

4. When we most desire Him

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[0 : 00] Now let's pray together. The earth is the Lord's, and everything that fills it, the world and those who live in it, for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.

Father, you are our creator, the Lord of the universe. A fine autumn day like this reminds us of your ancient promise that as long as the earth remains, it's summer and winter, day and night, sowing and harvest will never cease.

And we thank you for your hand on this creation that you have made, for its beauty, for its wonder, for its glory and for its tremendous variety, for all the things we can see and know and for the much greater number of things that we cannot see and do not know.

We thank you too for the seasons of life that you are in charge of these as well. In sunny times, in dark times, you are there.

And as we have sung, you will I cherish, you will I honour, you are my soul's delight and crown.

Father, we know that often our moods are dark, often our allegiance is fickle and often our faith burns low.

[1 : 23] We are sinful people who need your forgiveness. We pray you will forgive us for our weakness, our negligence and our own deliberate fault.

And this beautiful world which you have made is also a world of ugliness and pain and suffering and sadness, shadowed by death.

There are many places in the world where that is terrifyingly obvious. We think of a continuing conflict in Libya. We think of the famine and the Horn of Africa.

We think of many places throughout the world where there is oppression, where there is bloodshed, where there is discontent and where people have no voice, have no opportunity to vote, have no opportunity to express themselves.

Particularly remember your people in such countries where they cannot meet the way we do, where they cannot express their faith or share the gospel. And we pray you will strengthen them in these circumstances.

[2 : 26] And now in these moments, we pray that as we read your word, and as we allow that ancient word, which is not simply an ancient word, but the word you have spoken for us in every time and in every place, will come to us fresh, will come to us with power, will come to us with meaning, so that we may leave here.

Feeling and knowing that we have met with you the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ in his word. And we ask this in his name. Amen.

Now, if you turn in your Bibles, please, to 479, the fourth of the Psalms we've been looking at under the general heading, the God who is in control.

And we're going to read Psalm 63. Which is entitled, The Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

David says, O God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you.

[3 : 39] As in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I 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. In your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food.

And my mouth will praise you with joyful lips. And I remember you upon 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 will sing for joy. My soul clings to you. Your right hand upholds me. For those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth. They shall be given over to the power of the sword. They shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God. All who swear by him shall exult.

[4 : 43] For the mouths of liars will be stopped. Amen. That is the word of God. May he bless it to us. When I read a psalm like this, I feel extremely uncomfortable.

Because that is not the way I always or often pray. I am not often praying, my God, earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you and longs for you.

Sometimes I feel more like the so-called nun's prayer. I wonder if you have heard of the nun's prayer. Lord, she said, I do not love you.

Lord, I do not want to love you. But Lord, I want to want to love you. And I must confess, that's sometimes far nearer my experience than the words of this psalm.

Because often I'm running away from the Lord. Often I'm cold hearted. And often I have the feeling, which I'm sure many of you have from time to time, why can't he just leave me alone?

[5 : 52] Why is he to keep on pursuing me like the hound of heaven? This psalm, however, is giving us words to express our deep longings and love for him, which after all are a gift of grace.

Remember, these words are a gift of grace. This isn't David hyping himself up, pretending to an emotion he doesn't feel. These are the words of a man whose heart God has touched.

In whose heart a great surge of joy, a great surge of love for the Lord has come. And this psalm at first sight might seem out of place in the group of psalms we've been looking at.

Next week we'll look at the last psalm, Psalm 64. But throughout these psalms 61 to 62, which we've looked at, rather 60 to 62, which we've looked at, there has been a question mark over our title, the God who is in control.

We more often felt, is this God in control? And we more often wondered where he is when our enemies attack us, when we feel far away from home.

[7 : 06] And yet the title, when he was, when David was in the wilderness of Judah, and the dry and weary land of verse 2, and the enemies of verses 10 and 11, show that David is still in that situation.

I suggest that probably most of these psalms come from that bitter period, later in David's life, when he was hunted out of his kingdom, out of his home, by his much loved but overindulged son Absalom.

And probably these psalms are expressing that experience. What David is doing here is he's emphasizing the God himself, in whose care and under whose protection, the enemies and the challenges can be faced.

So if you like, this is the other psalms have been, if you like, black on white. This one is white on black, in the sense that the experience of God has become overwhelming.

We'll find next week in the last psalm we'll look at, in Psalm 64, that the tension remains, that the problems remain. But let's look at that. God is in control when we most desire him.

[8 : 18] And indeed, when we most desire him, it's because he desires us. There's nothing in us that responds unless the Spirit of God works in us. So three things, three movements in this psalm.

First of all, there's an intense longing in verses 1 to 4. The language here is full of eagerness, the eagerness of a lover. Verse 3, your steadfast love, the great covenant word, which is the special word used throughout the Old Testament, for that particular love that God has for the people he has bought, the people he has called to himself, the people whom he shepherds.

The God of the covenant. And that covenant remains in the wilderness of Judah, when Absalom is rebelling. But all you should notice, the words about God show that God is not a luxury.

It's not that David, David's hobby is not religion, so to speak. God is basic necessity. The words used here, my soul thirst.

Our soul is the very innermost part of ourselves. I'm longing, says David, I'm longing for you, as I looked upon you in the sanctuary. David's thinking about back in Jerusalem, when he was able to worship with God's people, but now his soul thirsts inward, and my flesh faints.

[9 : 40] My flesh, of course, is his outward personality, his outward body. Now the point is, there is no outward signs of God, but that very absence increases his longing.

As the poet Cooper says, where is the blessedness I felt, when first I knew the Lord? Where is the soul refreshing view, of Jesus and his word?

But God, of course, is no prisoner of palace, or sanctuary. God is everywhere. Some time ago, we looked at the great 139th Psalm, where David has these wonderful words, if I go to the heavens, if I go down to the depths of Hades, wherever I go, in every part of the universe, there you will be. And so he is, in the desert of Judah. And therefore, David's longing leads to praise, rather than despair. Verse 4, So I will bless you, as long as I live.

In your name, I will lift up my hands. Your steadfast love, he says, is better than life. It's because life, without the steadfast love, isn't really life at all.

[10:45] For David, it's existence. This intense longing. Now, I'm not going to say to you, you ought to have that intense longing. That's why I made the points at the beginning. Because this is not something you manufacture.

This is a gift of grace. That's why to have a heart open to God, is so important, and so vital. Now, this intense longing, is followed by an intimate relationship.

Verses 5 to 8. The intense longing of verses 1 to 4, is answered by the intimate relationship, of verses 5 to 8.

David was thirsting. David was fainting. Now, you'll notice, that as always, God gives more, than David asks.

David longs for a drink of water. God is satisfying, with fat and rich food, a mouth praising you with joyful lips. There's nothing niggardly about God.

[11:46] God is extravagantly generous. God gives always more, than we can ask, or imagine. That is characteristic of God. And, the brave praise of verse 4, because it is brave praise, is followed by a deeper, and more exuberant praise, in verses 5 and 6.

When I remember you, upon my bed, and meditate on you, and the watches of the night, when I lie awake at night, I tend not to meditate, on the Lord.

I tend to think gloomy thoughts, worries pile up, and I think of all the things, that have to be done. And of course, worrying increases, sleeplessness.

Once again, this is a gift. This is not something, David is saying, look, I've got to do better. What David is doing, is saying, that when I'm in the darkness, when these fears, and phantoms of the night, surround me, you are there, and you are more, and you are deeper, and your protection, is more real.

Remember the earlier Psalms, we've seen, we've seen rock, and fortress. The rock, on which we build our life, the fortress, in which we hide. But here, is the more intimate, in the shadow, of your wings.

[13:04] The image, that the Lord Jesus Christ, uses of a mother hen, gathering her chickens, under her wings. So two things.

First of all, this is not something, to be hyped up, or pretended. Pretending, is something anyway, we can only do, if we're faced with others.

The godly, Robert Murray McChain, who ministered in Dundee, in the 19th century, once said, what we are, on our knees, before God.

That is what we are, and nothing more. There's no show, no pretense there. It's rather, this is, this is experiencing, in the darkness, the presence of God.

You have been my help, my soul, clings to you. Suggestion of the urgency, of his need. This word clings, a very intense, a very powerful word. Your right hand, upholds me.

[14:05] Now the hand of God, in scripture, refers to the power of God. But, the word hand, is a more intimate, a more personal word. This is the hand, after all, which made David, and made all of us.

This is, harking back to Genesis 2, where the Lord God, takes the dust of the earth, shapes it, fashions it, and the word for shape, and fashion, suggests loving care, the potter's word, as he lovingly, shapes the clay, into a pot.

So, this is not something, to be hyped up. This is something, that God gives. This is something, that God sustains. What we need to do, is to be open to him.

What we need to do, is to place our problems, as I say, alongside him. That's been the message, hasn't it, of all these terms. And the second thing, this is ongoing. All of the words, the verbs here, are all continuous verbs.

In other words, this is not, something happens once, and then everything, is sorted out. No relationship, can stand still. See, desiring God, experiencing his presence, is not a one-off, but a

daily necessity.

[15:14] It's not, you're not going to find, some overwhelming experience, that suddenly makes, everything all right. There'll never be problems again. And, I'm not denying, of course, that sometimes, in his grace, God does give, such wonderful experience.

What I'm saying is, that after that, we still have to trust. After that, we still have to pray. So, we have an intense longing, which is answered, by an intimate relationship.

And then, finally, in verses 9 to 11, we have an infinite defense. The enemies, are still there. Those who seek, to destroy, my life.

And that, of course, is his son, Absalom, and the others, who have rebelled with him. Now, in Psalm 60 to 62, and next week, in Psalm 64, these enemies, are going to be more prominent.

But, the steadfast love, of the Lord, here in this Psalm, means that David, is seeing them, in true perspective. Remember, in all these Psalms, he's been putting, these two realities together.

[16:20] The reality, of the invisible Lord, and the reality, of the visible enemies. Now, we are not David, of course, but we have the same, we have the same things, to face, in the life of faith.

Life of faith, means believing, the invisible God, is more real, more powerful, than the visible enemies. And, David says, two things, about this.

First of all, the end, of the enemies, is certain. Verse 9, those who seek, to destroy my life, shall go down, into the depths, of the earth. They shall be given, over the power, of the sword.

They shall be, a portion of jackals. David is not, gloating over this. David is stating, that is what will happen, if they continue, opposing God.

Now, that, does not, always happen, in this life. And, in some of the Psalms, notably Psalm 73, the Psalms wonders, why it is, that the evil, prosper, in this life.

[17:21] Now, I know, that people, people say, riches don't buy, happiness. Well, that's true, but it does make, poverty more, more endurable. And, don't listen to moralizing, about rich people, are always miserable, and so on, they aren't.

I mean, I don't think, the former chairman, of the Royal Bank of Scotland, is miserable, but that's another, that's another story. The point is, that, not necessarily, in this life, but certainly, in the life to come.

The depths of the earth, Sheol, the place of judgment. They'll be given, they'll be, they'll meet God's judgment. They'll be given over, the power of the sword.

That doesn't necessarily mean, being killed in battle. The sword, in for example, in the book of Revelation, is a symbol, of the word of God. When the judge, when the Lord Jesus Christ, rides out of heaven, followed by his angels, a sharp sword, comes out of his mouth.

And that sharp sword, is the word, the word which creates, and which destroys. And this is, we're really in the world, of Romans 8, nothing can separate us, from the love of God.

[18:31] So, their end is certain. But, there's something, much more positive than that, in verse 11. The praise, of the king. The king shall rejoice, in God.

Now, in some ways, this refers to David's restoration, after Absalom's rebellion, which you can read about, in 2 Samuel 19. But, it also refers to, the world beyond.

All who swear by him, shall exult. Exult, is a very powerful word. Shouting with joy, exuberance, a party word. All who swear by him, and always, all who build their lives, on the Lord.

swearing by him, building their lives, on him. But, the mouths of liars, will be stopped. Now, liars, are those, who talk, empty talk, vain talk.

Anything, not built on God, will perish. That's been said, as far back, as Psalm 1. The wicked are not so, they are like chaff, that's driven away, by the wind. Now, just a couple of things, as we finish.

[19:37] And the first thing is this. This is describing, a real experience, which happens, by God's grace, from time to time. Remember, we are reading, five psalms, Psalm 60, to 64.

And, four of those psalms, except in part, don't sound like this. This is not, in other words, this is not saying, that, this is an experience, you ought to work up, and ought to have.

What this psalm is saying, is sometimes, in God's grace, even in this world, you have those, wonderful experiences, of his love, the daily experience, of his grace, and one day, that will be full, and uninterrupted.

All not built on God, will perish. The second thing, is this. And, so often, I'm going to turn, to C.S. Lewis. C.S. Lewis, talking about, this problem, I identified, at the beginning, of not actually, longing for God, says this, often, I don't desire him.

Often, I desire, my own happiness, my own way, my own desires. He goes on to say, but I wonder, ultimately, if I've ever, desired, anything else.

[20 : 53] And goes on, to say that, all these, remember as we sang, every, beauty, heaven, all fairest beauty, heavenly, and earthly, Jesus, my Lord, in you I see.

They're all, if you like, trailers, of the world to come. They're all glimpses, of the glory. And, and therefore, this is something, which, we look forward to, in a day to come.

But often, God, in his grace, gives us, here and now. And that's why, this psalm, speaks to us, in our failings, and in our wanderings.

Amen. Let's pray. God, our Father, we thank you, for those, wonderful times, in our lives, when we not only, know, theoretically, you love us, but those times, which come, when we know, in our hearts, that you do love us, and we rejoice.

And I pray this, may be increasingly, experience of, of our lives. And I ask now, that you will bless us, as we go our separate ways, back to responsibilities, and other things, we have to do.

[22 : 07] We ask this, in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.