

PSALM 63 – A SONG FOR WHEN YOU FEEL EMPTY

I wonder if you've ever known what it's like to be thirsty – *really* thirsty.

It starts as a slight itch in the back of your throat, but it soon becomes a distracting urge to stop whatever you're doing and find something to drink. If you don't, you'll soon feel light-headed or dizzy, licking your lips to try and somehow keep them moist.

It's not good to be thirsty anywhere, but David – the composer of today's song – is feeling thirsty in the worst possible place. David in the middle of the desert, in a dry and parched land.

He isn't there by choice. David is the nation's king, but his rebellious son has risen to up to lead a coup, trying to steal his throne. So David is fleeing for his life, marooned in a baked wasteland. His life is in danger, his enemies are pursuing him, and his days are filled with insecurity.

As the blazing sun beats down, imagine how David longs for a mouthful of cold, refreshing water. But there's none in sight. David is physically empty – hot and tired and thirsty.

His physical thirst is matched by a second thirst. A deeper thirst of the soul. He doesn't just crave life giving water, he also craves closeness with God. At the time he needs him most God feels distant. David sings from a place of exhaustion – both physical and emotional.

This feeling may be familiar. Perhaps you've known seasons of longing for God – times when life's oppressive heat has left you empty and dry, and God has just seemed far off.

In these seasons, it's easy to doubt God's care for us. Our circumstances cause us to ask: Has God forgotten me? Does he still love me?

But there in the desert, David writes his song because he knows there are better indicators of God's love than our circumstances. He finds this confidence through turning his thoughts to the *sanctuary*, back in Jerusalem.

The sanctuary lay at the heart of Israel's worship in the tabernacle. Primarily the sanctuary was a place of sacrifice.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see that to abandon the Lord of life invariably leads to death. Yet God mercifully allowed his people to offer sacrifices in their place. So, as the people made sacrifices in the sanctuary, they were reminded that they deserved death – but that God had made a life of drawing near to him possible.

In the heat of the desert David recalls having seen God, having experienced the power of his presence whilst offering sacrifices. This memory provides him with a new perspective. He can be confident of God's steadfast love for him – not because of circumstance, but because of sacrifice.

David remembers what the sanctuary visually demonstrated: that the living God would rather provide a sacrifice and be reconciled with his people than simply watch them perish. The sanctuary speaks of a God who wants to be known – who has done everything so that he can be known – whose love is 'better than life'.

Now, in the middle of the desert, the blazing sun still beating down hard, and his mouth as dry as ever, David finds fresh hope.

Surprisingly David's circumstances don't dictate his tone. The tempo and lyrics of the song remain hopeful. Verse 5 reveals David's deep contentment. He writes, "I will be satisfied as with the richest of foods." On certain occasions, worshippers at the sanctuary were allowed to eat the meat from their offerings. These meals embodied the richness of friendship with God. And David draws a parallel. His satisfaction in God, the love he experiences, is so rich and satisfying, it's like the finest of foods.

There are further echoes of the sanctuary in verse 7. At one level, when David sings of sheltering in the shadow of God's wing, he portrays himself as a tiny chick

sheltering under the safe wing of its mother. But this image links to the sanctuary too, where the gold wings of cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant pictured God's powerful and glorious presence over his people. David was reassured that, as he clung to God, God's grip on him would be even stronger.

So what gives David confidence that God will not leave him permanently thirsty, permanently empty? Not circumstances, but sacrifice.

And as we learn to sing this song, we're directed to that same hope. Our circumstances may look empty and dry. But we too can be confident of God's love for us, demonstrated in sacrifice. Not the sacrifice of animals in the sanctuary, but the greater, once-for-all sacrifice to which they all pointed. Through Jesus' sacrifice, God has done *everything* that we might know him.

Sometimes we feel like we're in a desert, but it is remembering Jesus' sacrifice that means even in the desert, our confidence and hope can be renewed. Because Jesus hung on a cross for us, crying out with spiritual and physical thirst, he guarantees that streams of living water will flow our way, even in the driest places.

Regardless of our circumstances, we can be assured: his love is better than life.

And it's with this confidence that David's song closes. As God's anointed king, he's confident that his enemies will ultimately be brought to nothing. Though they want to kill him, David feels assured that he'll be protected from their plots. While his mouth will be filled with praise, their mouths will be silenced. As he feasts on rich food, they will become food for wild animals.

God hasn't given us specific promises about our difficult circumstances. But we can have the same trust in God, knowing he hasn't changed from David's day. His love and faithfulness transcend our circumstances. And as we remember the ultimate sacrifice – willingly offered by Jesus for us at the cross, we can join in David's song, renewed in hope and praise.

Even in seasons of emptiness, we can trust our God, knowing that he will satisfy us with the richest portion of all.