

## THE DISCOVERY OF A SOUL THAT SEEKS GOD

A week or so ago I read the following quote from Dane Ortlund in his book entitled *Gentle and Lowly*: “The way the Puritans would write books is to take a single Bible verse, wring it dry for all the heart-affecting theology they could find, and, two or three hundred pages later, send their findings to a publisher.” (pg 43).

I kind of chuckled to myself when I read that because I feel like that is what I’m trying to do with Psalm 63— “wring it dry” of all I can find! Let’s turn there once again; please follow along as I read verses 1-8.

So far we’ve seen the declaration of David found in vs 1: “O God, thou art my God...” By making this statement, I believe David was acknowledging two things.

**First**, he was admitting his **need for God**. David had needs that he personally could not meet—but that **God could**. So he looked to God to have those needs met.

**Second**, by declaring that God was his, I believe David was saying that he was going to **honor God as God** in his life. He was not just seeking to **get things** from God—he also wanted to **give things back** to God!

**What** was David going to give? You can sum it up in one word—**Praise!**

--End of vs 3—“my lips shall **praise** thee.”

--Vs 4 “Thus will I **bless** thee while I live: I will **lift up my hands** in thy name.”

--End of vs 5 “...my mouth shall **praise thee with joyful lips**.”

--End of vs 7 “...therefore in the shadow of thy wings **will I rejoice**.”

--Vs 11 “But the king **shall rejoice** in God...”

David’s declaration that God **belonged** to him—and that **he belonged to God**—led to his **decision** to seek God. And even though this entire Psalm could be considered **a prayer**, the only **request** David makes is found in vs 2 “To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.” To the Hebrew people, the **greatest display** of God’s power and glory was when God freed them from the slavery of Egypt—and made them His very own people. And the sanctuary—especially the Ark of the Covenant—reminded them of when & how that took place.

But there is a far **greater display** of God’s power and glory than God’s triumph **over Pharoah** and his army. And it’s not seen in the **sanctuary**—it’s seen **at Calvary!** **How great** was the power demonstrated by the cross and empty tomb? It defeated the two things that **all men should** fear—and **most men do fear**—the most! What is that? **Death and hell!**

God showed His power **over death** by bringing Jesus back to life again! “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (I Cor 15:54). Death has lost its sting (I Cor 15:55) ... in heaven “there shall be no more death” (Rev 21:4).

But how did God show His power **over hell** at the cross?

--Did God **do away** with Hell; did He “get rid of it”? No; it still exists as a **real place** “prepared for the devil and his angels”—**and all those who reject Christ** in this life!

--Did God **change His mind** about sending people there because now Jesus had died and rose again? No; God **did not change His mind** or His way of doing things. **Rev 20:15** “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

--How then was hell “defeated”? How did God demonstrate **His power** over hell?

Because the **substitutionary death** of Jesus **provided the payment** for our sin—and thus an opportunity for us to avoid hell! **II Cor 5:21** “For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made [might have] the righteousness of God in Him [Jesus].”

Think about what happened at the cross.

--The **holiness of God** remained untainted—sin was punished!

--The **love of God** was satisfied—sinners could be justly forgiven because their sin was paid for!

--And **the glory** belongs **solely to God** because salvation is dependent on what Jesus did for us—not on what **we** do!

**Titus 3:5** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His **mercy** He saved us...”

But does that mean **everyone** is now heaven-bound because Jesus died and rose again? No; it doesn't!

Salvation is a gift **available** to all—but it does not become **yours** until you personally receive Jesus **for yourself!** We need to **have** Jesus—not just know **about** Him!

**I John 5:12** “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

And with that as a rather lengthy intro, I want us to look again at Psalm 63:3. What did David discover that led him to proclaim that God's lovingkindness was better than life itself? More important than what **David** discovered is **what we can learn** from God's Word that will lead us to the **same conclusion**. That is what we are going to **begin to look** at this morning.

First, let's consider... **1. Life in this world is not always bad**

Why do I bring that up? Because David is **not** making a comparison between a really **good** thing—God's lovingkindness—and a really **bad** thing—life!

--He is not comparing something **really good**—like banana cream pie—with something **really bad**—like Brussel sprouts! You know Brussel sprouts are rotten baby cabbages, right 😊?!

--And he is not comparing the **Prime Rib** at Camp Fairwood Men's Retreat with **soy** burgers!

--He's not even comparing a “bad day of fishing” with a “good day at work!”

David is comparing something many of us love and enjoy—**life**; with something that is **far better**—the **lovingkindness** of God!

I don't want to get overly philosophical here, but let's think through this a little bit.

A. We can't enjoy anything without life

Stated another way, you can't **enjoy anything**—and wouldn't even know what “enjoyment” is—if you **weren't alive!** Pretty profound, isn't it 😊? **One man put it like this:** “Had we no existence, though lovingkindness flooded the universe, it would be nothing to us. Life is necessary to discern and appreciate lovingkindness.” (Bible Hub; “Lovingkindness Better than Life” (Sermon on Psalm 63:3); Homilist). Think of it like this...

--We wouldn't know how good banana cream pie—or prime rib—was if we were not alive!

--We wouldn't know how **fun fishing** was if we were not alive!

--We wouldn't know the **satisfying feeling of accomplishing** something if we were not alive!

--We wouldn't know the thrill of **having and holding a child** if we were not alive!

--We wouldn't have the **joy of hearing** that same child say, “**I love you**” if we were not alive!

--We wouldn't know the **beauty of a sunset**...or a waterfall—or a car, for some of you—if we were not alive!

--We wouldn't know the smell of candles...or fresh cut grass...or frying bacon if we were not alive!

The list could go on and on, but the point I'm trying to make is this: life is a **gift from God**—and it is good!

What did God say **after He made everything**—including people?

**Gen 1:31** “And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was **very good.**”

What does God say **about children**?

**Pss 127:3** “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is His **reward.**”

Children are a **reward** from God—they are a gift—so **life is obviously a gift!**

Some of you might be wondering—and rightly so—about **the unborn**. They have not “seen life” in the way that I just described. How can they enjoy heaven if they have never been “alive”—in the normal sense of the word—and don't know what enjoyment is? Rest assured that they are **very much alive** in heaven!

**Life with God** is not dependent on a **physical** body—and **joy in heaven** is not dependent on having experienced life here on earth!

Another thing that is important for us to realize regarding **this** life is that...

B. God wants us to enjoy the things He has given us

I wonder if we think about that often enough. Notice on your outline some reminders regarding that.

Jesus told His disciples in **John 10:10** "...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more **abundantly**." It doesn't say—"I am come that they might have life more **miserably!**"

**John 15:11** "These things have I spoken unto you, that my **joy** might remain in you, and that your **joy** might be full." Again, it doesn't say, "I want you to be joy-**less**." It says, "I want your joy to be **full!**"

**I Tim 6:17** "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, **who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;**"

It is impossible to miss the fact that God has **given us things to enjoy**. We **look for joy** in the wrong things often-times, but that does not change the fact that God wants us to enjoy what He has given us!

**James 1:17** "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights..."

To recap, then, life in this world is not always **bad**. It is often **good** and is something that God says we **can—and should**—enjoy. The flip-side, though—and a reality we **have experienced all too well**—is...

**2. Life in this world is never always good**

That might not be the most proper English, but it captures an important truth—there is a **lot of bad** in this world along with the good! Regardless of how you define a "good" life, it isn't good **all the time!**

--A **nation** that used to know what **gender** is... and what **life** is...and what **marriage** is, doesn't anymore!

--**Churches** that used to preach the Bible don't anymore—and people who were **faithful to God** aren't anymore

--Children in the womb...and newborns...and 6-1/2 year old's...and teenagers **die**—sometimes tragic and painful deaths.

--Children who said **they loved us** when they were little now say they **hate us!**

--**Friends who stood by us** in the past don't anymore... and sometimes our **spouses don't**, either!

--People who **didn't commit** crimes are jailed—and people who **did commit** crimes remain free.

--Our eyes grow dim... our hearing goes bad... our joints ache... we get weak-kneed and wobbly...and we now find it difficult to do some of the simplest things!

--On top of that, our parents die... our friends begin to die...our siblings begin to die... our spouses die...and then **we will die!** Again, the point is obvious—there is a lot of **tragedy** in life along with **the good!** Life is **often** good—but it is **not good 100% of the time!**

Next, let's consider... **3. What is the lovingkindness of God?**

In order to see ... and believe ... and understand that God's lovingkindness is **better than life**, we need to know what it is we are referring to! So what is meant by "lovingkindness?" It comes from the Hebrew word "khesed" and occurs 247 times in the OT according to Strong's Concordance.

It means God's favor... and goodness... and grace...and kindness. And it also means "mercy." In fact, in our KJ Bibles it is translated "mercy" more than it is translated anything else.

But what is God's favor? What is God's goodness and kindness? What is God's mercy? Before we delve into those, I want us to consider...

A. What lovingkindness is not

--It is not a constant state of health—or wealth!

--It does not mean having power—or fame!

--And it certainly does not mean care-free, pain-free, and trouble-free living!

How do we **know** that is **not** what lovingkindness is? Because of **who** was saying this—and what he was **going through** when he said it!

David was not in his palace when he said this—he was in the wilderness. Why? Because he was on the run from his **own son**—and the people his son had stirred up against him!

Jesus Himself warned us in John 15:19 that the world would hate us. He also warned us that there would be trouble in life. **John 16:33** “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world **ye shall have tribulation**: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

God’s people get cancer. They lose their jobs—and their health. They lose loved ones—and their wealth. Family members and friends disown them. They are looked down on—and made fun of.

But when these things happen, it does **not mean** that God’s lovingkindness has ended! It is important for us to **understand** that—and to be **convinced beyond a shadow of doubt** that it is true!

So what is God’s lovingkindness if **it is not** a healthy, financially prosperous, care-free and trouble-free life?

#### B. God’s lovingkindness includes grace

What is grace? Grace is often defined simply as “God’s undeserved favor.” It is receiving from God blessings and favor that are not deserved. Turn to Psalm 36:7. There’s our word “lovingkindness.” Now vs 8. It is here where we get the sense that lovingkindness involves God “abundantly satisfying” us with more than we need—and that which we don’t deserve! God “makes us” drink of the river of His pleasures!

#### C. God’s lovingkindness includes mercy

I mentioned earlier that the “kheh-sed” is often translated “mercy.” What is mercy? Mercy is God’s **withholding** of judgment that we do deserve! We have an example of that in Psalm 103; let’s turn there. Notice vs 10. Obviously talking about sin...and not dealing with us according to our sins. Aren’t you glad God is merciful? Aren’t you glad He doesn’t “deal with us according to our sins”? Now vs 11. What a thought! God’s mercy—His forgiveness—is as great as the heaven is high above the earth!

**Who** is God’s mercy great toward? I don’t want us to miss this! It is great toward them that **fear** Him! God’s mercy is not great to the **arrogant...and the stubborn...and the proud**. God’s mercy is great to those that fear Him; to those who are humble.

Now back to Psalm 63:3. We’re almost done, but I want to consider one last question...

#### **4. To whom is God’s lovingkindness better than life**

Listen carefully—this verse is **not true for everyone**! Not everyone can say—truthfully—that God’s lovingkindness is better than life. Why?

Because if you die **without Christ**—if you die **unforgiven**—if you die **never having received Christ** as your Savior—God’s lovingkindness **will end**! It will not follow you to hell! There is no grace in hell. There is no mercy in hell. There is no lovingkindness in hell.

And no matter how good—or bad—your life on earth was, it will have been **far better** than **hell will be**! Hell is a **real place**—and Jesus talked about hell more than He talked about heaven! Here are some of the words Jesus Himself used about hell: eternal damnation (Mk 3:29); everlasting fire (Mt 18:8); place of torment (Lk 16:28); weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth (Mt 8:12; 13:42); and everlasting punishment (Mt 25:46).

To deny the **reality** of hell—or the **foreverness** of hell—is to suggest that Jesus did not know what He was talking about! It is calling Him a liar—or confused! Do you really want to do that? Do you really want to make yourself a judge over what Jesus said? How arrogant—and dangerous!

Let me say it again—if you die unforgiven; if you die “in your sins” is how Jesus put it—this verse is **not true for you**! God’s lovingkindness will not be better than life because God’s lovingkindness will end when you do!

There is a second group of people who this verse is not true for—a **disobedient** child of God. You can be a child of God and not sense God’s grace and mercy. Why? Because “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth” (Heb 12:6). Before David repented of his sin with Bathsheba, he wrote in Ps 32:4 “For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me...” God’s hand “heavy upon us” is the opposite of God’s lovingkindness!

--We won't sense God's favor when we are doing wrong!

--And we won't sense God's mercy—His forgiveness—if we continue to do wrong and refuse to repent!

David did not have the joy of forgiveness until **after** he confessed His sin to God—and the same holds true for us!

So who can truthfully say, "Thy lovingkindness is better than life"?

If the unforgiven can't say it ...and if **disobedient** children of God can't say it; by process of elimination that leaves just one group—**obedient** children of God!

I didn't say **perfect** children of God because there is no such thing! But any child of God can walk with God and strive to obey Him.

Obedient children of God will sense God's lovingkindness—even during trials—because they know God is molding them instead of chastening them. And when they do sin—and God points out that sin—they will humble themselves and repent and experience the joy of forgiveness.

So where do you fit in these three groups I just described?

--Are you still in your sins? If so, this life—no matter how good or bad—**will be better** than your next life! God's lovingkindness will end when your life does.

--Are you a disobedient child of God? If so, you will not sense God's favor and forgiveness until you repent and start obeying.

--Are you an obedient child of God? If so, this verse is true for you; God's lovingkindness is better than life. That is a statement of fact—but it is also a statement of faith.