

Created to Worship

Psalm 63:1-8

preached February 21, 2010 by Dr. Dwight Kilbourne

O God, you are my God, 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; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on 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 sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

The Thirst. A few weeks after the Hebrews had been miraculously delivered from their Egyptian slavery, they found themselves traveling in the arid climate of the Sinai Peninsula. In order to survive, they needed water for themselves and their livestock. Even with a seasoned guide who knew the lay of the land, they found they lacked water. So they began to call out to their guide, "Moses, give us water to drink!" They complained that they had been brought out into the wilderness to die of thirst.

When Moses heard their cries and complaints, he turned to the God who had delivered them. The Lord responded to his servant and instructed him to take the elders with him to the rock at Horeb. Moses was to strike the rock. When he obeyed, water gushed forth to satisfy the thirst of the people and their livestock.

Have you ever been thirsty – your mouth parched and your throat dry? Perhaps you have been in a situation where you were partially dehydrated. Thirst is a natural desire which clues us to our need for water. Without water, we cannot survive. We were designed to desire water.

The psalmist here uses the metaphor of longing for water to illustrate a deep spiritual thirst that human beings have. "My soul thirsts for you." This longing for God resides deep in our soul and yearns

to be satisfied. It is as much an innate desire as is our physical thirst for water. We crave to experience God and to express our worship. I believe it is right to say, "We were created to worship God."

Many things intensify the thirst of the soul. A recently widowed spouse feels drained and crushed and wonders if God is good or cruel. One who works so hard but seems never to catch up and life's stress bears down more each day. A parent who sees a child going down a destructive path and all intervention is met with resentment. One feels betrayed after a friend shares with others what was told her in confidence. One struggles as he wrestles with his thoughts of failure and not living up to the high standards. Why this great thirst?

In the first half of the 17th century, England found itself enthralled in civil war. In the midst of this struggle, Parliament saw an opportunity to reform the Church of England in connect to puritan thought and called together an assembly of Christian leaders who gathered at Westminster Abby during the years from 1643-1648. Out of those gatherings were born documents that were and have been very important to Reform (Presbyterian) tribes of the Christian community. One of those documents was the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which was a question-answer guide used to educate children and adults about the basics of the faith. The first question was: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer was: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

While the language of this catechism sounds somewhat exclusive and archaic to most contemporary ears, the message is one that supports my conclusion and the theme of Psalm 63. "We were created to worship (glorify) God." Our soul's thirst is to experience and worship our Creator.

Designed for worship. We are physically designed in such a way to drink the life-giving sustenance of water. We have hands that lift the glass. Lips that can form a channel around a glass, a seal

around a straw or can conform to sip from water one might scoop into his hands. Our mouths are designed to hold the water temporarily as we swallow the liquid. Then it enters into our digestive system where it is fed to our every cell. We were designed to drink.

A few weeks ago Brian Davis, our teaching pastor for the Vine, used an illustration during his sermon on the Pursuit of Meaning that he said did not work with his congregation. He told of the Actias Luna Moth who has no mouth when it comes from its cocoon. Brian shared that it lived for about one week and had the primary purpose to reproduce. Brian said as he looked at some of the college males they seemed to be thinking – "Sole purpose to reproduce – not bad." Well the Actias moth is a unique creature that is not designed to take in nourishment.

Not only are we designed to take in the nourishing powers of water, we were designed to worship. The psalmist masterfully demonstrates this and highlights the human instruments of praise we bring to worship: "my lips will praise you" (3), "my soul is satisfied with a rich feast and my mouth praises you with joyful lips" (5) and "I will lift my hands and call on your name" (4). Isn't it intriguing that the same bodily instruments used to drink water are used in worship? Could it be that we drink soul quenching nourishment when we are engaged in worship?

A.W. Tozer once wrote: "Without worship, we go about miserable." That makes sense, we were designed to worship. Peter fully understood that we were designed to worship God as he wrote these words: *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light* (1 Peter 2:9).

A few weeks ago, I attended a conference where Bishop Robert Schnase was one of the keynote speakers. Schnase is the author of the book *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, from which comes our study guide for our

Lenten study on worship. During his presentation on worship, he made this comment: "Often we enter worship with a performance mentality – the sermon today was 6, the music was a 7."

This performance mentality that many, if not most of us bring to worship not only hinders our worship but leaves us with the same deep thirst of the soul with which we came. It is as if we come, take the glass of living water into our hands, carefully inspect it to see if it is clear or cloudy, allow our hands to detect whether it is cold or warm, smell it to see if it has any odor and take a small sip to see how it tastes. Then we set the water down and give our evaluation and leave. We never turn up the glass and drink of worship and find the satisfaction for our souls.

Schnase went on to say that instead of having the performance mentality, we should ask these questions: "What did God say to us?" "How did I connect with God and others?" We need to drink the water that is placed before us in worship.

Over the past few years on the Sunday after Christmas, Patty and I have worshiped in the small UM church that my father serves in Kingsport. Each year I am struck by the contrasts that exist between the worship there and here. The quality of our music and the order of our service is refined. Our choir is so polished and the voices blend so well. Typically there is a measure of "chaos" in their worship. Yet despite differences in quality and practice, I have noticed that the people there take the glass in their hands, turn it up and drink fully.

Designed to worship corporately and privately.

The worship of the Lord that quenches the soul's thirst has two parts – much like the two legs of a ladder. A ladder with only one leg is a pole and is difficult to climb. The two legs of worship are corporate worship and private worship.

The psalmist in his poem expressed the centrality of each of these. He wrote, "So I have looked upon you in sanctuary." The sanctuary was the public and formal place of worship. Then the psalmist speaks of remembering God upon his bed and thinking about God throughout the

night. The bed is a private and intimate place. In this psalm, we see the place of both corporate and private worship.

Today there are many who seem to see little value in corporate worship. They claim that they can worship God as effectively in their homes or out in nature as they can in the midst of a church gathering. Of course the truth is people can and should worship God privately. Yet there is need for us to worship together. Something transpires in the midst of the gathering of people in worship that does not happen when we are alone. There is a unique level of encounter with God. Jesus expressed it in this way, "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:19-20). There is a power in community at worship. To worship regularly with a community of believers is important.

On the other hand, private worship is vital as well. We need those times when we can be with God one-on-one. The level of intimacy in private worship is significant. I would urge each of you to take time daily to worship God while you are alone. Those times may be short or long. Developing that intimacy with God in private worship is vital. Jesus spoke of this when he encouraged his followers to go into the closets to pray. Jesus fully understood the importance of private devotion to the Father.

One of the times and places I find meaningful in private worship of God is during my morning walks. Most mornings, I take a 3-4 mile walk through our neighborhood. While on my journey, I take time to worship. I pray. I sometimes sing. I seek to bring praise to God. Something special happens during those private times of worship. I experience God's presence and I feel equipped to take on the day ahead.

A portrait of worship. There is one last portrait of worship found in Psalm 63 that I invite you to examine and ponder: "My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me."

Most small children have a special bond with their parents. Have you seen a child who is frightened or hurt run to his mother for care? Have seen a child want to express her love to her dad? The scene looks very similar in each situation. The child reaches for the parent. The parent stoops to the level of the child. The child throws her arms around her father's neck and clings to him. Then the father takes his arm, places it around the child and stands up holding the child.

This is the picture of worship. We run to our heavenly Father, whether in joy or pain. He stoops to our level. Then we throw our arms around his neck and cling to him. Then God takes his arm and wraps it around us. In this image of worship, our souls are satisfied.