

Psalm 63

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Preacher: Daniel Gilman

[0 : 0 0] Father, we thank you that we can trust you. We can know you and we can trust you. Father, we love you and thank you. Amen. You can be seated.

Just because it's never remiss to read the Bible again, let's turn back to Psalm 63 and read it one more time. So that's Psalm 63. O God, you are my God.

Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live. In your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food.

And my mouth will praise you with joyful lips when I remember you upon my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night. For you have been my help. And in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

[1 : 0 6] My soul clings to you. Your right hand upholds me. But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth. They shall be given over to the power of the sword. They shall be apportioned for jackals.

But the king shall rejoice in God. All who swear by him shall exult. Since Kendra and I got married a few years back, we've tried to go camping as much as possible, as frequently as possible.

And it usually ends up being a couple of times a year. I mean, that's just how life goes. Hobbies can't be daily life. Most years we've been married, what we'll do is every year we'll go out and buy one more piece of equipment to make our camping experience better or easier or more fun or some other thing.

One of the first years we went out and bought a nice little tent, one that you could pick up and carry easily, you could put in your backpack. Another year it was a water filter because, you know, you don't want to drink the bacteria out there.

One year it was a stove. So every year just something new, slightly better outfitted to make camping a more enjoyable experience because there's almost nothing as bad as being improperly equipped for a camping trip.

[2 : 1 6] A little bit of rain is a big deal when you're out there and your tent is full of holes or whatever it is. You don't have enough shelter. Anybody who's been camping probably has a story about getting rained out and wishing they could quit and, you know, being too far to get anywhere, get home to shelter or whatever.

Bill Mason, who is a Canadian outdoors guru, avid canoeist, he was a filmmaker with the NFB. He had a lot of writing about camping done.

And one of the things, one of the distinctions that he liked to make about his camping experiences was that when you were camping, you could either find adventure or adversity.

Adventure happens when you're well prepared, when you have a tent that's not full of holes, something that will keep out the elements, when you're not finding bugs everywhere, when you're having enough to eat, when you have enough to drink.

You can really enjoy being out in the sunshine. You can really enjoy chomping through a moist forest or you can enjoy racing across a lake in a canoe or whatever it is that you find attractive.

[3 : 20] Adventure is sitting, taking a nap by the edge of a lake. Adventure is the reason you might go camping in the first place. Adversity is what happens when your tent floods in the middle of the night or when it falls down, when you run out of food or water or too cold.

Adversity is misjudging the length of your hike and having to hike in the dark. Bill Mason would say that enjoying the outdoors is all about finding adventure, avoiding adversity.

There was one time that I was a kid that we were out camping in a place called the Gran Sabana. So I grew up in Venezuela. A number of people asked me that last week. It's not a secret. I grew up in Venezuela.

Gran Sabana translates Grand Savannah. So it was lots of open space, grass, shrubs, sand. So there's very few places if you wanted to keep your tent cool during the day to pitch it.

So you look around. We finally found an area where we could camp and there was a tree that we could put our tents underneath. And the sky was clear. There was no bugs.

[4 : 22] There was as many elements that would make it an adventure as possible. There was no rain in sight. Everything seemed perfect. Our trip was an adventure.

And so we bedded down for the night. There was no mosquitoes. The rain didn't happen in the middle of the night. The tents didn't fall down. When morning came, my parents woke up and started to stir and then started to get bitten.

And as they got up, they noticed that their tent was full of little red bugs. Little dome tent full of red bugs. And as they got up, they realized that they had pitched their tent right on top of the entrance to a fire ant nest.

So, as they stirred, they bothered all the ants that were very hungry from a night alone in the tent trying to find a way out.

They actually weren't bitten that badly, believe it or not. But it could have been a lot worse. Nonetheless, for my parents, that easily crossed the line between adventure and adversity.

[5 : 26] And for the right or the wrong sort of person, a thought like a tent full of ants probably makes you queasy enough to not think about anything else for a minute. Maybe shudder.

And that's often what turns adventure to adversity. It's something that you can't take out of your mind. These are the sleepless nights moments of our life.

And this is the reason I've never gone winter camping. Never been able to drag myself out into the cold. Because I know that if I go out winter camping, it'll be instant adversity for me.

I'll be able to think about nothing for the cold. And who wants to spend an entire weekend thinking about how cold you are? Now, David is writing this psalm, Psalm 63, from the desert. Helen read the introduction to this psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

A lot of people like to speculate that this is when he was being chased by Absalom in a big rebellion. But there's not a ton of evidence for that. It's mostly speculation. But we do know that he was writing in or about the desert.

[6 : 36] And the first verse just sounds thirsty, doesn't it? Our God, O God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

When you're in a desert, thirst quickly becomes the only thing you can think of. Just like winter camping for me, deserts are prone to becoming instant adversity.

And yet David is pointing his desperation, his need to God. And that's a great lesson to learn from David, and one that I talked a little bit more about last week. In our need, in our desperation, we can turn to God and expect him to respond in his nature.

We can expect a response that's good, and merciful, and sovereign. Our desperate times are often the ones that we are more apt to call out in the first place.

Our desperate times are ones that often God responds most dramatically. These desperate times are often times of adversity, where you can't think of anything but your problems.

[7 : 41] The times that you have those sleepless nights. Where David says, my flesh, my flesh faints for you and my soul thirsts for you.

Where we might say, God, if there was ever a time where I needed your help, it's now. But there's another kind of desert. The desert beside the one where you're worried for your safety, or the one that you get chased into.

Where your enemies hoped you would die. You probably know something about what I'm talking about already because desert is almost synonymous with a place where what we need to survive is lacking.

Desert is such a common metaphor for this that sometimes we use it without thinking for a time and a place where we can't see God in our life. We can't see him working.

We don't hear him speaking. And I'm afraid to say that more often than not, it's not a place that I am chased to so much as it's a place that I walk to of my own accord.

[8 : 41] It frequently takes me a long time to even realize that I've gotten to that place, that I am desperate. A long time to see that I'm not turning to God enough to even realize that I'm there.

That I'm even thirsty for God's presence until I'm scared and freaking out and saying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? So here's David in the desert. He's in a place of adversity, a place where he's thirsting for God.

He's thirsting for God and that's all he can think about. It's coming to the forefront. And what does he say next? He says, verse 2, so I have looked upon you in the sanctuary. David looked back to a time where he did see God, to a time that he was in the tabernacle in the tent of meeting.

So how do we trust a God that doesn't appear to us at every instant of our life? Well, David looks to times where he has seen God. David knew that his fathers had seen God act when they needed him.

David knew that from his own birth he had seen God act when he knew, when he needed him. And so he had reason to trust that God would be with him in whatever situation he is.

[9 : 48] David is thirsty for God when he's in the wilderness and he's looking back to a time when he saw him clearly. One of my favorite shows to watch when I have the time is a show called Man vs. Wild.

And the premise of the show is pretty simple. There's a fellow named Bear Grylls and he's a special forces, an ex-special forces soldier whose job is to survive in extreme situations.

And the whole premise of the show is that Bear Grylls jumps out of an airplane and parachutes into some forsaken location. It's frequently a mountaintop or the Australian outback or some inhospitable place where there's nothing but adversity.

And the whole show is him working himself and his cameraman out of whatever adversity they find themselves in. So off he goes trekking through whatever wilderness he's in doing cool stuff making it all seem easy.

Usually dispenses little bits of survival advice as he's going along. If you've ever been camping with me I'll usually try to impress you with a trick or two I've learned from the show.

[10 : 56] It doesn't usually work. At some point in time during the show almost every week there's a point where you will see a sunset or a very pretty flower or a waterfall that's just breathtaking.

And the show will normally just pause for a second and Bear Grylls the presenter will frequently sit down and he'll often say something to the effect that a big part of survival is getting your eyes off the problem for a minute keeping your spirits up.

Now Bear Grylls is a Christian and frequently he'll say something to the effect that he understands that worshipping God is a way that Christians find ways to get through adversity.

And you hear a similar refrain from people who George likes to call spiritual but not religious. There's usually statements made like nature is my church or I feel closest to God when I'm in nature.

And certainly David sees God's glory in nature. There are lots of psalms in the book that describe God's glory in terms of nature and what he sees surrounding him.

[12 : 12] Psalm 19 is quite explicit. The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. There's an explicit declaration that God's glory can be seen in nature.

And certainly there are aspects of that thought that God's glory can be found in nature that are true and good but that's not where David goes. David recalls a time in the tabernacle in the sanctuary of the tabernacle which is almost the complete opposite of looking for God in nature.

Instead of looking for God the huge God the expansive the God who rolls out the sky David is looking for the God at the center of Jewish organized religion.

David's psalm is directed to a God who he is seen in a particular place in a particular tent at a particular time a tent made by particular people. God the God that David is looking for is not just creator God.

He's looking for God who doesn't just work on the greatest of scales. He's looking for Jehovah the God who spoke to Moses directly and David has known from his childhood.

[13 : 24] One of our mistakes when we find ourselves in the desert is sometimes to just go looking for this gigantic God for this God who called an entire nation of Israel out of Egypt for the God who creates the intricacies of our world.

We go looking for his glory in the biggest things we can find. We can see God's glory in a wide open sky so that's where we look. We can see God's glory in a piece of finely written music and so that's where we look.

We can see God's grandeur in the intricacy of our world so that's where we look. And you can fill in the blanks with whatever you find. You can see God's glory in the creation.

But don't get me wrong. The mistake isn't looking for God's glory in creation. That's not the mistake at all. The mistake is looking for God in those places when we should be looking for God in the place that he chose to meet us.

Our God is not just creator. Our God is not just the sustainer. He's not just holy and he's not just awesome. Our God is also a very particular God who has chosen to show himself to his creations.

[14 : 34] He's not just chosen to be visible in his glory in creation although he is that. He's chosen to create a relationship between himself and us. So when our God created the universe and he rested, some of the first things he did was to talk to his creations.

Right from the start our God has shown a desire to be more than arm's length with his creation. He has always wanted to speak to individuals. As much as we see the character of God, his faithfulness, his mercy, his sovereignty played out on the grand scale of God's relationship with Israel as a whole, we also see all of those things reflected in individual relationships with God like David's.

In this case, when David is far from home and under physical duress, he's not looking at the bigness of the desert around him. He's not looking at a God who is even greater than that desert and created it in the first place.

He's not looking at how huge that makes God. David is looking towards the tabernacle. He's looking to the relationship with God that is represented by it.

The glory of the tabernacle is not the glory of the massive God of the desert. It's the glory of a God in covenant with his people. It's the glory of a God who would stoop to speak to Abraham and stoop to speak to Jacob and Moses and David started all when they were all weak and worth very little as far as the people around them were concerned when God started to speak.

[16 : 14] Certainly none of them were worthy of attracting the attention of almighty, gigantic, glory-filled God, the God who created the universe.

After David looks to the sanctuary, to the place that represents his relationship with God, he names an attribute to praise God for. He names a part of God's character that is steadfast love, loving kindness as the older versions say.

The original word that David would have written is one that oddly enough comes up in all the commentaries. Everybody argues about what it means. The reason they do that is because as it comes up in the Old Testament, it has a whole lot of nuanced meanings to it.

It gets translated a lot of different ways, sometimes as kindness, sometimes as mercy, sometimes as grace, sometimes as love. In some places, the context seems to indicate that it's all of those things wrapped up in one.

That's the attribute that David is looking at. The story goes that at one point there was an English translator who decided that he didn't want to translate all those words differently.

[17 : 27] He wanted to choose one word and so he just said, all right, loving kindness, that's the word that I'm going to choose. That is the attribute that David is praising, all those words.

That word loving kindness sometimes gets used for God's love towards people. Sometimes it's used to indicate his favor towards people.

Sometimes the word is emphasizing God's commitment to particular people. Sometimes it's indicating the sort of promises that he makes. Sometimes it's indicating the kindness that he shows in action.

And you can see that a mix of all those various things just doesn't occur in English, right? But nonetheless, that's the character that David is praising in God. God's steadfast love, his loving kindness, is deeply rooted in the relationship that God has created with David and that David has fostered.

It's not ever a word that would be used by a disinterested party. By its nature, it is used by a party that God is so interested. And God is so interested that he would make promises in his covenants to stubbornly love Israel, to stubbornly show favor that doesn't waver easily, and to act on their behalf through all situations.

[18 : 44] That's the steadfast love of God. And it was the steadfast love of God that followed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from their journey from Babylon all the way to Egypt. And even though in Egypt, Israel completely forgot about God, it was that loving kindness that drew God to pull them back out again.

It was the loving kindness of God that brought him to be merciful to Israel throughout centuries of rebellion. Although they rebelled over and over and over again, it was the loving kindness of God that brought him to mercy.

And as we were reading through the book of Revelation over the last few months with George, it was clear that Israel still plays a role in God's plan right up until the end of days.

That's the loving kindness of God. And those are the promises that David is appealing to, the promises for love and for mercy and for kindness and for grace.

And those are the promises that are extended to us in the exact same way. Those are the promises that are extended to us through Jesus. Those promises of steadfast love the same way that he has steadfastly loved Israel that he has showed loving kindness are extended to us.

[20 : 02] That's part of the good news. That's part of the gospel of Jesus. And perhaps you might feel like you're in a desert and it doesn't really matter how you got there. It doesn't matter if you walked there yourself or if you were driven there by adversity.

It doesn't matter how you got to the dry and thirsty land. Because that same loving kindness is offered to us. That same loving kindness that drew God to mercy time and time again.

And the same loving kindness that drew God to favor over and over and over again. It doesn't matter because it's the same loving kindness that David appeals to. And you can look to the sanctuary where Jesus now stands as our advocate and appeal to that same steadfast love of the Father.

So if that is you, it doesn't matter how you got there. You can still appeal to the loving kindness of God. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you that we can know you and we can see your mercy and we can see your kindness and your love.

And Father, we thank you that your loving kindness is beautiful and fantastic and brings you glory. Father, we thank you for all these things.

[21 : 15] We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.