

Psalm 63
"Feasting on God"
August 28, 2022
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Ordinary Time

This Sunday completes our seventh summer in the psalter, where we have been preaching consecutively through the psalms for three months each June, July and August since 2016 - last year when I was on sabbatical, we leaped ahead a bit and went through the psalms of Ascent.

But next week, we will return to Hebrews, picking up where we left off in May at the beginning of chapter 13.

And, Lord willing, next June we will begin another summer in the psalms with Psalm 64.

As we close out our time in the psalms this summer, I just want to give a bit of a brief personal testimony.

It was about 10-12 years ago that I began to put praying the psalms at the center of my devotional life with God. Since that time I have prayed through the psalter as a whole, psalm by psalm, many times. And it has absolutely changed me.

I'm a different person, a different pastor, a different husband and father than I was a decade ago because of the ways that the psalms have shaped me in that time.

The Psalms have taught me to hope. They have taught me to lament.

They have taught me to long for God to judge the wicked and destroy evil.

The Psalms have taught me to be persistent in prayer.

They have taught me how to praise God in all circumstances.

The psalms have taught me what it means to abide with Jesus as I pray with him the same prayers he prayed on earth, and the same prayers he prays now in heaven.

The psalms have taught me wisdom, and to better love what God loves and better hate what God hates.

The psalms have taught me to long for the resurrection of the dead and not fear death - not my death, nor the death of anyone I love.

The psalms have expanded my imagination from the outside for the glorious possibilities of the Christian life - they have, in the deepest sense, enlarged my soul.

The weakness of the modern church in America is undebatable. There are a hundred examples of this.

But I am convinced that one of the primary reasons for the weakness of the modern church in our time is that God has given us an inspired, scriptural prayer book and we do not use it.

And because the prayers of the modern church are not fundamentally shaped by the prayerbook that God has given us, our prayers are weak and insipid and shallow - and the same, generally speaking, is true for our faith and our obedience.

Of course, I am not responsible for the church in general. But as far as our church is concerned, it is one of my deepest desires for us, in the years that are before us, to become experts on the psalms.

I long for us to know the psalms better - for us not only to pray them and preach them and sing them on Sunday mornings, but for the psalms to form the center of our personal spiritual lives throughout the week.

And so, beloved, I commend to you the psalms.

Each of you possess, in your bibles, the only book on Christian spirituality and prayer that you ever need.

God, in his love and mercy and wisdom, has given you the psalms. And so, as we conclude another summer in the psalter, I simply encourage you to pray the psalms.

Pray them in your homes. Pray them in your personal life. Pray them on your commute. Pray them in the morning when you rise. Pray them in the night when you wake and cannot sleep.

A very simple way for you to begin to use the psalms is to use the daily psalms that our church publishes each month. Every day of the year, we assign 1-3 psalms depending on the length, taking us through the whole psalter about five times in a year.

Just start there. Pray the daily psalms. Don't just read them silently in your head, speak them out loud to God. It'll just take 5-10 minutes. You can pray them one time through in the morning and another time through in the evening.

Or, even better, come to morning prayer on Wednesday or Friday mornings, and we'll pray the psalms for that day together.

And I promise you, that if you do this, if you begin to pray the psalter - the whole psalter, not just two or three psalms you most gravitate towards - if you pray the whole psalter, the Spirit of God will use these ancient words to transform you more and more into the image of the Son of God.

Listen now to God's word from Psalm 63, which is printed on the back of your order of worship if you'd like to read along.

Psalm 63

A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. [Explain context]

- 1 O God, you are my God; earnestly 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.
- 2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
 beholding your power and glory.
- 3 Because your steadfast love is better than life,
 my lips will praise you.
- 4 So I will bless you as long as I live;
 in your name I will lift up my hands.
- 5 My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,
 and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,
- 6 *when I remember you upon my bed,*
 and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
- 7 *for you have been my help,*
 and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.
- 8 My soul clings to you;
 your right hand upholds me.

9 *But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;
10 they shall be given over to the power of the sword;
they shall be a portion for jackals.*
11 *But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him shall exult,
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.*

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you.

Blessed Lord, who caused all the holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear this portion of your word, and to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest these words, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The kingdom of heaven is like a feast.

Those are the words of our Lord Jesus, in the parable from Matthew 22.

The kingdom of heaven is like a banquet of the richest foods prepared by God for God's people to enjoy. That's what Jesus says.

Think for a moment about some of the finest meals you have ever had.

Maybe at a white table cloth restaurant. Maybe at some hidden restaurant that doesn't look like much on the outside but has the best food you've ever tasted.

Maybe a thanksgiving or Christmas feast in your home, where you were surrounded by friends and neighbors and relatives and the noise of laughter and conversation and old stories and old jokes are just as much as part of the flavor of the meal as the food itself.

Maybe a particular dish that your mother or your grandmother or made when you were growing up — nothing fancy — but the memory of those biscuits or that fried chicken or that apple pie or whatever it might be sticks with you to this day.

The kingdom of heaven is like that. That's what Jesus says. The kingdom of heaven is a feast.

The feast begins at the very beginning of the Scriptures themselves.

God makes a remarkable world, a beautiful creation full of good things to eat, and he stands before Adam and Eve and says — all of this, all of this goodness, all of this feast is for you to enjoy.

And of course, the feasting continues all throughout the Scriptures. It is perhaps the most central theme in all of the Bible.

When God visits Abraham to tell him and Sarah the good news that Isaac will soon be conceived and born, he tells him over a feast that they share.

When Joseph is reconciled to his brothers and extends to them the forgiveness of God, he does so at a feast that God has prepared for them in a strange and foreign land.

When God delivers Israel out of slavery he does it by telling them to prepare a feast and kill a lamb.

And he doesn't just deliver them from Egypt by a feast, he delivers them for a feast - when God brings Israel to Sinai, we are told in Exodus 24 that Moses and the elders go up the mountain on behalf of the people, and there — in most of the fascinating and mysterious passages in all of the Scriptures - they eat and drink with God.

And when God establishes the ritual practices that will provide structure and form for Israel's life with him, he places at the heart of that life a shared meal - the peace offering - where part of the sacrificial animal is burned on the altar and offered to God and part of the animal is given to the worshiper and his family to eat in God's presence - a shared feast.

When God describes to Israel the good land that he will give them in Canaan, he does it in this way - he tells them that is a land that is full of good things to eat - it is a place where they will feast on milk and honey.

When Solomon, early in his reign, fulfills most clearly his role as a faithful king, he establishes a rich and generous table for the people in Jerusalem, and the writer of 1 Kings tells us: *Judah and Israel ate and drank, and were happy.*

And when Isaiah prophesies of the salvation that will come on the last day, he describes them like this: *On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well-refined.*

And of course, when the Son of God came in the flesh and lived among us, he came, by his own self-description, eating and drinking.

Jesus' ministry in the gospels is largely one of table fellowship - his first miracle was to provide wine for a wedding feast, and he shared his table with pharisees and friends, and most controversially, he feasted with tax collectors and sinners of ill repute.

But the most surprising thing that Jesus did took place on the night before he was betrayed and killed, when he sat in the upper room with the twelve, and he took the bread and said, this is my body, given for you - take and eat.

And in like manner, when he took the cup and said, this is my blood, poured out for you - take and drink.

In this Jesus established for his people a ritual meal that would be the means by which they would know - not only intellectually, but in their very hearts and bodies - their God was not only the one who prepared a feast for this people - their God was also the one who gave himself to his people as the feast itself - in fact, the Son of God had been made flesh for just this purpose - so that his people might feast on him.

And indeed, beloved, this is who your God is.

He is the one who invites you to take all your desires and longings, all your hunger and thirst — and feast on him.

And this is not just an eschatological promise, to be fulfilled at the end of time.

As our psalm this morning shows us, God means for himself to be a feast for us now — right here, in this world, in this wilderness as we wait for the redemption of all things - God gives himself as a feast.

Indeed, this psalm, Psalm 63, should be imprinted on minds as a psalm that prepares us for the Lord's Supper, a fundamental place in the Old Testament Scriptures where the promises of God come together for us to see and believe that God has truly created us to glorify and enjoy him forever.

Listen to the wisdom of the Psalmist:

*1 O God, you are my God; earnestly 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.*

Here in verse 1, David describes his longing for God's presence as thirst and hunger. His soul thirsts for communion with God, his flesh faints and hungers for God.

And by so doing, he invites us to join him in this longing, in this hunger and thirst.

Beloved, this is the mark of true spiritual life - a hunger and thirst for God - a longing which is not yet fully satisfied.

And so often, when God leads us into the wilderness - which is the place where David wrote this psalm, it is so that our hunger and thirst for him will be aroused and heightened and felt in ways that it hasn't been before.

It is when our false sources of sustenance are taken away that we learn, as our Lord says, the blessedness of hungering and thirsting for righteousness - for those who hunger and thirst in this way will be satisfied.

And indeed, in verses 2-8, we see the way in which God satisfies David in his thirst and hunger. First, in verses 2-4.

- 2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
 beholding your power and glory.*
*3 Because your steadfast love is better than life,
 my lips will praise you.*
*4 So I will bless you as long as I live;
 in your name I will lift up my hands.*

In verses 2-4, David tells us the first place the Lord has satisfied his hunger and thirst for God - it is in the sanctuary, in the gathered worship of God's people.

Here David recalls how Sabbath day after Sabbath day he has worshiped God in the assembly of Israel, and how it was in that corporate worship with God's people that he beheld God's power and glory, it was in that place and time that he learned that the steadfast love of the Lord was better than life as he praised his name among the people, and it was in that place that he blessed the Lord's name with raised hands.

Here, of course, David is teaching us something crucial about the spiritual life.

The hunger and thirst that God gives us for himself *are* fulfilled by him. But our hunger for God is not fulfilled in some esoteric or mysterious way.

No, beloved, God gives himself to us through the means of grace that he has established - Word, Sacrament and Prayer, and he does it nowhere more regularly, more faithfully, more sweetly than in the gathered and public worship of God's people.

If you read the record of David's reign as Israel's king in 1 Chronicles, you will see how intentionally he worked to establish the glorious worship of God's people in the sanctuary he established for them in Jerusalem.

And it is in the sanctuary that David recalls how God has fed him with himself, how his hunger and thirst for God has been satisfied.

I hope that you come on Sunday mornings hungry for God, beloved.

Because that is why he has established this sanctuary, this table for you.

But in verses 5-8 we find that the communion with God that David has experienced in the sanctuary carries out into the rest of his life as well.

*5 My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,
6 when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
7 for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.
8 My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.*

David's communion with God is not limited to the public worship of God's people.

No, David says that God satisfies his hunger and thirst with fat and rich food as he remembers God upon his bed in prayer, as he meditates on God's word in the watches of the night — and it is there, in that place, in the silence of the night, in the quietness of his bed that David communes with God as well - for even there when he is alone, David is covered in the shadow of God's wings, and in that place he sings for joy.

My soul clings to you, David says to God.

And here David uses an intimate term for communion with God, the same verb used in Genesis 2 when we are told that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife.

In that way, David says to God, just as a man cleaves to his wife and becomes one flesh, in that way, my soul clings to you, even when I am alone, for your right hand upholds me and strengthens me.

And it because of David's feasting on God, it is because of his rich communion with the Lord in the public worship of God's people and the quiet intimacy of his private life with God that he can confidently trust the Lord to deliver him from all his enemies.

As he puts it in verses 9-11:

9 *But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;*
10 *they shall be given over to the power of the sword;
they shall be a portion for jackals.*
11 *But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him shall exult,
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.*

Beloved, as we conclude this morning, I just want to ask you this question.

Do you know what it is to feast on God?

Do you know what it is to find your hunger and thirst satisfied in him?

Do you know what it is to come to worship on Sunday mornings because you are hungry for God, because you long to feast on him?

And do you know what it is to be satisfied in your communion with God throughout the week, in the private places of your life, in your bed, in the watches of the night?

This psalm, I believe, is given to us by the Holy Spirit to expand our vision for the possibilities of our communion with God in this life.

I suspect that many of us are far too easily satisfied with the quality of our feasting on God. We eat a little and we think we're full.

But then we turn, with our bellies still rumbling, to a hundred other things in this world to find our satisfaction.

But beloved, God is a feast. And the Lord Jesus offers himself as a feast for you.

He says to you today, even as he spoke by the prophet Isaiah, *"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, he says, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in rich food."*

This psalm, which speaks so deeply of the riches of being satisfied by God, is given to us in the first person, so that as we pray it, we learn to say with our own voice:

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you.

And to say also: My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, as I behold you in your sanctuary, when I remember you upon my bed.

Beloved, I promise you this. However much you know of communion with God now, at this point in your life, there is more waiting for you. There is always more of him to give.

If you dare to give to Jesus more and more of your longings, if you venture to channel your hunger and your thirst to him, then he will give you satisfaction - more satisfaction than you can presently even imagine.

For each one of us, there is more of Jesus to experience, deeper communion with him to know - for our God is a feast, and those who dare to hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.