



Thirsty for God (Psalm 42)

Have you ever been to a hot country? You'll know how quickly it is to develop a thirst. In fact, your body will feel thirsty before you do. I remember one holiday we had in Spain many years ago. Right from early in the day my eyes would hurt. It was quite while before I realised that I did not have enough fluid in my body to keep my eyes damp. After that we made sure we drank plenty of water and had plenty of electrolytes to keep fit and healthy in the heat.

That part of Spain we went to - near Murcia - was one of the driest places in Europe. It rains there only a month or two in the year and it's a place that is a dry and thirsty land and you have to be prepared.

What is the best thing to take into the desert? A thirst aid kit!

You're crawling through the desert - dying of thirst. Suddenly you see a good pop singer, a bad pop singer, and Santa Claus. Which one should you ask for water? The bad pop singer: the other two are mirages.

This isn't a warning to be careful on a hot day – we haven't seen much of that recently!. Hot just isn't us. Drought is rare – flooding is more likely. But out in the heat we need to be careful as we become thirsty quickly and sometimes we don't know how thirsty our bodies have become because we suffer symptoms before we feel thirsty - dehydration, diarrhea, eye pain, but then a dry mouth, tiredness, sickness, collapse.

It's rather like those films you have seen about people lost in the desert. You can only last a matter of hours without water in a hot desert. They have a huge thirst which they need to satisfy.

In the heat, we need to understand we have a thirst and make sure that the longing for water is satisfied before we suffer serious problems. And why do people let that happen to them? Maybe they just exert themselves without giving a thought to their water intake. Or maybe to quench their thirst they drink alcohol or a fizzy drink which restore water but not electrolytes. They are interesting tastes but they don't quench your thirst.

Why am I saying all this. Because spiritual thirst is rather like this. We can't function spiritually without God. He's spiritual water and in a world that is a spiritual desert we can't function without Him. Someone once said that in the heart of each person is a God-shape space. Listen to these words

"The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain - a curious, wild pain - a searching for something beyond what the world contains, something transfigured and infinite, the beatific vision - God. I do not find it, I do not think it is to be found, but the love of it is my life; it's like passionate love for a ghost. At time it fills me with rage, at times with wild despair; it is the source of gentleness and cruelty and work; it fills every passion I have. It is the actual spring of life in me."

Those words were said by the atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell. He recognised he had a thirst but tried to deal with it himself.

The Psalmist had a much more sensible idea!

42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? 3 My tears have been my food day and

night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Why do I preach on this subject this evening. It's because we live in a world and in a life that is a desert and we have a thirst for God needs to be satisfied. I know you get a lot of challenging services I know that responding to those kind of sermons is difficult for many people who are going through the struggles of life. It somehow seems difficult to come to grips with mission or prayer meetings or the challenges of being a Christian when the world seems such a hostile place.

How do we respond? Do we just shrug our shoulders at our problems? Are we good British people and show a stiff upper lip? Or are we fatalistic. This is how things have been all my life. Why should they change? Or maybe we are fatalistic about church. Why should I participate in what they do at church? Nothing ever changes.

Maybe it's because we are thirsty and we need to drink. And here was the Psalmist, beset by all his problems:

42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" 4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

But things had been different. He could go back to a time when he was leading the procession in the house of God. he could remember the blessings. He could remember the joy. But now? He felt as though he was out of it. But in his despair he recognises he's thirsty:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

Are you thirsty this evening? What are the consequences of that thirst. In his despair the psalmist realised it - dysfunction and depression - a feeling of defeat.

One of the problems that we face as Christians, particularly if you are of the active sort who do lots of things in the church is that you may be giving yourselves some heavy exercise in the desert, without realising your thirst and drinking out of the fountain of life.

I believe that God wants each church to be one that thirsts after Him and drinks and are satisfied.. Because when we do, we do everything with His mind and will. We reach others with His passion for them. But often we go forward without realising that we are even thirsty, let alone trying to quench our thirst as we long after Him like the deer.

As we look at Psalm 42, it seems to be a dialogue that the psalmist is having with himself. He has all the pressure and despair but needs to remind himself of who God is. So what does he focus on:

◆ The Hope of God

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and 6 my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon--from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

Why do we thirst after God? Because He is our hope. He's our only hope. Through Jesus we are people of hope. In the depths of our troubles or in the hurley burley of life we forget who God is. The psalmist looked on God's greatness and in it was his hope. He didn't just see a little bottle of water or a little stream provided to quench his thirst. Here was the most powerful expression of water on earth – a waterfall. n He does things in style – deep water, powerful breakers.

Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

Why should we realise our thirst and drink and be satisfied? Because He is the only hope we have. He is

the only One that gives true meaning to life because in Him is our eternal future, our eternal sonship. Let's get a heavenly perspective. We are people who need a change of perspective. And let's not leave it until the last minute to appreciate the hope that is in Christ:

A nurse tells about the time she was attending to Rudyard Kipling. He was terribly sick. He tossed and turned on his bed. His nights were spent in restless agitation. Do you want anything? she asked him quietly one evening. And this is what he said. In a very weak voice, he said, I want God, I want God!

David Brainerd was a younger man and famous missionary to the American Indians before he was martyred. What was his desire? Let me read this to you:

"I withdrew to my usual place of retirement, in great tranquility. I knew only to breathe out my desire for perfect conformity to Him in all things. God was so precious that the world with all its enjoyments seemed infinitely vile. I had no more desire for favour of men than pebbles. "At noon I had the most ardent longings after God Which I ever felt in my life. In my secret retirement, I could do nothing but tell my dear Lord in a sweet calmness that He knew I desired nothing but Him, nothing but holiness, that He had given me these desires and He only could give the thing desired. "I never seemed to be so unhinged from myself, and to be so wholly devoted to God. My heart was swallowed up in God most of the day."

Here was a man with a thirst to be in God's presence. Never mind what about life. He was a man who desired the presence of God – and he found it. Sometimes we find ourselves a long way from that don't we? But if our desire is to grow, then it should be to grow into Him. To desire the presence of God, to desire to know Him as a friend, a Father, a Saviour. But there's more than that. We were reminded of a verse this morning that takes up the idea of deep water and waterfalls *John 7:37 (NIV) On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*

By that Jesus meant the Holy Spirit. When we are dry – the water is already within us – the Holy Spirit. The bottom line is we are thirsty and only the presence of God will assuage that thirst.

◆ The Presence of God

8 By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me-- a prayer to the God of my life. 9 I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" 10 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" 11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

Then the most remarkable thing - the psalmist realises that God is there all the time! That's the wonderful and remarkable thing. Even more so for Christians because we realise that Jesus has given us living water – the Holy Spirit.

And we are given this truth before the psalmist slips back into melancholy and he has to tick himself off again *Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*

What is the most important thing this church should have as we face the future? Is it to have a church that's noticed in town? Is it to have a busy evangelism program? Is it that we have an effective programme for reaching people's felt needs in Felixstowe? Is it for a financially healthy and well maintained church?

The most important thing is to be a people who hunger and thirst after God. A people who so desire God's presence that they are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to do it. People who desire to be like their God and fix His hope within them. That's my prayer for you and my own church and myself.

Because it's in our thirst for God's presence that we will find ourselves becoming more Christ-like, having His passions and desires. If we believe that God can do amazing things in Felixstowe, then it isn't going to be wrought through programmes, through being busy, through tampering with worship services,

learning new hymns or having more Bible studies; nor even having more prayer meetings. All these things have value in a healthy church.

What will really make the difference is people who are thirsty and hungry after God. People who not only can't wait to be in His presence but walk with Him daily - a people of passion for our God.

I can't make you thirsty for God this evening. I believe that hunger and thirst after God is wrought by the Holy Spirit through the grace of God. This is the message God has for us this evening and right now, for some of you, many of you or perhaps even all of you, the Holy Spirit is prompting your heart. You know you are walking in a desert, you know that you are thirsty. Let's come this evening and pray for that thirst for His presence.

Incidentally, when we are thirsty and come to the waters we always find that we have a God who satisfies thirst. Let's drink!

Father as we come before you this evening
We realise we are a thirsty people
We walk through a dry and barren land
And we realise that there are times
when we have underestimated our true thirst.
And we have suffered as a result from being deprived of your presence
Even though by Your Spirit
You are right with us.

Lord make us thirsty for you
By your Spirit
Make us people who yearn for your presence
Because you are the only source of hope
And you have already showered blessing on us as your people.

Fill us afresh with your Spirit this evening
Make us thirsty for your presence
Make us thirsty for your holiness in our lives
Make us thirsty for those people and those things you have a passion for.

As we receive from you
We pray for healing from those consequences of walking and not drinking
Whether it be physical problems,
psychological problems,
emotional problems
spiritual problems.

As you deal with our thirst this evening,
we ask your healing from these sufferings
That we may be freed from those things that stop us walking with you as we should.

Thank you Lord that you are the God who loves us
And you proved that in Jesus.

Make us people who long after your presence, and find in You
the water of life that quenches our thirst completely.

Amen