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PILLARS OF PRAISE

SCRIPTURAL
BACKGROUND
Psalm 63

We are in the midst of the Thanksgiving season when we set aside time to reflect on and give thanks to God for the many blessings that He has given to us. If ever there is constant note of praise and thanksgiving you will find it in the Book of the Psalms. The writers of the Psalms always find opportunity to give praise and thanksgiving to God for his bountiful blessings, regardless of circumstances. The Psalms seem strike a chord in our hearts. We tend gravitate to them in time of sorrow, difficulty, pressure and death. The writers are honest in their feelings

about God, and the dark events that take place in their lives. They are not afraid to ask the question "WHY" in moments of tragedy and bewilderment, and they deal honestly with the realities of life. It is significant that they always seem to come up with an answer that satisfies them, and God is at the core of the answer, and so He spontaneously receives the praise and the glory. David the writer of this Psalm describes circumstances of difficulty and sadness.

Psalm 63 is associated with David's stay in the Judean wilderness at the time he fled from Absalom his son. Absalom had revolted against his father David and was pursuing the throne of his father. In the desert away from away the palace, times were difficult were difficult for David and added to it he was in danger of death. He was cut off from the sanctuary of God, but God had not cut Himself off from David. It is in this difficult setting that David writes this Psalm. Yet in spite of all he endured, the scriptures tell us that he encouraged himself in the Lord. Spurgeon said, "There was no desert in his heart, though there was desert around him."

The statements at the beginning and at the close of the Psalm, highlight the confidence that David has in his God. He strongly testifies and affirms his relationship with His God. "O God, You are my God." Dr G. Campbell Morgan points out that David in the desert David declares his thirst for same vision of God that he had in the sanctuary in the past. Psalm 63:2. It is clear that the memory of those visions was an inspiration for the present. Because his faith is rooted in God. He is able to rise above the difficult circumstances in praise, gratitude and victory. It has been said that "it is a happy person who is able to make sorrow the occasion to sing, and the darkness of the hour an opportunity for shining in the confusing disilluioning circumstances that are a part of life, and do it with an with an unwavering trust in God. This is possible if there is a strong personal relationship with God combined with an earnest determined pursuit of God. In the desert, pursued by Absalom and his army when it seemed that he was about to lose everything, David wrote "Because you are

my help I sing in the shadow of your wings." In these extraordinary words the Psalm lays down what the "Pillars of Praise" are. It underlines why David's faith is able to shine in the dark places of life? They reveal the reasons he is able to praise and give gratitude in the midst of confusion, darkness and an uncertain future? The words in this Psalm highlight source of his gratitude His spirit of thanksgiving sprang into life because he had

**Decided on
Something Essential.
Psalm 63:1.**

His gratitude began with his standing with God. David stated it clearly in verse 1. **O God, You are my God." You cannot be in any doubt where David stood with God.** ".....My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water." This Psalm has been called the soul **"Soul of the Psalms."** **The early church sang it every morning, and what is so significant about this first verse is what it tells us about David's deepest longing in life. It is brought to our attention by a crucial decision he had**

made. What filters through these words is

**the Priority of
David's Decision.
Psalm 63:1.**

His statement is important at this point. "O God, you are my God earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you." David had settled on something essential in his mind and heart, for he had established God as a priority in his life. The God for whom he thirsted was not a detached God, separate from him - He was not a remote God, distanced from him - He was not an aloof God, disinterested in Him. He was a personal God enjoying a relationship with Him. His words clearly indicate this truth. **O God...You are My God."** The words "My GOD, "are not uttered casually or in an oath, or even an expression of high emotion, that even some Christians use and they use it in vain. They take that which is sacred and fling it about as though it was a football, not realizing how sacred and precious the Name of God is. Not so with David, there is a sense of awe and reverence in His words as he expresses a personal relationship with this God. In our society and even in the church the

sacredness and holiness of God has been reduced to an unacceptable level of the common. (Familiarity). One has rightly said that "we have tried so hard to become relevant in our day we have forgotten how to be reverent. David however has perceptive sense of the holy immensity of God. David decided this great and holy God of the universe - the God of his people's history - the God of all creation and the God who by His might and power, delivered His people from Egypt, and gave them the land of Canaan, was His God, and he held Him in awe. He had settled on this God as his priority. "O GOD you are my God...I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory." And when God is a priority, then everything that pertains to Him becomes a priority. This was the priority of His decision.

Now David, having settled on God as his priority in life, reveals the

**Intensity of his
desire for God.
Psalm 63:1.**

David says, "my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land,

where there is no water." This was David's consuming passion. It is this kind of inward driving force which is vividly described by the Psalmist in Psalm 42:1-2. "As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants for you O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." This is his heartfelt expression of David's consuming passion for God. The words "pants" and "thirst" indicate the soul's appetite and intense desire for God. Thirst and hunger are an indication of life, and the satisfying of those desires ensure the sustaining nourishing and the nurturing of life. What is true in the physical realm is also true in the dimensions of the spiritual. Spiritual thirst and spiritual hunger are evidences of spiritual life. These desires are indispensable to the development and growth of spiritual life. They are the compelling, constraining and energizing forces in our quest to know more of God, and keep Him central in our lives. David describes this desire as thirst in the desert place where there is no water. There is no thirst quite like that. I once

experienced an incredible thirst back in Africa when I tried a short cut in the African bush, which proved to be wrong. We struggled through thick bush on a blazing hot day, and developed a consuming thirst. Desperate thirst is a terrible thing. Everything else is forgotten in the pursuit of water. Nothing matters except water. The throat constricts, the tongue swells, the mouth feels like cotton wool and visions of fresh running waters appear which are simply mirages. David seems to have this thirst for the Presence of God. Psalm 1:1. "My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water." That kind of thirst gets God's attention. Jesus said that they who "hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled." The measure in which we will receive the Presence of God in our lives is dependent on the measure of the depth of desire or our thirst for Him. The superficiality in western Christianity generally, is not primarily because there is no spiritual thirst. There is a thirst, but men and women are drinking at the wrong fountain. They gravitate to the things

that may have the touch of religion on them, but in fact they are digesting spiritual junk food. Some of this junk food has infiltrated some of the church. Events are promoted which stimulate entertain the senses. Let me ask a question which should ascertain where you are in your spiritual desires. Do your spiritual desires gravitate to God, His holy word and sacred will? Or has God simply been made part of a comfortable package in life because it is the right or traditional thing to do. The crucial question for the Christian; is God the center of your desires? This is a question, not a judgment call. But it is something upon which we should continually and seriously reflect, because it touches all of our lives. One has said that "while there is a great deal more to Christianity that thirsting for God, there is no Christianity worth the name without that thirst." Listen to David once again, "O God you are my God, earnestly I seek for you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you." This describes the intensity of David's desire for God. This leads me to highlight

The Totality of David's devotion to God. Psalm 63:1.

David is completely focused on God. Thirst for God and devotion to Him go hand in hand. Both are essential to knowing God. In verse 1, when David brings together his soul and his body he is indicating that his longing for God is total! It is complete! This is not the only time David expressed his intense longing for God. In Psalm 27:4 he wrote, "one thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord." The one thing about which speaks does not eliminate the rest of life. The "one thing" is his priority. For David, the rest of life revolves around this important priority. It puts everything into perspective. God is his life, and all other things are viewed in relation to the one thing. This is the essential value that upon which David had decided. The crucial question is "How complete is your devotion to God. David's attitude of thanksgiving found its roots in his

Discernment of something fundamental to his

life with God. Psalm 63:1-3.

Listen to his words "I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, then my lips will glorify you." Note the absence of self-glorification or the exaltation of self. Note his concern that the living God be glorified. This concern is expressed in verses 3-4. "My lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live." The circumstances under which David was living were not conducive to praise. And yet in the midst the wilderness and in danger for his life his song was heard. His praise and thanksgiving broke the silence of that wasted wilderness. "My lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live." He sounded a note that the church has held down through the centuries; that "man's chief end is to glorify God." And so, in these difficult circumstances, David uses this opportunity to praise, celebrate and exalt his God. It was Augustine who said that "the Christian should be an Alleluia from head to foot." And Paul writing to the Church 10:31, declares that "whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." This is what David was doing,

but there was reason for it. It seems that he was rejoicing because he discerned and believed in the,

The Reality of God. Psalm 63:1 -3.

"O God you are my God.....I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory." What David said here was more than a belief in the fact of God's existence, but this God was his God. He wasn't groping in the dark trying to discern which God he discovered in the sanctuary. It is clear that he did not see the God of pre-conceived ideas, or a God who is packaged in rigid notions of who men think He is. He is the God of Israel's history who revealed Himself to David as He is – Holy Almighty, real and personal. He is the God who revealed Himself in response to David's hunger and thirst for Him. There were many "god's" in that day, but as far as he was concerned he knew the God for whom he sought. He describes his vision of God in the sanctuary. His discovery was the result of a desire for Him. Indeed his discernment of the true God was dependent on his insatiable thirst for Him. God, Himself says

in His word, "seek me and you will find me." The scriptures make clear that when we draw near to God He will draw near to us. That is God's promise and that is why David cries out, "My soul thirsts for you." Knowing God is totally dependent upon a deep and constant thirst for Him. We cannot know God as we ought without that kind of thirst. In verse 2 he says, "I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory." There is no evidence that David saw God with his natural eyes for no man has seen God at any time. Obviously he has some kind of vision because he said "I have seen you in the sanctuary." There are different ways in which we can see God. It is true that there are evidences of Him all about us. Augustine wrote that, **"God is an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."** We meet Him in the beauty of the natural world. The Bible says that the heavens declare His glory – it reveals His splendor and His beauty. It proclaims His creative power. We also meet Him in the corridors of time. There are evidences of His footprints in

history. God has always been there standing in the shadows of great events in His purposes and will. We can see Him in all of that. We can see Him in the smile of a child. We feel His heart beat in the love of a mother for her deformed infant. We see evidence of Him in many and different ways. All of this is somehow a detached vision of Him, and it really does not do anything for us. It is impersonal, but there is an insight and knowledge of God that comes to our hearts and minds by faith. We can know Him in such a way that the Almighty God of creation can become our personal Savior in Jesus Christ His only Son. For he has reconciled us to Himself through the death of His Son on the cross. We can know Him on an intimate level. This is the level on which David thirsted to know Him. But David also discerned what, **The Qualities in God are. Psalm 63: 2-3. "I have seen your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life my lips will glorify you."** It is clear that God reveals who He is to those who earnestly seek Him and thirst after Him. The

three attributes as David discerned them are extremely important. They gave to Him a correct perspective as to who God is. There is first of all,

The Power of God. Psalm 63:2.

God's Almighty power impacted Him. "I have seen your power." The power of God speaks of His Absolute authority His indisputable Sovereignty, His control in life and over life. This God of power, said David, is "My God." Then there is

The Glory of God. Psalm 63:2.

"I have seen your glory." God's essential Glory is His holiness. This means that He is completely and perfectly free from evil. "God is light" cries John, "God is light and in Him there is no darkness." God hates sin with all of His being. God will never adapt or accommodate Himself to the demands, desires and agenda's of sinful man. What God does do, is to provide a way whereby men and women can have a relationship with Him. And the sacrifice of God's one only Son on the Cross was His answer to the problem of sin in man. The cross is an evidence of the holiness of God, for it is through the Cross

that there is forgiveness and cleansing from all sin in the power of the Blood of Christ shed on that Cross. A Holy God does not wink at sin but He does provide a freedom from it. John said, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Jesus died to make men and women holy because He is holy. Paul tells us that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for He died to make her holy. Holiness is the essential the Glory of God. The third truth David discerned was,

**The Love of God.
Psalm 63:3.**

In verse 3 David says, "your love is better than life my lips will glorify you."

David places great value on the love of God. It is "better than life" He said. To be loved by the God of all creation and power and authority surpasses life itself. Life on earth is transient, temporary fleeting, but God's love is eternal. God's love is secure, saving and invincible. There is a dimension in love that is of more value than the haunting shadow and vanishing vapor of life. In the early days of the Apple computer, co-founder Steven jobs offered the position of

CEO to Pepsi chairman John Skully. Skully wasn't really interested in the position; he was satisfied with his work at the Pepsi Co. Finally, in exasperation, Jobs looked Skully in the eye and said, "Are you telling me that you would rather sell sugared water for the rest of your life, when you could lead a company that will change the world?" What is it that really counts? Skully made the decision to leave Pepsi and went to work for Apple. David saw what really counts in life on earth. Your love is better than life. The Love of God is eternal. And because he saw the true value of the love of God as compared to life his response was, "my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as live." Your love is better than life. Maybe we should ask, "When is God's love better than life? The answer to this is when the child of God is faced with a choice of renouncing their faith, denying Christ or face martyrdom. Think of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego who chose the fiery furnace rather than renounce their faith in God to worship the golden image. To them God's love was better than life. Or think of Stephen in the

New Testament who was willing to remain steadfast to God and the gospel and be stoned to death rather than compromise His faith in God. To Him God's love was better than life. Or think of the first Zulu Christian Martyr Maqamusele Khanyile who was thrown to his death off a cliff in Eshowe in Zululand because of his acceptance of Christ and his strong refusal to turn his back on Christ. To him God's love was better than life. Think of the modern day martyrs who are being put to death even today because of their devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. Their love for Jesus is better than life itself. David saw the incalculable and priceless value of God's love because he believed and wrote that "God's love is better than life, I will praise you as long as I live." Psalm 63:3-4. A.W. Tozer wrote "The love of God is one of the great realities of the universe, a pillar on which the hope of the world rests. But it is a personal and intimate thing too. God does not love populations, He loves people. He loves not the masses, but men and women."

The power of God, the Glory of God and Love of God, are the pillars

of praise, and this is what David discerned in the God he served. There is one more pillar of praise here. It is David's

discovery of something experiential and practical. Psalm 63:4-9.

This discovery caused David to rejoice and celebrate it with thanksgiving. Having discovered the God who is, he celebrates,

True Satisfaction in Life. Psalm 63:4.

"My soul will be satisfied with the richest foods with singing lips my mouth will praise you." The metaphor is vividly descriptive, "My soul" (that is who I am in essence. My inner self) "will be satisfied." Man is deficient without God. He is hollow and empty without God. He will never find satisfaction apart from God. This is not simply a Biblical truth, it is fact of man's existence. The quest of man is to find satisfaction for himself in life. That is why he pursues one stimulus after another. Our society reveals that man is on a quest to find fulfillment in life and has failed. Nothing seems to bring satisfaction to it.

Montgomery Boice reminds us of a fountain on Sedgley Hill in Philadelphia where we used to live. If a person makes his way out along the eastern side the Schuylkill River, he will come to the statue of a pilgrim where a small spring empties into the river. Then, if he follows the course of that stream upward onto the hill, he will come to a spring, which is its source, and he will see an inscription erected there years ago by the government of the city. It reads: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again," a quotation from the conversation of Jesus with the woman of Samaria." John 4:13. 'What the quotation tells us is that all earthly satisfactions are ultimately unsatisfying, just because they are earthly.' (Boice). They are not eternal and we are beings made for eternity. The scriptures tell us that God has set eternity in our hearts. St Augustine said ("and I paraphrase him) "man is restless and will not find rest until he finds it in God." Man came from God. He was created in the image of God and so man is incomplete without Him. When man turns away from God he loses something of

incalculable worth. One has said that there is a "God shaped vacuum" in his soul, and until God fills that vacuum he will continue to be restless and dissatisfied. And because it is a dissatisfaction of the spirit, it can never be satisfied by the sensual, material or earthly prosperity. Jesus went on to say in that same conversation with the woman of Samaria "Whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water welling up to eternal life." John 4:14.

David's thirst for God compelled and constrained him to seek for Him. He knew that only God could satisfy him... The Psalmist in Psalm 104: writes that "God satisfied the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things." And the Prophet Isaiah tells us that the Lord will guide you always, he will satisfy your need in a sun scorched land." David testified "My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods." One has written that "David had drunk at the spring of the covenant-love of God, and was forever satisfied. In the dry desert place David

found satisfaction in life. "Your love he said is better than life." Not only did he find true satisfaction in life. He also discovered,

True Security in Life. Psalm 63:4-9.

His words are illuminating. "I sing in shadow of your wings." Because you are my help, I sing within the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. They who seek my life will be destroyed." There are two elements to this security, It rests on a

Solid Foundation. Psalm 63:4. ".....you right Hand upholds me."

What stronger foundation is there than the right Hand of God upholding the life. There is nothing more substantial than the Mighty Hand of God sustaining and supporting your life. David discovered this when he clings to God, he would not be moved, even though life may throw its worst at him. He may lose everything that the world can offer him, but at the end of the day it will only be the Hand of God upholding him that would sustain him. The second element that David discovered

True Protection Over Life. Psalm 63:7.

His words are revealing. "Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings." In David there was this sense of unshakable protection in his life. He was in the desert. His son had turned against him and was seeking to destroy him. Death was threatening around the corner. The future was uncertain. The circumstances in which he found himself, gave no reason for a song. But David lived in another dimension. "I sing," he said, "I sing in the shadow of your wings." There is no power in hell, no force on earth and no enemy in the heavenlies that can destroy the solid foundation of God's right Hand, and remove us from the shadow of His wings. David thirsted and earnestly sought for God and found Him and in finding Him, knew that he was safe and secure. Jesus assured us that as His sheep we are in His hands and no one would be able to snatch us from His Hands. To whom are we clinging this morning? Under whose wings are you resting? What will hold us together when life tumbles in on us?

David made a decision to focus on God in life.

He thirsted for Him with his whole being. In a desert place he was able sing praise and thanksgiving to His God. Dr Sangster tells a story of a completely paralyzed little girl confined to a hospital bed. She was placed in what was known in those days as a Phelps box. It was like a casket. She was strapped in it and could not anything but look straight up at the ceiling. Dr Sangster asked how she was doing and she replied that like to count the stars. When Dr. Sangster asked her what she meant she said, at night I ask the nurse to put near the window so I play with the stars. Asked to explain what she meant she said I take all of my blessings and I place them on a star but she said there are not enough stars to go around all of my blessings. David lifted his soul in gratitude God the midst of danger and a desert. There is so much we can thank and praise God for in our world and thanksgiving is a time to remind ourselves of it.