

# Psalms 63

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 March 2021

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] Do turn to Psalm 63. And next week we'll look at the resurrection.! Faithful love is better than life.

It's a really beautiful statement, isn't it? It's an odd statement in the middle of the psalm. And you might be thinking it's poetic license.

It's a kind of literary device of exaggeration to express the heartfelt exuberant of love's recipient. But I need to say to you, these are not the words of some lovestruck romantic.

Of whom the sweet spring fragrance of love is in the air. In fact, these words are from really the winter. The winter of poor choices.

And unfaithful choices and betrayal. It's in the middle of that. That your love. Your faithful love is better than life. These are the words.

[ 1 : 28 ] In the midst of failure. And these are the words in the face of threat. Your faithful love is better than life. These are words.

With past mistakes. And present threats. We've all got them, haven't we? We've all got past mistakes.

And present threats. Which would you choose? If you could choose one of them, which would you choose? Past mistakes or present threats.

Guilt and shame are not very good traveling companions, are they? But neither is the threat of sedition. Somebody threatening to destroy you. Or displace you.

The first. Guilt and shame ruins living. The second. Plans to stop you living. So which of those would you choose? Guilt or sedition?

[ 2 : 31 ] But I have to say, when it comes to this psalm, David doesn't have to choose. Because it's past mistakes that are the catalyst for his present threats. And this is the context in which we read that your love, O Lord, is better than life.

And salvation from his past mistakes is where salvation from his present threat finds great confidence. So we know what Absalom's, David's present threat was.

It's there in the title of Psalm of David when he's in the wilderness of Judah. Absalom. His son. Had betrayed him. Absalom. His son had turned against him.

Absalom was David's present threat. It was a threat that had begun when his father was very, very dumb. You know that, don't you? In a season when kings should go to war, David gets caught looking at pornography.

David is like a Christian looking at pornography. But he's not looking on a website. He's looking through the window at the nakedness of his neighbor's wife. And as you read that story, there's the obvious fruit of that.

[ 3 : 42 ] The result is unfaithfulness. And unfaithfulness inevitably leads to guilt and shame. And King David, great King David, is compromised.

And at that point, even though David repents and he is fully forgiven, David is never the same again. David has to live with the scar tissue. Of his sin. And with David's betrayal and adulteries come family resentment.

And none of us should be surprised by that. Every one of us should know that. That in the days of unfaithfulness lay our darkest hours. Have you got that? Do you hear that?

In the days of your unfaithfulness lies your darkest hours. Psalm 32 tells us about David as an unrepentant man.

Before he admitted his guilt to Nathan. It tells us that his sin shattered him emotionally and physically and of course spiritually. And in the wilderness, David speaks about his soundest ever decision.

[ 4 : 53 ] Which was to confess his sin to Almighty God. And that is a very sound decision. Because there's something sounder than confession of sin. And that is the soundness of the gods to whom he confesses that sin.

And so in the days of his past mistakes, he says, Many are the woes of the wicked. But the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.

No one, of course, appreciates the sunlight than the person who has spent long hours and days in darkness.

We appreciate, don't we, spring at the moment so much when we see the flowers. Because it's been a very, very long and dark winter. And in the background of David's stupidity and willful disregard and unfaithfulness, David learned that in the end, God's steadfast love is better than life. It's a lesson that shines light. And does not desert him in the context of his current threat. Now I hope that you know, most of you are familiar enough with the Bible, that the impact of what this means for you and I should begin to dawn on us.

[ 6 : 20 ] That sin has a very barren outlook. And sin causes the ground to be parched. But as we sit here this evening, I have the joy of offering you forgiveness.

Because there is a sinless king. There is a sinless king who has entered the dry and the desolate places where there is no water. And Jesus says on the cross, do you remember what he says? He says, I thirst. And he was crucified to offer you and I shelter. He experienced thirst so that you and I might freely drink of the living water.

And that's good news, isn't it? It is, isn't it? Hello? This? God's mercy to David in past sin encourages him in the middle of present threat.

And in Psalm 63, David finds himself under threat because of the sin of another. Absalom, the son, the son within King David's own family. The pain of betrayal.

[ 7 : 28 ] You know the story, isn't it? David is ruling in Jerusalem and Absalom hangs around the gate. And all the disgruntled people come to Absalom.

And he tells, they tell him of their woes and how King David, it's hard to get hold of him. They can't see him. And Absalom says, well if I was king, I'd help you.

If I was king, I'd give even more money to the NHS. If I was king, you teachers, you'd get a pay rise. If I was king, I'd sort out your problems.

And there's a coup. And David's leadership is undermined. And in the end, he betrays his father and takes power. And when we read that, we hate that, don't we?

The pain of betrayal. Friendly fire is the most painful thing, isn't it? So the attacks of the enemy, the attacks of the outsider, well that's one thing.

[ 8 : 28 ] But the arrows of a family member. Or a friend. Or a Christian brother and sister. That is so much more painful. So much more out of order behavior.

And out of order behavior is not foreign to the Christian church. Is it? Christians take Christians to court.

Christians play favorites by damning others by their critique of them. The Apostle Paul calls such Corinthian Christians, he calls them brothers.

But when you read through 1 Corinthians, their behavior is far from brotherly and endearing. And we need to be mindful that Jesus came to his own and his own did not receive him.

As you read the Gospels, you become aware, don't you, that the church at that time, there was lots of out of order behavior towards Jesus, wasn't there?

[ 9 : 31 ] Indeed, we're told they abandoned him to the cross. And that Jesus, in that moment, well what did he do? He took them to court, didn't he? He railed against them.

No, he didn't. What did he do? He suffered for them. He was wronged and he prayed, Father, forgive them. He was truly counter-cultural.

Not of this world's culture. And so it's no wonder that David pens this wonderful words with the opening words. Oh God, you are my God and 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. Five things about this psalm. They'll be brief. Five things. Number one, I want you to really simply notice that this psalm is a prayer. It's so obvious, isn't it?

[ 10 : 30 ] I wonder whether I need to say it. But please don't miss the fact that great kings pray. Don't miss the fact that David knows that he is dependent upon God, the God who holds his life in his hands.

And so, brothers and sisters, we must be people of prayer. And I don't say that to lay a guilt trip on you because prayer is the language of relationship with God.

Prayer is the declaration of our dependence on his sovereign greatness. And so we deal with our guilt in confessional prayer.

We see the vanquishing of enemies in petitionary prayer. We transport all our needs in the vehicle of prayer to the mercy seat of God.

And of course, in prayer, we praise God for our deliverance, don't we? And so it's a great lesson for you and I who are in the main activists.

[ 11 : 38 ] In our doing and our studying and our working and our serving and our visiting in the various ministries that God has given to us in our homes and in our workplaces, that we would be more active in prayer.

Secondly, notice that David seeks God because God is strong and glorious. The psalm, there is a prayer.

And secondly, David seeks God because God is strong and glorious. David literally is in, at the end of verse 1, he's in a dry and a weary place as the psalm begins. And David's been there before.

He's been there before because of past sins. But now he finds himself again in the same place. He finds himself there again in the same place, not because of his sin, but because of the sin of someone else.

And while the conditions are difficult, I want to suggest to you that the problem is the same. Can you notice that it's the inner man and the outer man that is in need of God?

[ 12 : 44 ] He says, my soul thirsts, my flesh, my body faints. And so what does he do in verse 2?

Verse 2, he sets his gaze to the place, to the sanctuary, to the meeting place that brings God's strength and glory into focus.

And if we're to do that today, this place is not the sanctuary. Alright? This room is not the sanctuary. Do you get that? Where is the sanctuary? Where is the place we meet with God? It is the cross and the resurrection of Christ himself.

Or you can go to Ephesians 1, where the Father in love predestined us for adoption, to be brought into God's family as his sons.

And his blood seals us with his Holy Spirit. And so if you listen carefully in the background of this psalm, I think you can almost hear in the wilderness of Judea, in the dry and weary land, music.

[ 13 : 57 ] And singing by David that God is our strength and refuge. A very present help in times of trouble like we just confessed. David praises God and he seeks God because God is strong and glorious.

But thirdly, David praises God because God's faithful love is better than life. Look at verse 3.

Behold, 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. Charles Spurgeon writes of this moment.

He says, life is dear, but God's love is dearer. To dwell with God is better than life at its best. The withdrawal of his life, of his countenance, is as the shadow of death to us.

Life is to many a doubtful good. Loving kindness is an unquestioned boon. Life is but transient. Mercy is everlasting.

[ 15 : 05 ] Life is shared by the lowest of animals. But the loving kindness of the Lord is the special portion of the chosen. Do you see the contrast in this psalm?

Absalom's hatred of him. He pursues the life of kingship. He wants to murder his earthly father. But David seeks the faithful love of God which is better than life.

Verse 5. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food. My mouth will praise you with joyful lips.

And so Absalom, what's he after? Do you remember? Absalom is after David's kingdom. But I think here's the lesson that you and I have got to learn at this point. David is seeking God's kingdom.

There's no grasping, is there, for kingly position by David.

But there's a resting here. A resting in a dry and weary land, but also in the provision and decisions of a loving God. And so whether he lives or whether he lives or whether he dies at the hands of Absalom, in one sense, is not important.

[ 16 : 22 ] Whether he's returned to kingship or whether he loses his kingship, at this point the psalm finds David resting in the provision and the decisions of a sovereign loving God.

Whichever way it goes, that's where he rests. And there's a trust here in the sovereign purpose of God. A kind of trust that says, I will go anywhere with you, God.

In preference to being somewhere else without you. I will go anywhere with you, God. In preference to being somewhere else without you.

And David hadn't always lived like that, had he? He hadn't lived consistently like that, of course. But can you see his dissatisfaction with a life marked by sin?

Had taught him that true satisfaction is found only in God. David prays, David seeks God. He turns his face towards the place that bring God's glory into focus.

[17:27] He praises God and fourthly, he meditates on God. God fills his thinking. Good verse six. And there's nothing like a restless night, is there?

And there's nothing like when the night is filled with fearful adversaries and shattered circumstances. There's nothing like it.

And so I think if the pillows of the servants of God could speak, they would take us to some pretty darkened places, wouldn't they?

And in fact, if your pillow could speak, there would be dark places that your pillow could take us.

And the watches of the night are not always pleasant, are they?

There are worries. There are unspoken insecurities. There are unsettled inadequacies. There is hidden sin. There is tearful brokenness.

[18:29] And we long for the distraction of the sun to come up in a new morning. And all of us know these realities, and so the need to pray for one another is actually very, very important.

I was reading in Numbers 11, and Numbers 11, 11 has become one of my favorite verses for ministry.

It's best in the NIV, and it's Moses speaking. And Moses says this, Oh Lord, what have I done to deserve the burden of all these people?

It's a great verse, isn't it? I've sent that to all our ministers. And we laugh at that. But in truth, that's what Moses went to bed with every night.

And to the glory of God. And it's what those of us who have been called to lead and to shepherds, called people, actually, we should go to bed with every night. Hearts weighed with the burden of, and a burden for sinful people.

[19:36] And I think if we've lost that burden, we've lost the burden of Christ. And ministers and elders are concerned more with kind of making a name for themselves or their position. They've lost the burden of Christ.

On the run, in hiding, under threat. David does not deny his need for help. But he knows where his help comes from.

Look at, again, verse 6. When I think of you as I lie on my bed, I meditate on you in the night watches, because you are my helper.

You have been my help. It's quite an interesting thing. I only picked this up probably on Friday. But I do think beds in David's life, they're quite key moments.

Actually, you could write a history of the life of David by looking at beds in the life of David. They're a really interesting place of education for David, don't you think? So his bed was the scene of his adultery.

[20:46] And his bed was the restless nights of shame and fear and failure. But his bed is also the place where he learned that blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.

Whose sin is covered over. And we would do well, wouldn't we, to meditate on the mercy and the forgiveness of God. To be drawn from our pillow concerns. To the power of the cross and the resurrection of Christ.

And his sovereign purposes for us. It may be hard for some of you to accept this, but I think David learned that there is no better activity in bed than to meditate on God.

Do you hear that? There's no better activity in bed than to meditate on God. That's really, really counter-cultural, isn't it?

There's never been an age which is more over sex than our ages. And there's never been an age which is more disappointed with the reality of sex. And perhaps if we spent more time meditating on God in bed, we might find all those things improve.

[21:56] In Psalm 63, God's merciful character and his power to forgive sins. The king, the forgiven king, meditates on God for protection.

In the midst of threat. And whether it's past failures or present threat, there is a rejoicing in the shadow of God's wings for David. And like a child, like a child, do you notice David clings to God?

His right hand holds David fast. It's a lovely image, isn't it? It's a picture of a son and a father. There's so much more that could be said.

So David dependently prays. He seeks God for he is strong and glorious. He praises God for his faithful love, which is better than life. He meditates on God because God is his help.

And finally, David trusts in God. And the psalm begins with David seeking God, but by the end, verses 9 to 11, it begins, it ends with God vindicating David.

[ 23 : 05 ] God vindicating his king against his enemies. Those who seek to destroy my life, verse 9, shall go down into the depths of the earth. They should be given over to the power of the sword.

They should be apportioned for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God. And all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped. Of course, if you know your history, you'll know that David is reinstated as the king.

His enemies are vanquished. Here's my question. Here's my question. Would we have considered the king to have been vindicated had God allowed him to die at the hands of those who sought to destroy him, whose mouths are full of lies, let's just play that out.

If David had been killed in the wilderness of Judea, would we have considered him vindicated? It's a good question, I think, because there are many brothers and sisters today who are put to death for their love of Jesus Christ.

And if you are put to death for your love of Jesus Christ, if you meet the falsehood and lies of those who would slander your good reputation, and they were all around you, and you've spoken evil of, would you consider your love for God vindicated by God?

[ 24 : 37 ] Well, the book of Psalms is the hymn book of the kings. Each and every psalm, in some way, shapes ultimately the ultimate king, who is Christ.

And do you remember that Jesus Christ was surrounded by falsehood and by lies? He was put to death by evil while answering the burden of all his people.

And he was vindicated in resurrection and enthroned forever. And so if you were to suffer and you were to be put to death for your love of Christ, would your love of Christ be vindicated?

And I think if I've read this psalm rightly, and I've understood the Christian life rightly, you can bet your life on it. You can stake everything you are on it.

So can I exhort you as much as possible to stop living for yourself? And don't fear for your prospects, but rest in the one whose love is indeed better than life.

[ 25 : 49 ] And be mindful that a sovereign God wastes absolutely nothing, not even the most difficult moments of your existence. Let's pray.