

Thirsting After God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 September 2008

Preacher: Jonathan Smith

[0 : 0 0] hey everyone my name's john o smith i'm one of the ministers here if i haven't met you it's probably because my wife renee and i have just come back from five weeks in africa it's really good to be back i want you to know that um the thing i noticed most when we were away was the fact that we didn't have our brothers and sisters around us and that and we really felt that um it was tangible uh we were the only christians on our trip and it's five weeks without being able to come to a church service hear a sermon you know talk to anyone who understood what we were talking about when we were talking about jesus so it's good to be here and um it's a real privilege to come here tonight and to preach from psalm 42 we'll do psalm 42 tonight psalm 43 next week and uh the reason we're doing them together in this little two-week series is because they're really function as one psalm if you look at psalm 42 and 43 they're very similar same refrain and so we look at them over two weeks um i want you to pray for me um yeah i do i want you to pray for me if you're if you're a believer pray for me if you love me as a brother pray for me tonight because i'm still jet lagged this it seems weird to me i hope i don't have malaria or something but i'm still jet lagged it's been a week and i'm not sleeping at night so i'm really tired and i've got a full text sermon here this makes me really nervous if you know me you know that notes make me really nervous and i got pages of them here i'm also doing a topical sermon so normally we preach just verse by verse through the passages of the bible tonight i'm not really going to look verse by verse at this psalm it's going to be good for you to read it i want you to read it throughout the week and prepare yourself for 43 next week but tonight i just want to talk mainly about spiritual depression spiritual dryness spiritual longing that kind of thing so um pray for me pray for me now as i pray for you let's pray together dear lord i pray that you would be with us now as we look at your word we know that your word is powerful like a double-edged sword that cuts right to the core of our being so i pray that you would cut us open tonight that you get right to our hearts that you change us convict us by your holy spirit i pray particularly for those of us here who are empty broken fed up depressed people who don't know jesus people who do know jesus and still feel that way i pray that you'd speak to them powerfully in jesus name amen well guys tonight we come to a psalm that i hope will encourage us to assess our own spiritual thirst to reflect on our own barrenness before god the fact that we need god above everything else and to come to jesus christ who the bible says is the fountain of life in order to quench that thirst every one of us here right now is feeling in some way spiritually depressed or spiritually thirsty or without god and if you're not you're weird and you will experience this really soon that's the nature of this life and so i want to talk tonight about what what is god's design in that spiritual depression or that longing or that feeling of emptiness what god has a design for it i believe and that's the main point of what i'm going to talk about tonight i believe that god gives us times of spiritual thirst and emptiness so that we'll come to him for relief that's the design he gives it to us this feeling of emptiness so that we'll come to him to find relief to find fulfillment to find salvation

so that's my main point and i believe that many of you are here tonight who desperately need to hear this word desperately need to hear this word that's what i've been praying about all week that god would just bring people here who are feeling broken and messed up and depressed and empty and in need of god so uh i have this friend in canada let's kick off with a story i never do this i've got this friend in canada he's one of my best friends worked with him about eight years ago in america for a couple of years and we were roommates together and he's a an awesome guy strong christian guy um and has taught me so much about what it means to be a christian i was saved when i was living with him and he really nurtured me in the first little while um anyway he's a he's a salvation army guy and he does a lot of counseling and he's got an interesting method for pastoral care this is his pastoral care method his counseling method it doesn't matter if you've got the flu or if you're

struggling with lust method's the same his method is uh first it's a four-point strategy number one talk to god about it it's a problem you have two talk to your friends about it three see what the bible says about it and four and most importantly get over it that was all that was his words to me constantly throughout my time in america just get over it and for me and my problems which are normally pretty petty and pretty weak it's good advice sometimes we just need to get over ourselves don't we just need to man up even if you're a woman you can man up and get over your problems a lot of the time but it's not a good it's not the kind of advice that we would offer to the guy who wrote psalm 42 have you noticed as chris read this or if you've read it before by the way if you go to kurong or word or shops like this you'll probably see this psalm plastered across a coffee mug or something with a deer kind of look in the woods it's not about deer it's not about coffee mugs it's about a guy who is feeling utterly lost and depressed so this this isn't the kind of guy we'd come to with my friend bram not we wouldn't come to him with his strategy see the picture before us in this psalm let me give you a little background is one of utter loneliness this guy he's been cut off from the temple and that's a huge deal he's been cut off from the temple from the very presence of god remember god dwelt in the temple not metaphorically not in a tooth fairy kind of way his very presence was in the temple and he's been cut off from the temple separated from the presence of god from the place of divine revelation from the place where sacrifices were made he couldn't make his sacrifices to his god and it was the place where atonement was made so he couldn't have his sins atoned for he'd been cut off from god and as if that weren't enough he's being oppressed by enemies he says just as a deadly wound oppresses its victim he's being oppressed by enemies and both his constant tears and his enemies continually taunt him mocking him saying where is your god you're such a loser you're in this state no one's here to help you you've been cut off from your people cut off from your god where is he now i've heard people say that particularly to christians who are really suffering sickness or persecution question is asked where is your god and that's the question he's asking himself as well where is my god where is he gone so i wonder have you ever envied this guy his spiritual thirstiness that's what he says as a deer longs for flowing streams so my soul longs for you my soul thirsts for you oh god have you ever read that and thought man i wish i was as thirsty as this guy is i have i definitely have see if your story is anything like mine let me give you a little bit of a testimony if your story is like mine then you've been around the church for a while i grew up in the church as a kid and uh my nan is sitting down the back i've just seen her and she's 98 years old she's been at that church where i grew up for most of that time and so we grew up as the kind of central family at the church that we grew up in and and so i knew how to work the system right you know i know whose hand to shake when and who to speak to and for how long and i knew when to sit and to stand and to kneel i knew the whole deal i knew the church inside out that was my childhood was in the church really um and so i never knew what this guy was on about i'd never been cut off from the multitude i've never been cut off from the congregation or of a festival or never been cut off from the house of god for that matter and the thing is it wasn't that i wasn't thirsty because of that i was really thirsty i was really empty i was really hungry for something i mean i thirsted after all sorts of things i thirsted after money status sex women girls ladies members of the opposite sex i was really hungry but thirsty for god that just didn't make sense to me i'd equated god with the church and so i lacked nothing because i had the church all to myself but i was really thirsty so then the time came for me to leave high school and i was a little bit lost i got into a couple of courses at uni marine biology in queensland that was really quite appealing and um...

although i was never any good at science so that wasn't going to work i got into psychology at monash and nothing really appealed so um... instead i decided to fly halfway around the world to join a team of young people from 12 different countries to work with inner city underprivileged underprivileged and then it happened and then psalm 42 really came to life for me in my experience i became this man my first two weeks at camp i experienced the death of my grandfather who was my best friend a full-blown demonic presence in my cavern i'll talk to you afterwards if you want to hear about it still freaks me out still afraid of the dark a near death bout of fever that landed me in hospital for a week the rapid decay of the relationship terrible relationship i had with a girl back here and also being temporarily fired by the camp management twice within my first two weeks that all hit me just straight in the nose and suddenly i was this guy suddenly i was cast into utter loneliness and it was the worst and the best two weeks of my life in the space of those two weeks god in his mercy devastated me dehydrated me and in the end he delivered me so do you ever envy the writer of this psalm do you ever envy his thirstiness his loneliness his emptiness i do i long for the kind of

thirstiness that god grants to his children in order that they wake up c.s. lewis is one of the greatest guys that's ever lived he said god to summarize what he said god isn't in the business of making us happy he's in the business of waking us up of growing us up and he'll use whatever means he can to help us to grow up i long for that kind of thirstiness that takes our minds that takes our minds off our petty problems you know how petty problems just grow up really huge when you've got nothing else to worry about i envy and and hope for the kind of thirstiness that sweeps us off the path of our own self-interest and into the haven of god's intimacy that's what happened to me over those two weeks i do envy the psalmist because guys this is this is the truth without the desert we wouldn't long for the oasis without the wilderness we wouldn't yearn for the promised land without spiritual dryness we wouldn't ache for jesus who is the fountain of life guys look at me this is this is really serious i want to hit this

on the head spiritual emptiness this is what i believe i believe this is what the bible teaches and i believe this is so important for us to know so that when we are in that position that this guy's in we won't despair listen to this spiritual emptiness both in believers and unbelievers is god's way of reminding us that in the end only he himself is truly satisfying let me repeat that spiritual dryness spiritual emptiness spiritual thirst is god's way of reminding us that in the end only he himself is truly satisfying god may let you go on drinking and getting drunk for months so that you will realize that drinking and getting drunk is not satisfying god may let you continue to spend your money shopping for every latest fashion for years so that eventually you will realize that fashion will never satisfy you who's getting dizzy with every ad on the tv at the moment because it's spring festival and you get to go out and spend all your money at mire on hats if that's more exciting to you than sitting down and getting into god's word then there's a serious problem and i know it i've felt it i'm not judging it it's just the truth if we try and fill up our lives and our emptiness with the things of this world instead of god himself we will be utterly disappointed and for the by the way for the older guys generation parents i've seen this a lot with home renovations it seems to be the new thing your life will be out of this world improved if you can out of this world improve your house that's a lie as well it's just going to break up and fade away you'll never be satisfied by anything aside from jesus christ himself i believe this is god's design let me give a few illustrations we're the only species in god's creation that is afflicted and blessed with chronic longing dolphins are content to frolic in the sea lizards are content to lie in the sun cats are content to lie on the sofa i think that's all they do man is not content with anything we're never content we're never satisfied by what we have in front of us by what we make everything we make gets old we fight without success against an epidemic of boredom and it's getting worse fad after fad fashion after fashion challenge after challenge leave us empty in the end but why why is that i believe it's god's design god has designed dissatisfaction in order that we would continue to search for him i'm gonna break a rule now it's the number one rule in youth ministry i did it for 10 years i know it it's a youth service and i'm gonna read a 200 year old poem to make a point so just stick

[18 : 58] with me because i find this hard to understand i really like poetry but i'm gonna read it real slow i want you to stick with me this is an illustration of the point i'm making that god has factored into his creation dissatisfaction spiritual loneliness depression emptiness void in order that we would come to him for relief george herbert he's a great guy this poem is called the pulley describing god's design for human discontent he says when god at first made man having a glass of blessings standing by let us said he pour on him all we can let the world's riches which dispersed lie contract into a span he's saying god is pouring blessings on humanity creation so strength first made a way then beauty flowed then wisdom honor pleasure when almost all was out god made a stay perceiving that alone of all his treasure rest in the bottom lay for if i should said he bestow this jewel also on my creature he would adore my gifts instead of me and rest in nature and not the god of nature so both should losers be yet let him keep the rest but keep them with repining restlessness let him be rich and weary that at least if goodness lead him not yet weariness may toss him to my breast translation because god is gracious he frustrates the human race again and again in order that they might come to him and not rest in his creation not rest in his gifts not depend on the good gifts that he gives us but depend on him god causes paintings to fade jewelry to tarnish muscles to sag believe me faces to wrinkle he causes every sin to sting until we reach a point where we might turn and come to him who does not fade god does not lose value god does not break up god does not wrinkle he wants us for himself and he wants everything but himself to fade into the background you can see this in the psalm verse 6 says my soul is cast down within me therefore i remember you i'm feeling depressed and empty and broken therefore i remember you

one of my great heroes charles spurgeon was a minister in the uk and he said i might have quoted it to you before but that's all right i always forget it he said i suppose i'm sure i've told you this i suppose the greatest blessing god can give a man is health apart from sickness and his

point was he said he could pile up the lessons that he'd learnt during his healthy times on a penny but what he'd learned about god during his many many sicknesses and depressions would be altogether uncalculable i do envy the psalmist i want my unbelieving brother andrew to thirst like he thirsts my brother is thirsty but he's trying in vain to quench that thirst in the things of the world and it's just not going to be enough there's never going to be enough money never going to be enough status never going to be enough job advancement never going to be enough toys to quench that thirst not in him not in you definitely not in me my brother needs to know what he's really thirsting for and if you don't know jesus and you're feeling empty you need to know why it's because nothing you have will be able to quench that thirst or fill that emptiness if you have ever done any evangelism you would have seen this quite often when you do evangelism with people the hardest thing is not to get them saved but to get them lost right to get them to see what they're missing to see what they don't have god's way of doing that quite often is to have people empty feeling empty feeling depressed feeling void everyone thirsts but not all thirsting for god that's the tragedy i was reminded of this a few years ago i'll tell you another story i like telling stories i never tell stories a few years ago a couple of years ago i was working at a church and i was leading a service and a good old friend of mine came up to me and he was telling me about his unbelieving girlfriend who was doing it really really tough she was really struggling her parents had all but disowned her she was experiencing acute depression acute depression she had tried yoga meditation psychotherapy martial arts she tried everything and nothing worked nothing relieved her and the next week i saw her sitting in the pews and she looked really austere and distant almost dried out her tears had been her food day and night the sermon that night spoke to her of a loving saviour a healing creator a forgiving redeemer and while i longed for the post sermon supper she was longing to connect with this god she was longing to be saved to be healed to be forgiven and she was that night she became a christian because she was tired because she was unsatisfied she was restless she was thirsty she was so thirsty after asking jesus into her life she surrendered herself to him and do you know what she said to me never forget this she said she felt refreshed refreshed refreshed that was her words her thirst was quenched her longing had been relieved she'd gone to the fountain of life and found the only thing that's truly satisfying her problems didn't disappear by the way she's still got terrible parents she's still struggling with depression she's still got heaps of problems but she had been embraced by jesus christ the son of god who had come to earth to live the life that we can't live a life without sin to die the death that we deserve to die death for sin she'd been embraced by the man jesus who'd been raised from the dead who sits at the right hand of god who reigns and rules as sovereign over this earth and who will call his people who have been thirsty enough to embrace him to be with him in heaven for eternity and i rejoiced in her suffering i was glad that she'd been depressed and lonely and tired and fed up i remembered my own fruitless wanderings before i went to the states the relief that came in the form of jesus and that's what really psalm 42 points to it's what the whole bible points to jesus christ jesus the one who relieves us see all the drinking in the world all the drinking up of what the world has to offer will never satisfy us if we don't see jesus christ as the fountainhead he said it in john 4 14 let's hear jesus own words he says whoever drinks of the water that i give him will never be thirsty the water that i give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life isn't that beautiful whoever drinks the water that i will give him will never be thirsty it's easy to wander away from the fountain of life isn't it it's easy way more easy than we think to wander away from the fountain of life and dive into the fountain of worldly pleasures thinking that that's going to satisfy us but it won't i caught myself the other day actually yet three stories in one sermon the other day i was feeling really really down really down really distant didn't feel like i was a very good christian didn't feel close to god didn't feel like i was doing a good job here at church and uh you know what i did to relieve myself and to quench my thirst i drank two cans of red bull i took a fistful of vitamins and uh i went for a walk nothing it didn't do anything for me i knew that i hadn't been reading my bible that i hadn't been spending time in prayer and meditation with god i hadn't been uh good to my wife particularly uh i hadn't been doing all sorts of things that i knew god had been using to bless me in the past i'd walked away from the fountainhead and i thought red bull would save me and it doesn't

neither would a trip to doncaster shopping town and 500 bucks on my credit card neither would 500 dollars spent on a prostitute or a bag of marijuana none of it would have satisfied me because only god satisfies let's listen to the definition of evil just in case you hadn't got my one point sermon yet i want to hammer it home for you it's the definition of evil according to jeremiah chapter 2 it's not an it's not just that we should come to god for satisfaction because that's the right thing to do the flip side is that it's evil to go to other things in order to find satisfaction if you're a christian and you're going to other worldly things to fill up that void god says that's evil listen to jeremiah chapter 2 take this as a memory verse 11 to 13 be appalled oh heavens at this be shocked be utterly desolate says the lord for my people have committed two evils they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters and hewed out cisterns for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water do you get that do you get what he's saying they've neglected god they've chucked away god who is the fountain of living waters and they've cut out for themselves baths with cracks in them that can hold no water so they go to these baths that they think you know they'll be able to quench their thirst in that bath of water and there's nothing in it because it's broken and all the time they had the fountain of living waters that's the evil that we commit when we refuse to go to god and go to everything else instead so what are the cracked cisterns in your life what are these cracked buckets what are they in your life think about it you might have some time after the sermon

I think to think about this but is it success at work or school is that what you rest in is that what you trust in is it popularity good looks fashion sense sports reputation money alcohol drugs dating eating disorders sex everyone's got one and if you don't identify it and if you don't target it and if you don't fight it it'll own you we need to be honest with ourselves in this area guys well what's the take home message then from psalm 42 or at least what's the take home message from this sermon firstly don't begrudge god your seasons of spiritual dryness because i believe they're the design of god to draw you back to him don't stay out in the desert but when you see that it's god that you need run to him that's what he wants secondly when you face dry times go to the fountain of life jesus christ to be relieved don't try and quench your thirst in the broken cisterns of the world and thirdly and finally make it your daily routine this is what i need to hear as well make it your daily routine to thirst for the water of life to thirst after god's word to thirst after time of communion with him and with his people i'm going to leave you with a picture a mental image from the book of revelation this is going to be the ultimate thirst quencher if you're a christian if you're a christian jesus comes back tonight you arrive on the shores of heaven this is it it's a refreshing picture revelation says they shall hunger no more neither shall they thirst anymore for the lamb that's jesus in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water and god will wipe away every tear from their eyes then the angel showed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal flowing from the throne of god and of the lamb through the middle of the street of the city and he said to me it is done i am the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end to the thirsty i will give from the spring of the water of life without cost the spirit and the bride say come and let him who hears say come and let him who is thirsty come let him who desires take the water of life without price love to pray for us let's bow our heads lord thank you for this picture in psalm 42 of a man who is utterly lonely and desperate and empty and broken and depressed and i pray for each one of us whether we're feeling that way now or not that you would burn onto our hearts our great need to come to you in these times to come to your word and be refreshed by it spend time praying to you meditating on your word and meeting with brothers and sisters to be encouraged and built up lord i pray

[37 : 38] that we would support one another in times of loneliness and depression that this would be a haven for people who are like that who are experiencing those difficulties but above all i pray lord that you would bring people who don't know you to know you to be saved by you to be relieved by you and ultimately to arrive on the shores of heaven to be infinitely and eternally relieved pray this in jesus name amen