



My soul thirst for god

psalm 63

text

We begin our discussion of Psalm 63 by providing the author's translation.

- ¹ A Psalm belonging to David... When he was in the Y^ehûdah Wilderness.^a
- ^{2/1} 'ĕlohîm, You are my God,
I am always looking for you.
My soul thirsts for you,
my body is in need of you,^b
as^c a parched land
wilting for lack of water.
- ^{3/2} Thus I enter the Holy Place to look upon you,
to witness your abundant strength;^d
^{4/3} for your relationship^e with me is more important^f to me than life itself.
I will boast of you.
^{5/4} I will bow the knee to you throughout my life;
I will raise my hands to your name.^g
- ^{6/5} Because you fill my soul with an abundance of the very best,^h
I will extol you with an exultant shoutⁱ
- ^{7/6} whenever I think of you upon my bed,
whenever I meditate upon you during the night.
- ^{8/7} Because you are a help to me
I will always take cover^j under your wing.
- ^{9/8} My soul clings to you;
your right hand firmly takes hold of me.
- ^{10/9} As for those who would seek my harm,
they shall enter the realm of the dead.
- ^{11/10} They will find themselves delivered over to the sword-wielding hand
to become food for a pack of wild, scavenging dogs.^k
- ^{12/11} But the king will rejoice in God.
He will praise God along with all others who commit themselves^l to God.
But those who break covenant^m with God will find their mouths stopped.

My soul is thirsty

As always, we appreciate the Psalmist's candid confession of need and dependence upon his God. It seems that his time in the desert has taught him something about spiritual realities.

“My soul is thirsty for you;
my body is in need of you,
as a parched land
wilting for lack of water.”

We have seen similar imagery and a similar confession elsewhere.

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
so panteth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:
when shall I come and appear before God?”¹

The Psalmist is not just in need of a comfortable and casual morning drink from the spiritual water fountain. Too much time has passed since the last rain. Soul and body are “parched,” and “wilting.” How much time has passed? How long does it take to become “parched” and “wilting”? How long can one go without drinking from the fountain of life before the dying begins?

We find, upon reflection, that the dying begins immediately. Any time spent away from our God is too much time. Because of our own weaknesses, combined with the harsh conditions in which we find ourselves, we are in *constant* need of nourishment and refreshment. We are in even more need and under even more threat than the once-a-day collection of the desert manna suggests.

¹ Psalm 42.¹⁻²

Though the metaphor is often one of sea rather than desert, our hymnal is full of consistent and unapologetic confessions of desperate need similar to those found in the Psalms. I often wonder if, as we sing these hymns, we really hear—and more—if we really mean what we are saying; what we are confessing. The following really is but a small sampling of the pervasive confessions.

First, there is the environment. We live on “life’s tempestuous sea”² with “world-wide commotion, from ocean to ocean.”³ Here we find ourselves “stranger[s] cast upon the rocky shore of a land where deathly danger surges with a sullen roar.”⁴ We are threatened by “hiding rock and treacherous shoal.”⁵ We are “trav’ling thru this wilderness”⁶ in “mortal strife”⁷ “amid th’ encircling gloom,”⁸ standing “amidst a thousand snares”⁹ while “torrents of sin and of anguish sweep over [our] sinking soul”¹⁰

In addition to a threatening environment—a lone and dreary world, as it is called elsewhere—we are faced with our own weak and flawed nature. We “search in weakness.”¹¹ In our “battle with temptation,”¹² we are “apt to go astray”¹³ and inclined to “wander as strangers in sin.”¹⁴ We speak to God of our “dying faith,”¹⁵ our “helpless soul” and “defenseless head,”¹⁶ our “timid heart,”¹⁷ and our “wounded heart.”¹⁸ “Heavy laden, careworn and fainting, by sin oppressed,”¹⁹ we confess that “not the labors of [our] hands can

² Hymn #104

³ Hymn #52

⁴ Hymn #121

⁵ Hymn #104

⁶ Hymn #163

⁷ Hymn #81

⁸ Hymn #97

⁹ Hymn #79

¹⁰ Hymn #105

¹¹ Hymn #45

¹² Hymn #40

¹³ Hymn # 121

¹⁴ Hymn # 6

¹⁵ Hymn #79

¹⁶ Hymn #102

¹⁷ Hymn #103

¹⁸ Hymn #115

¹⁹ Hymn #117

fill all thy law's demands,”²⁰ and, fearful that “life is vain,”²¹ we wonder that “for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died to rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine.”²²

Such acknowledgements as those of the Psalmist and the hymnists can be disturbing, maybe even galling and humiliating. We might be tempted to don the camouflage of pride and hide such realities. We might resort to easy legalisms that distort. The great Book of Mormon anti-Christ, Korihor demonstrates what a hard pill to swallow such awareness and acknowledgment is when he claims confidence in his own abilities, and so desires to be judged solely on his personal “life management” skills. But, it is such candid confessions as we find in the Psalms and again in our Hymnal that demonstrate the sincere humility of the “pro-Christ” individual. It is such confessions that are one of the true markers of faith in God. They are a necessary prerequisite for entering that life which is eternal.

i enter the holy place to look upon you

But the Psalmist knows something more than his own thirst, his own weakness and needs. While important and necessary, awareness of our thirst and the dangers that surround us does not save. We must know where to find water. And, knowing where it is found, we must make the pilgrimage to that refreshing spring. The Psalmist knows very well where the source of thirst-quenching water is to be found. It is to be found in none other but God. And so, off to the temple he goes to “look upon” God. Elsewhere, the Psalmist informs us that this quest for God is of the highest priority.

“One thing have I desired of the LORD,
that will I seek after;
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,

²⁰ Hymn #111

²¹ Hymn #98

²² Hymn #193

to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to enquire in his temple.
When thou saidst, ‘Seek ye my face;’
my heart said unto thee, ‘Thy face, LORD, will I seek.’”²³

It may be important, even necessary to say that it is in the person of God, not the structure of the temple, that the Psalmist seeks and finds the refreshment he so much needs. He seeks the “beauty of the LORD,” not the beauty of the temple. This is an important distinction to make. Hopefully an analogy will not seem too trite.

My favorite candy is the Heath Bar. When I go to the store to buy this candy, I want a Heath Bar, not the packaging. Yet, I look for a particular wrapper. But the wrapper is only the sign of what lies within. It is the chocolate that makes my mouth water, not the wrapper. It is the candy, not the wrapper than satisfies my longing. We mention this because it seems that ancient Israel at times became confused about this. Such confusion, their prophets warned, can easily lead to a distraction that looks very much like idolatry. We may not always be immune to such confusion.

So it is that it is not the temple that quenches the Psalmist’s need. It is the God that resides within. “I enter the Holy Place *to look upon you;*” to “behold the beauty *of the LORD;*” to “*seek the face of the LORD.*” Only an encounter with God Himself can quench the mighty spiritual thirst.

You fill my soul with an abundance of the very best

Having entered the temple and looked upon the beauty of the LORD, the Psalmist meets a God most generous. The Psalmist meets a God who is completely devoted and committed to him. There, he meets a God who does more than quench and satisfy a thirst, a longing. This God provides more than the Psalmist needs. He fills him with a bounteous flow of life-sustaining and life-enriching nourishment of the very best kind.

²³ Psalm 27.4, 8

As is so often the case in the Psalter, the Psalmist feels threatened and attacked. The “enemy” is one of the most common themes of the Psalms. Protection from the enemy is one of the blessings God bestows upon the Psalmist. Here, the Psalmist expresses his confidence that those who seek his harm will be unsuccessful, finding themselves under life-threatening danger.

Conclusion

This Psalm reminds us of our very real need for and dependence upon God. It reminds us that our relationship with him is our most important relationship. By reminding us of God’s commitment to and generosity toward us, it strengthens our commitment to seek after him and his help. It fills us with a longing to look upon him and experience his encouraging and saving faithfulness such that we echo the Psalmist’s firm commitment,

“Thy face, LORD, will I seek.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

^a Versification is different in the King James than in the Hebrew. So, the first verse number represent the Hebrew, the second represents the King James versification.

^b “Soul...body”

The Psalmist needs his God, body and soul; i.e., every part of the Psalmist understands his need for God’s attention and presence.

^c “As a parched land”

Many, seeing the incorrect addition of a slight tittle, have read □ rather than ▨. I follow this reading here.

^d “Your abundant strength”

“Literally, “your strength and glory.” The idea behind “glory” (Hebrew *kabôd*) is “heaviness” or “abundance.” In his want, the Psalmist goes where he knows there is abundance sufficient to meet his need.

^e “Your relationship”

The word translated here as “relationship” is *hesed*. Much has been said about this word. It is difficult to translate. We find, most commonly, translations such as “love,” “kindness,” “loving kindness,”

“mercy,” and “grace.” However it is translated, all agree that it is built upon a relationship, a connection between two parties. It signifies an unfailing commitment to another. It seems that whatever word we choose, the idea is that God is present in one’s life in a positive, encouraging, and uplifting way.

^f “More important”

Literally, “better.”

^g “Bow the knee... Raise my hands”

Bowed knee and upraised hands is the “posture” of prayer.

^h “An abundance of the very best”

This is literally something like “milk and fat.” It could be translated “milk in abundance.” In Isaiah 55:2, and again in Jeremiah 31:14 it is associated with the goodness of the Lord, and seems to imply no small portion of that goodness.

ⁱ “Exultant shout”

“This is literally “shouting lips.”

^j “Take cover”

Here is another example of the importance of context over the lexicon. The word used here is the same used in verse 6, *rānan*. This is literally “a ringing cry,” “a loud outcry.” It is probably an onomatopoeic word. In the present passage, whatever this is, it is being done from below God’s wing. It is hard to not think of birds chirping loudly under their mother’s wing. As one imagines this scene, one can simply think of all the noise. One can also see the birds as taking refuge, finding cover and protection under the mother’s wings. This is the image I see here, and so translate accordingly.

^k “Food for a pack of wild, scavenging dogs”

To die without burial was considered one of the worse things that could happen. It is often viewed as an expression of God’s displeasure. God would not allow such a thing to happen to one of his favorites. To translate such passages as “cursed by God” might be too loose a translation, but the idea is certainly to be found in the event.

^l “Commit themselves”

This is literally, “swear in him.”

^m “Break Covenant”

This is literally “speakers of lies.” Whether one thinks of the lies as being directed toward the king or God Himself doesn’t really matter. The king is so intimate with God that to speak against him is to speak against God. In King Benjamin’s world, and in Matthew’s world, what is said of royalty becomes true of everyone. All are an extension of God. See Mosiah 2:17 and Matthew 25:31-46.