

Enjoying God in the Desert

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn now this evening to Psalm 63, the book of Psalms and Psalm 63. We're going to look at the whole Psalm or most of the detail of the Psalm together as we look at David's experience in the wilderness of Judah.

The context of the Psalm is set by the title, although we're not told exactly that it was the events that we read about in 2 Samuel 15 and 16 to do with his retreat from Absalom when Absalom gathered support against him and caused him to flee from Jerusalem.

But it certainly fits that context, and if it wasn't that particular experience, then it was certainly one very like it. Because he talks here about being in the wilderness, of being in a dry, weary land where there is no water, where he is reflecting upon his time of being able to be in the sanctuary of God and recollecting what that was like.

And if you read these chapters in 2 Samuel, that's really the kind of thing that's described for us in David's experience. We read, in fact, the passage from chapter 15 we read, which talks about the weariness of himself and of his people as they came weeping as they came, with dust on their heads, a time of mourning, a time of considerable anguish for them as they had to leave Jerusalem with David in support of him and make their way into the wilderness for a time.

There's a wilderness experience in the lot of every Christian. And we all have a wilderness experience, in some sense, from time to time.

[1 : 5 0] Times when our soul is really wrenched by whatever difficulties, pains, problems we face. And one of the beauties of God's word, of the Bible, is that you can take the likes of the psalm and many, many other passages, but particularly the psalms that set out so wonderfully experiences of different kinds.

You can take this psalm tonight and put your own wilderness into it. You can take it and start making a misuse of it, though it was written by David and for David and about David's experience.

It's there in God's word and God has given it to us so that when we know of whatever kind of desert experience it is, be it small or great, be it short term or long term, you can put it into this psalm for yourself.

And you can follow David's direction and David's advice and David's confession. Because this psalm really is a chapter of the Bible.

There isn't really a chapter of the Bible that's more full of devotion to God, more full of emotion in his relationship to God, more full of commitment to God, and yet it's all in this desert experience.

[3 : 1 5] And that's why it's so relevant for our human experience and our believing experience as well. As we put our own dry land experience into it, let's look at three things that we learn from David that we can then bring with us into our desert experiences, into our troubles in life, into the things that we face as we journey onwards in human experience in this world.

First of all, we find David seeking after God in verses 1 to 4. And then secondly, verses 5 to 8, we find David expressing satisfaction in God.

And then finally, verses 9 to 11, he speaks about being secure with God. That God is his defense. That his enemies are not going to gain the upper hand, but that he, in fact, is going to come through victorious.

In whatever way it will be, it doesn't matter. That's what he's convinced of. Seeking after God. Satisfaction in God. Secure with God.

How important these three points are to every single one of us, and ought to be for every human being. There are three points which really apply to the youngest person in here tonight.

[4 : 39] There are three points which apply just as much to the oldest person in here. To the most experienced Christian, and even to the one beginning the Christian life, even right now or in these recent times.

But these three things that David emphasizes are absolutely important all the way through our journey in life. Let's look at, first of all, his seeking after God.

The opening words of the psalm, O God, you are my God. Now there's a sense in which that confession really contains everything else that he says in the rest of the psalm.

Every single thing that he mentions following on from these opening words are already packed into these words in his expression of faith, in his confession of what God is to him, what God means to him, how he is himself with God.

O God, you are my God. There is David's covenant confession. There is David reaching out to God in his wilderness experience, but his first line is a wonderful confession of what God means to him and of what God is going to remain to him.

[5 : 58] Because God possesses David and David possesses God. Isn't that what this contains? O God, you are my God. You belong to me.

You have given yourself to me. I know what it's like, David is saying, to have you as my God, to have my relationship with you in a covenant way.

Now, in other words, when David is here in the wilderness, he's not feeling his way towards God, not really knowing much about what God is like. This is somebody in a desert experience reaching out, not to a stranger, not to somebody he doesn't know.

He's reaching out to his best friend. He's stretching out his hands and his soul, his very body is aching in his wilderness experience. And it's aching not just because it's sore being in the desert, not just because of the difficulties of the terrain that he's in, not just because he's no longer where he was comfortable back in Jerusalem.

He's aching because he's longing for God. He's aching in his heart and in his body as he reaches out for this best friend, for this God that is his God.

[7 : 13] How do we cope with our wilderness experiences? What are our first thoughts when life becomes difficult? When we leave the comfortable path and God brings us by his providence into some sort of wilderness experience, some testing, something that really sometimes perhaps will shake us up even, wouldn't it be great for you and for me?

as our first words, the very first thing that comes into our mind, the very first words that we would utter in that context. Oh God, you are my God.

What's better than that? What's more meaningful than that to someone in a dry and weary desert? Because everything is in that that he needs.

all his provisions, all the care that he needs, all the rest, all the refuge, all the guidance, all the support, all the comfort.

It's all there, isn't it? Oh God, you are my God. Have you come here this evening to this service with that confession fresh in your own heart?

[8 : 30] Have you come to this service this evening and still stand out with such a confession on your own part? Can you tonight personally say, oh I do hope you can say, I pray that you'll be able to say it.

I pray that if you don't say it now you'll be able to say it. Before you leave this place tonight, oh God, you are my God. You are my God.

Who else can I look to? Where else is my refuge? How else can I face the issues of life? Lord, it is only with you that I can do it.

And that's the key to his satisfaction as we'll see because his confession in his relationship with God brings you to look at this longing that he expresses there in the strongest possible terms.

Immediately after saying this, earnestly he says, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

[9 : 43] His body and soul are involved in it. And you know, this word seek, I seek after you. Earnestly I seek you.

It's related to the word in Hebrew for the breaking of the dawn. And it kind of connects up with what you find in Psalm 130 that we sang a short time ago together where the psalmist is there also expressing his desire for God where he is saying, I wait for God.

Now waiting for God is not something that you just do as a kind of hanging about type of activity. It's not something in which you're just idly waiting around for something to happen.

Waiting for God is longing for God. Waiting for God is the activity of your soul reaching out to him. And how does the psalmist put it there in the way that he's seeking God in Psalm 130?

I watch for God, I wait for God more than they that long for the dawn. My soul waits for the Lord.

[10 : 53] If you're at night, you're feeling not very well, you feel the night long, you're in pain, what does the dawn mean to you?

What does the breaking of light mean to you? Well, it may not take away your pain, but it takes away something of your circumstances and brings in itself a measure of relief.

And here is David putting that into a spiritual experience and saying, here I am in the desert, but Lord, I have this longing with you. And it's so strong that I can describe it as the longings of somebody who's longing for the breaking of the day.

My heart is pounding after you. My flesh longs for you. It's not something that David is looking for that he doesn't have. It's something that he knows he already has because God is there with him and he knows that God is with him and he knows that it's his God that's with him there.

I seek you earnestly. And then he comes in verse 2, so I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and your glory.

[12 : 08] Now we read in 2 Samuel 15 how the ark was brought out, you know, the ark, the little box that was commanded by God to be made. Moses made it and Moses followed God's direction in having the box made.

It was placed in the innermost place in the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. It was that above which the cherubim, the wings of the cherubim and the mercy seat and the cloud that represented God's presence.

the ark of God was such a significant thing and as it was brought out by Abiathar and Zadok as David was leaving Jerusalem, David said, no, take it back.

Don't take it with us. Take it back. It's places in Jerusalem. And if I find favor from God, I will see that ark again.

I will see that sanctuary. If God is on my side indeed, then this will pass and I will be back in Jerusalem. Take it back there. And if not, well, here I am.

[13 : 17] Let him do as it seems right to him. What a wonderful expression of faith on David's part. He's coming to enter into the desert. He knows that's where he's heading and yet he says, no, I don't want to take the ark with me.

That belongs in the sanctuary. And if God is on my side, that's where I'll end up yet. And here he is in the desert. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and your glory.

And what is he really saying by this? Well, he's saying something like this. He's not saying, if only I was back in the sanctuary, why am I here in the wilderness? Why am I in these conditions?

If only I was back in Jerusalem, where I really ought to be and where I want to be. He's not saying that at all. What he's saying is quite remarkable, actually.

He is saying, the longing after you that I had when I was in the sanctuary is just as strong with me now as I remember those days.

[14 : 19] Because this word, so, in the translation, makes it so very relevant, doesn't it? It connects it all up. My flesh, my soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you.

In a dry and weary land, so I have looked upon you in the sanctuary. When I looked upon you in the sanctuary, in the same way as I do now, this is how I looked upon you in the sanctuary.

In other words, David's heart, beating after God, yearning for God, it is now just as strong in the desert as it was in the sanctuary when he was in his comfort. What a great statement that is.

What a challenge that is. You and I are in the wilderness experience. When the going is really getting tough. When you have something to contend with in your lot that you didn't expect, that you find difficult.

When your faith is wrestling with it. When you're asking yourself, what does this mean? How am I going to cope with this? How am I going to benefit from this?

[15 : 26] Here is David saying, God is just as real there, just as available, just as near, as he was to me in the sanctuary. And my heart is beating after him now, just as much as it was then.

So I looked upon you in the sanctuary. Yes, he misses the sanctuary. He misses Jerusalem. But he's not missing God because God is with him.

And his heart is yearning for him and in fellowship with him as much as he was back then. And then he comes to say, since your love or because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live. And in your name, I will lift up my hands. What is that really saying to us? It's saying that for David, God's love was everything.

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will go on praising you. This is a man in the desert. This is a man that you might expect to be moaning with his lot.

[16 : 37] This is a man that you would possibly expect to be really complaining about what has happened in his life. And complaining to God that this is just not fair.

But what he's actually saying is, Lord, I know your steadfast love. I know what that means. I know how secure that is. I know how absolutely precise and unerringly it looks after my life.

So I'm going to go on praising you. And I will do so till the day that I die. That's what he's saying. I will do it as long as I live. In your name, I will.

I will go on lifting up my hands. I'm going to go on looking to you for my support. Because of the quality of your steadfast love.

That's what his seeking after God includes. As he yearns for him in the desert. As he expresses this fellowship that he has with him.

[17 : 45] Now there's for ourselves something to actually apply to our daily life as well. Seeking after God. What is it about? It's not about what our circumstances are. It's not about whether our circumstances are comfortable or trying.

It's not in any sense dependent on how things change from day to day or week to week. It's all about having our confidence in the love of God. And if that's where our confidence is it doesn't really matter what happens from day to day and how things change.

That conviction of David will be our conviction too. I will go on praising you all the days of my life. Seeking after God.

Secondly verses 5 to 8 he talks about satisfaction in God. See he's talking here about a great feast. 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.

all the way down to verse 8 there. My soul clings to you your right hand upholds me. David's expressing his satisfaction in God and he's talking about it in terms of being at a feast.

[19 : 04] Think about it. He's talking about being in a dry and weary land where there is no water. He has to search around him for something to drink and where he's going to get his food even if they've carried stuff with them it's not going to be in the same sort of supply as they once had.

But he's talking about sitting at a feast and feasting on certain things that belong to his relationship with God. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food.

That's why he's gushing out in praise of God. The desert hasn't made any difference as far as this is concerned. God's provision is as ample and as rich in the desert as it is back in Jerusalem.

Do we believe that? Do we rejoice in that? Can we take that with us tonight into our experience? Is this really how we found God?

Well this is what David is saying is true of his relationship with God. The fatness and richness of the best food. It's an image of what he has in spiritual fellowship and feeding spiritually upon God.

[20 : 30] And not only that but it lasts even through the night. 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.

Here's a man who can't sleep and he can't sleep not because his situation is uncomfortable though it is uncomfortable in a physical sense compared to what he was used to back in his home in Jerusalem in his royal quarters in Jerusalem.

He's now in the desert he's got to lie on the hard ground. He's got the night around him. But that's not what's keeping him awake. What's keeping him awake is his fellowship with God.

He's lying on his bed awake in the watches of the night. What's he doing? He's meditating upon God. How different that is to myself and I'm sure you're saying the same of yourself.

In many times when you feel weary and you can't sleep and you're tossing and turning and you're longing for the night to pass and you wish it was morning and then when it comes to getting near the morning you're so tired you don't want to get up and you have that grumbling in your soul.

[21 : 44] That's how it is so often isn't it? You just turn around and you grumble and you wish that this was over. There's nothing like that with this man at all. He's not saying to God Lord why did you put me here?

What's the purpose of all this suffering? This isn't right for a king. Nothing of that enters into his mind. What he's doing is meditating on God and how God has always been his help and how in the shadow of God's wings he will sing for joy.

That's his satisfaction in God. Night and day desert or palace to David it doesn't matter God is everything. Your soul and my soul was made to be satisfied.

God designed your soul for satisfaction. You were made as a human being to live a satisfied life.

How are we trying to find satisfaction? Well we can cram all that we like into our souls but if fellowship with God is absent it will not satisfy.

[23 : 04] In the famous words of Augustine thou hast made us for thyself and our soul can find no rest until we find our rest in thee.

Or to find in the teachings of John Calvin the great reformer who spoke about the shape of the human soul as shaped to contain fellowship with God.

The God shaped void in the human heart that nothing can fit but God himself. It's a bit similar to the words of Peter when the Lord turned to them the twelve after seeing all of these people who had been following him outwardly as we mentioned this morning John chapter 6 going away from Jesus as teaching became too much for them too demanding he put this question remember to the twelve will you also go away and instantly Peter turns and says Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life there is nowhere else we find satisfaction and security but in you here is David's feast in the desert here is David's satisfaction in God and he concludes that part of the psalm by saying my soul clings to you your right hand upholds me it's almost that you might say the same sort of language as a child and a parent holding hands and if you've seen in the middle of a large crowd especially with the fear that that brings into a little child walking along holding on to their mother or dad's hand you know how tightly they hold your hand but it's not really the tightness of their grip that gives them the sense of security it's the tightness of your grip on their grip that's what assures them that they're safe that nobody's going to take them away so it is with David in the desert he's holding

God's hand in fellowship his soul is clinging to God and that word cling is again a very very strong word used for Ruth when she clung to Orpah when she clung to Naomi rather as Orpah had gone back to her people and Ruth actually clung to Naomi there it's just a spiritual adhesion bonded together and so David is saying my soul clings to you he's holding God's hand if you like so tightly but his assurance is in the fact that God is holding on to him that God's grasp is felt by David your right hand upholds me that's what he's sure of that's what his certainty is and if you and

I could only all the more readily just feel the grip of God and it takes care of all our questions and if they're not all fully answered for us nevertheless we know that God has the answers and that God will look after us even if we're puzzled and even if we're pained seeking after God satisfaction in God and then secure with God verses 9 to 11 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 a portion for jackals now isn't it interesting isn't it significant you've been following David's thoughts all the way through the psalm from the beginning he is actually here because Absalom his son has turned to be an enemy and he has gathered all of this support against him and David knows and rightly counts these as his enemies he's had to flee from his place of rule from Jerusalem he's now in the desert and yet this is the first time that he mentions his enemies why why has it taken him so long in the psalm a psalm that's caused if you like by the fact that he had to flee from his enemies why has it taken it so long for him to actually make any mention of them well isn't it obvious because he's so taken up with

[27 : 57] God he's so taken up with God as his God and from the time that he opens this great prayer and this expression of faith oh God you are my God everything else just recedes into the background to do with his enemies to do with his circumstances in the situation that he's in he's taken up with God with what God means to him with a steadfast love of God to him personally I wish I was more often like that that I could even get up from my knees in prayer and say Lord thank you that that was all about yourself but that's what David is like that's what you and I have to try and be more and more like to and when he does speak about his enemies you see he's not speaking about them in a way that takes over his thoughts and now becomes really troubled as he speaks about them it's actually the very opposite the fact that he now begins to speak about his enemies is actually taking him in the other direction it's not taking him down into the depths of depression or despair again it's actually saying about them it's alright

God is looking after me and my enemies will be given over to the power of the sword they're seeking to destroy my life but actually they will be destroyed by God he speaks about them being the portion of jackals jackals are animals that come when a lion or large predator has made a kill and have gorged themselves they leave stuff behind hyenas come in after that and then when the hyenas have finished the jackals come and tidy it up they take all the bits and pieces that are left over there's a very solemn point that God is talking about the wicked his enemies and the enemies of his people as if they were just the leftovers of human life there'll be a portion for the jackals but he says the king shall rejoice in God the steadfast love of God is for

David so committed not just to him as God's person but it's committed against his enemies too you see when God is committed in his steadfast love to his people he is absolutely and just as surely committed against those who would be their enemies and would want to overthrow them or to destroy them that's why David is saying those who seek to destroy my life they haven't a chance because they're facing the steadfast love of God for me and how comforting is that when you meet with Satan when you meet with his temptations when you look at the way sin sometimes tries to gain the upper hand in your life when you look at the world and its temptations and all that it throws at you because you want to live in obedience to God you can turn round to whatever enemy it is and say you do your utmost but steadfast love is looking after me and I know what the outcome of that is the king shall rejoice in God and there's something else there something very precious he still calls himself the king he's not in his place of residence in the royal quarters he's not in Jerusalem where he rules from he's in the desert he's a refugee but he still rightly calls himself the king he hasn't lost his royalty he hasn't lost his royal status though he's no longer in the same conditions he was used to so it is with you as a

Christian when the devil tempts you and says to you look at you you can't be a Christian look at what you've just done look at the thoughts that have just gone through your mind look at the things that you did that you know you shouldn't have done and look at the way you left that undone you know you should have done that you know you should have taken that step you know you should have actually done for the Lord something you've just ducked out of it how can you be a Christian you can turn around and say you say what you like but you haven't taken my royalty from me I'm still a prince with God and I always will be I will never lose my royal status because that's what God has given me we live in an age when Christians are increasingly deprived of many things things which are very precious to us freedoms which are very precious we still have many in this country compared to other countries but even in this country we find many of them being eroded we find it becoming increasingly difficult to speak as Christians to insist on our rights as

Christians but you keep in mind this whatever the world can take from you it can never remove your royal status it can never empty your confession of its meaning oh God you are my God let's pray almighty and eternal God we do give thanks for the way in which you look after your people for the steadfast love that surrounds us and accompanies us and is with us at every step of the journey through life oh Lord we pray as we seek after you earnestly and seek to have the quality of fellowship that David expressed we pray that we might increasingly know that satisfaction of soul that we have in yourself and we pray that you would give us increasingly as we go on from day to day to be confident of the security that we have with

[34 : 46] God so that we can say that whatever happens in life none shall be able to take away that status from us that you have given to us graciously bless your word to us again and all for Jesus sake amen