can give us the impression that their everyday life seems to be full of fun and exciting experiences, close friendships, with never a dull moment...

So to reading through the Psalms can give also us the impression that whoever happens to be writing these Psalms seems to have the kind of "walk with God," or "devotional life," or "spirituality," or "personal relationship with God," –

however you want to describe it – an experience of God that the rest of us "average" people could only ever dream about.

And the opening line of Psalm 63 is a perfect example of that.... David proclaims "*You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you*" (vs. 1)

Now I don't know about you – but if I'm honest with myself, even as a pastor, I can't say that I'm constantly seeking God with the kind of intensity that David describes here, but I could probably say that I do "earnestly" seek out a lot of other things...

Can you relate to what I'm talking about friends?

For example, think about when we go shopping.... we're earnestly seeking out the best deals and bargains right?

We might spending a whole afternoon at the mall with our girlfriends, looking for that perfect dress, the perfect shirt,

hunting for right accessories to go with it – and all for the best price possible... we're earnestly seeking it...

Or maybe think about how earnestly we seek out the right place to live when we are looking to buy a home... or how we earnestly seek for a job opportunity... or how we might earnestly seek to find Mr. or Mrs. Right...

So as we read the first line of Psalm 63 and reflect on it we might be asking ourselves *“are we seeking to be in the presence of God like we would seek out a job, or the right home, or a great bargain? Do we want God in the same way as we want those other things?”*

Well friends let me reassure you that the purpose of Psalm 63 isn't to make us feel ashamed or guilty that our desire for God's presence seems extremely lacking in comparison to David's.

But - friends, if the first line of this Psalm prompts us towards some honest reflection about the state of our desire to be in

the presence of God, and we find that to be in need of some revitalization; that's not necessarily a bad thing either.

But the way to revitalize that desire isn't about trying to move yourself from one extreme to the other, instead it's about finding something that we can reorient ourselves with, that we can focus on, and center our life around.

And for David, the center of his life is God's love – or God's *“covenant loving-kindness,”* which is a better translation of the Hebrew word **“HESED”** in vs. 3 - and we know David centers his life around this because he says *“your covenant loving-kindness is better than life!”*

And this conviction about what is better than life itself is the very basis for why David is earnestly seeking God, and longing for Him with his whole being.

Not only because it's natural that people intensely pursue what they so highly value, but because this conviction had put David in a situation where He needed God to step in as his

covenant God and deliver him or his life was going to come to an end.

Now we know from the title of this Psalm that David wrote it while he was in the desert of Judah, and there are two significant instances in David's life where he fled to the desert of Judah.

The first instance was when King Saul was trying to kill him and prevent him from becoming the next king over Israel, and the second was when his son Absalom rebelled against him and tried to become king instead.

Now to be honest, we can tell which instance prompted David to write Psalm 63, but it doesn't really matter, because in either case David has to flee to the desert because somebody had determined to set themselves against him as God's anointed King over Israel.

And being King over Israel is directly tied into God's covenant loving-kindness for two reasons.

First, Israel could only exist as a nation of which David could be king because Yahweh had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, made them His covenant people, given them His law and settled them in the Promised Land...

And secondly, once David had become King of Israel Yahweh had made a covenant with him, assuring him that he would always have an heir to the throne of Israel.

Now last week as we looked at Psalm 51, we saw that David was not able to stay 100% faithful in his covenant responsibilities before God, because he pursued an affair with Bathsheba and committed murder to cover it up.

But friends, we should also realize that when it came to covenant unfaithfulness – it was David that was his own worst enemy...

What I mean by this is that no one else was able to tempt David, or threaten him, or intimidate him, so that he turned away from Yahweh out of the fear of man.

Do you understand what I'm saying here?

You see friends, David knew that Yahweh's covenant loving-kindness was better than life – and truth was that it made his life as one of God's chosen people, and as the King of those chosen people, possible.

So for David, loyalty to Yahweh took precedent over everything and everyone else... but this loyalty and conviction sometimes made enemies for David.

This is why he is in the desert. He is fleeing from his enemies and waiting for God to act on his behalf to deliver him from those who would take his life.

So if we understand this dynamic in David's life - when we read the opening line in this Psalm "*You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you*" it becomes far less intimidating to us because we realize David is not speaking about being in a constant state of emotional hype about God.

Instead David is crying out to God about the situation that he is in, where his life is in danger because of who Yahweh has called him to be as King of Israel, and his loyalty to that calling on his life.

And it has to be God who steps in to act on His behalf – because only God's deliverance from those who would claim the kingship for themselves will confirm the calling on David.

If David takes matters into his own hands, it will only undermine that calling because it will appear that David is establishing the Kingship by his own strength.

This is why David refused to fight against King Saul, and why he refused to take direct action against Absalom.

Instead, in both instances, David fled into the wilderness where he waited – earnestly - for Yahweh's covenant purposes for him as King to be confirmed; even if it meant he had to endure a period of time where his life was in danger.

So friends – the question that Psalm 63 puts before us is whether or not we can agree with David’s confession that God’s covenant loving-kindness is better than life!

And it should make us reflect on whether or not we are willing to center our lives around it, and stay focused on it – even when doing so might make turn people against us... and make us some enemies who can threaten us in some way.

And if we are having trouble confessing this with David – perhaps it would help to be reminded that the fullest and most complete expression of God’s covenant loving-kindness is revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the subsequent out-pouring of the Holy Spirit.

So that we are confessing that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are better than life – in fact they are the source of our life.

And if we call Jesus “Lord” then our allegiance and loyalty lies with Jesus - and how He fulfills all of God’s Covenant purposes for this entire creation! No one and nothing else!

And each of us is called to reflect God’s covenant purposes for His creation in our lives as a demonstration of our loyalty to Jesus...

So we need to ask ourselves whether or not we are willing to center our lives on Jesus, and stay focused on Him – even when doing so might make turn people against us... and make us some enemies who can threaten us in some way.

For some of us that loyalty might be continuing to confess that Jesus is the only way that people can have a covenant relationship with God, or we might politely decline the invitation to get wasted and high with the popular crowd at school or work, and refuse to talk and act and joke around like they do...

This might make us very unpopular with our non-Christians friends and family...

Or it might be insisting to boyfriend or girlfriend, a fiancé, or a spouse that God’s intentions for relationships and marriage do

not involve fornication, infidelity, or abuse and He calls us to a higher standard of conduct and commitment – and that could put an end to our relationship...

For others it might be refusing to go along with a greedy business scheme, a corrupt political situation, or a destructive environmental agenda, or unjust social situations – because these do not reflect God’s covenant intentions for business, politics, the environment, or society... which Jesus gave his life for in order to bring to fulfillment.

Your refusal to go along with the status quo might jeopardize your chances of promotion, sink your political career, put your job at risk, or even get you in trouble with the law...

And in some places in this world if your loyalty to Jesus Christ as your savior may cause you to face outright persecution by some government or false religion and your very life is in jeopardy – you might face prison, torture and even death.

So friends – are we willing to center our lives on Jesus, and stay focused on Him – even when doing so might make turn people against us... and make us some enemies?

Well I’m not sure that it’s possible to fully and honestly answer that question until you are actually in one of those situations – but I can tell you friends, that if you are a loyal Jesus follower it’s not a matter of “if” you are going to come across some sort of opposition - but “when.”

However we do not need to be afraid friends – our Lord Jesus said *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)* Persecution cannot, will not ultimately destroy us.

However we still have to endure the times when our loyalty to God’s covenant loving-kindness in Jesus will bring us into trial and testing, and if you’ve ever gone through one of those times you’ll know that it’s an overwhelming experience of being tossed back and forth between the extremes of fear and faith.

One day we're confidently saying we're trusting God to act, we've got faith in Jesus and we've seen him to great things in our lives before... and so on...

And then we're faced with the reality of our situation again and we're terrified of what might happen and there's really nothing we can do about it.

And so we start praying - and while we might not use the same words as David did there is no doubt that we are earnestly seeking God and longing for Him with our whole being!

And friends I wish I had known before what the Holy Spirit showed me in Psalm 63 for this message – because it would have been really helpful in the those times of trial and testing that I've endured before.

But – it's all in God's timing, so I'm just going to pass it on now and trust that God will use it in your lives as He intended to.

You see friends, I'm trusting that the Holy Spirit wants to show us - through the poetic arrangement of Psalm 63 which swings back and forth between points and parallel counterpoints - how He will help us endure a situation such as David was in, and become centered on God.

Let me show you how this works out...

It starts with vs 1 – which is where we are when we're being tossed back and forth between fear and faith *“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.”*

Now the counter-point parallel section to vs. 1 is in vs. 9-10, because this refers to why David is out in the desert crying out for God, so it related but here David also expresses his confidence that God will eventually deliver him.

He writes *“Those who want to kill me 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.”*

So far this is reflecting how we swing back and forth between fear and faith.

But then we move on to vs. 2 and we discover the reason behind David’s confidence that he will be delivered. He writes *“I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.”*

This is David’s undisputable experience of God working in his life in the past which have proved to him that God is more than capable of acting to save him in the present situation. As David himself once said to King Saul *“Yahweh who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine [Goliath].”* (1 Sam 17:37)

So the counterpoint parallel section to vs. 2 is found in vs. 6-8 where David says *“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. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.”*

So David’s past experiences of God’s deliverance have made a powerful impression on him, so much so that instead of staying awake tossing and turning over the danger he is in - he is calmed down, and while he still can’t sleep – it’s because he is caught up remembering how God has protected and watched over him in the past.

And then David is moved to worship – yes there still some fear here... references to the watches of the night, hiding in the shadow of God’s wings, clinging to God, and so on... but the fear has lessened and praise is rising in its place.

So then we move on to vs. 3 where David has now become fully centered on the fact that it really doesn’t matter what happens to him – God’s covenant loving-kindness is better

than life itself. He confesses *“Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you!”*

And find the counterpoint parallel to this statement in vs 5, but there’s a transition that’s occurred and this verse is less counterpoint and more elaboration on vs. 3. It pick up the theme and expands on it.

So David says “I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.” So in other words – even if this is the end of my life God, whether I continue as King or not – I’m satisfied with just having been able to praise you when I was alive...

And then we move to vs. 4 which becomes the center verse of this back and forth counterpoint parallel structure – and David is in a place where he is centered and focused on just worshiping and praising God. He says *“I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.”*

So in other words – with the little time that I may have left... instead of frantically pleading with you, instead being tempted to take matters into my own hands, I’m going to focus on the one thing that really matters here Yahweh – I will praise you and worship you.

And having reached this place where David is completely focused in on God and who he is and not on himself anymore and he is at peace.

He can leave his situation in God’s hands – there’s no more frantic prayer... just a statement of faith. So David says *“But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God will glory in him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.” (vs. 11)*

So friends, what I believe the Holy Spirit wants us to hear and understand this morning from showing us this poetic structure of Psalm 63 - is that when we go through these kinds of trials and tests where we are alternating between fear and faith...

Jesus will have his Holy Spirit take us through this same pattern of back and forth between our contrasting emotions, gradually and gently bringing us to where we are centered on praising God.

The Holy Spirit will start by moving you calling out to God for help, and then give you the confidence that God can deliver you from your situation.

Then he will remind you specifically of things He has already done in your life which prove that – or things to which the bible testifies...

And through recalling and remembering those acts of God, you will be moved into praise and worship, and through that the Holy Spirit will center you on God so that you have peace - in spite of your situation.

And this will enable you to endure while you wait for God's deliverance, and give you the assurance that it will come to pass.

Friends, believe this and receive this in faith this morning – this is what the Holy Spirit wants us to receive from this Psalm.

It's not about comparing your desire for God with David's and finding yourself lacking – but about preparing ourselves for the experience of waiting for God to deliver us from the situations that will come into our lives, because we have stayed loyal to Jesus Christ.

So friends, trust, and believe that God's covenant loving-kindness in Christ is better than life!

Stay loyal no matter what... and then we will also be able to say "O God, you are my God, and earnestly I seek you..."

Amen.