

Bucket Lists and Broken Cisterns

My wife and I just celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary. We took a cruise to Alaska and had an amazing time. Such grand beauty. Honestly, I don't know how you look at the beauty in the natural world and think it's all just a random coincidence – bang, beauty. Anyway, that's another discussion for another day. One thing I definitely wasn't ready for was the push to get us on another cruise – I mean we hadn't even pulled out of the port and they were already talking about signing up for future cruises. One sign posted in front of their sales office said, "You're going to need a bigger bucket list." Really? The implication there's more stuff to put on your "before you die" list that you knew. And it reminded me that this is how the world thinks – the good life is found in abundance. Abundance of things and experiences and pleasures and accomplishments. And what you see is people trying to squeeze every drop they can out of this temporary life, as if that will satisfy.

And I wonder this morning if you and I are buying the same lie. Are we chasing temporary things in hopes of finding a satisfaction that endures? Listen, if I asked you this morning "what are you living for?" most of you would probably say "Jesus." But are you? Over the last few years, as I've wrestled with disappointment and hardship, pain, loss...I've started asking myself this question: If none of this ever changes, if the people I love most never turn to Jesus, if the life I always thought I'd have never happens,...Is Jesus enough for me? Or I am more like the world than I want to admit? Clinging tightly to my selfish, worldly and very temporary dreams, just trying to squeeze every drop I can out of this temporary existence.

Jeremiah 2:13 My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

I don't know about you, but I really don't want my hope to be in bucket lists and broken cisterns. This morning, we're going to look at one of David's Psalm and see how he postured himself to seek and find satisfaction.

Let's look at it together

Psalm 63 A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.

¹ O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you;
My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you,
in a dry and parched land where there is no water.
² I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.
³ Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.
⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name, I will lift up my hands.
⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
⁶ On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.
⁷ Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.
⁸ My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.
⁹ They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth.
¹⁰ They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals.
¹¹ But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

On the surface this doesn't sound like David is experiencing difficulty. Honestly, until you get to those last few verses, it doesn't like the situation is all that bad. But the description of the Psalm tells us that David was in a tough spot. It says:
A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.

The background of the Psalm sounds like the script from a soap opera (???) or a raunchy talk show. Here's how it goes: David has son, Amnon, who falls in love (or we should probably say lust) with his stepsister, Tamar. His obsession only grows until he devises a plan to, shall we say, "take advantage of her." He fakes being sick, asks his dad (King David) to let her come make him some chicken soup. When she comes over, he sends all the servants out and makes his move. She protests, he rapes her. Then decides he hates her and sends her away. When her brother Absalom, finds out what has happened, he starts planning his revenge. 2 years later, he kills Amnon. Then he flees. King David grieves because in essence he's lost 2 sons. But he never holds Absalom accountable. A few years later, Absalom returns, but David just sweeps the past transgression under the rug. Again, no accountability. Meanwhile, Absalom – who is very good looking and winsome – sets out to build a following. Eventually, he mounts a coup and ousts his dad. So David flees and heads for the desert with Absalom in pursuit, plotting to kill him. In fact the end of this Psalm tells us that David is being lied about and threatened with death. I told you it was messed up! By the way, how's that for family drama?

Clearly, David is not in a place of abundance when he writes this Psalm. He is, both literally and figuratively, in a desert. It's clear that he is feeling the poverty of his circumstance. Maybe some of you can relate to that – you feel the weight of what's happening to you. Your situation may not be as dire as David's, but you're in a hard place. And you are struggling. I'm with you – there are some things that are really hard for me right now. So I want you to know that you are not alone.

But as I worked my way through this Psalm, I was struck by how little was said about David's situation. The prevailing focus of the Psalm is the character and sufficiency of God himself. And that is incredibly important, because it gives us insight into what we need to do when life is dark and hard. When you are in a desert, When life is hard, When you are disappointed and bewildered, **You worship your way to satisfaction.** That's what David did. V3. *My lips will glorify you.* V4 *I will praise you* v5 *with singing lips my mouth will praise you.* He didn't highlight his heartache, recount his trouble and bemoan his disappointment. He set his heart and mind on God. He worshipped his way into the abundance of God. Worship turns your heart toward God. Singing praise focuses your mind on the greatness of God. But I love that David doesn't just verbalize his worship. V5 *in your name I will lift up my hands.* David lifts his hands in praise and prayer, but don't miss this, his worship is tethered to the character of God. It's not fluffy emotional hype. It's a genuine, wholehearted response to what he knows about who God is. The name of God is the revelation of the character of God.

Do you remember what happened when Moses asked to see the glory of God? God came to Moses and proclaimed his name... *"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.* And what was Moses' response? He bowed to the ground and worshipped. In 3 different Psalms, 86, 103, and 145, David repeated what God had spoken to Moses. And he anchored his worship in what he knew about the character of God. He feasted on God when he was famished by life.

We're going to walk back through this Psalm (63) and I want to highlight 5 things David knew about God that fueled his worship and provoked him to seek God. First...

He knew God was the only God who could satisfy. 1-2

¹ O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. ² I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.

David had enjoyed great success and prosperity. He had been in the place of highest authority and great responsibility. He had experienced immense blessing and pleasure. But he did not set his heart on those things. David's longing was for God.

Earnestly I seek YOU, my soul thirsts for YOU, my body longs for YOU. In another season of trouble, David would say:

One thing I ask of the Lord, and 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 and seek him in his temple. Psalm 27:4

David had an unquenchable thirst, an insatiable appetite for God. He had tasted and seen that the Lord was good. And he wanted more of God. David had spent time with God, communing with Him, learning to know Him and delight in Him. And that experience of God fanned into flame his desire for more of God. . I want to be very clear here, finding God to both enjoy and serve him is a very different enterprise than using God to resolve our problems and to relieve our pain. One is pursuing God to know him and the other is just seeking to use him. More than he loved the idea of pleasant circumstances, he loved and longed for God.

For some of you, the problem is that you just don't know God that way, because you don't prioritize time spent with him. John Piper says: You can't savor what you don't see. You can't cherish and desire and love and enjoy and treasure what you're not aware of...we cannot be daily satisfied in the depths of our soul in Christ if we don't see him and savor him. (And) that can only happen by a steady meditation on the word of God in the Bible. You want to stir longing for God? Get to know Him by spending time with him in the word.

But I need to be honest today. Some of you aren't hungry for God, you don't run to him for satisfaction because you're still trying to satisfy ourselves with other things. You've got no appetite for God because you are feasting on so many other things. (ex. my boys snacking – ruining their dinner) For some of you, what you're chasing after is straight up SIN. And sin will kill your appetite for God. But for some of you, the thing you've set your heart on is not, in itself, a bad thing. Maybe it's marriage or children. Could be owning a home or maybe it's some opportunity or accomplishment. I don't know what it is, but it dominates your thoughts and the idea of losing it or never having it seems unbearable to you. And that thing has become an idol, you're looking for life in it rather than in God.

But here's the beautiful thing – God wants you to know him, to seek him, to find satisfaction and delight in him. So pray and ask him to open your eyes. Paul prayed for the Ephesians and asked God to give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation so they could know him better. (Eph 1:17)

Only God will satisfy you – nothing else lasts, no one and nothing endures. In seasons of lack, we need to remember that what we are really longing for is God Himself. Because more than we need what God can do, we need HIM.

Second...

He knew God was abounding in steadfast love v.3-4

³ Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.

Here's what David knew; **to be loved by God was better than the best things life had to offer.** In a season of great loss – he lost his palace and all the fine things he had enjoyed as king, he lost his power and security as king, he lost one son to death and another to betrayal, he lost so much, yet he didn't plead for those things to be restored – he declared that to be loved by God was better than all the things he had lost.

The very best that you can dream of in this life does not even compare to the sweetness of the love of God. Our problem is that we think a lot about the best this life has to offer and imagine how satisfying we think that would be... but spend little time contemplating the greatness of God's love for us.

Let me ask you this, do you struggle to believe that God loves you? Why? Is it because of your current circumstances, or something in the past? Listen to me, your circumstances are not the measure of God's love for you. I thought about this just recently, if that were the case – that God's love for us is measured by our circumstances – then Jesus could have

concluded as several different points in his life that God did not love him! His confidence in God's love for him was not wrecked because he was poor and didn't own a house, or because he never married and had kids. His assurance that he was a beloved son was not destroyed because he was lied about and falsely accused. Or because he was rejected by others, abandoned and betrayed by his friends. His trust in His Father's love was not destroyed because he was crucified. No, in spite of all he suffered, Jesus had an unshakeable confidence in God's love. And you know what? No matter what experience in life, we can have the same assurance.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

You should memorize and meditate on verses like this that declare God's great love for you. You need to arm yourself with truth of the Word to combat the lies of the enemy. Otherwise, all you have is your own thoughts feeling and opinions. Your circumstances are never the measure of God's love for you. His love for you and I should always be measured by what He did to rescue and redeem us from sin.

We've got to learn to know and believe and celebrate God's great, great love for us – so that in seasons of want we don't believe the lie that he is not a God of love. Third...

He knew God was good and did good to his children v.5-6

⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. ⁶ On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.

Let me remind you that when David penned those words his situation had not changed but he was expecting His good God to do good to him. Nothing about his current circumstance had improved. And yet he is anticipating satisfaction. What's he saying? By faith, I'm going to imagine myself being fully satisfied with Jesus. He is anticipating satisfaction; he is dreaming about the feast. And when he lies awake at night, he is recalling and recounting the goodness and glory of God, not contemplating his trouble. He's feeding faith and hope not nursing anxiety and fear. Negative rumination will kill your faith. You've got to stop imagining a future that is void of the presence and activity of God. Listen to me, in Christ, your future is secure. God has made us too many promises for us to believe the enemies lies.

He won't leave you or forsake you. He will finish the good work He started in you. He is working all things together for your good. He will come again and take you to be with Him in His presence where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore.

Fourth...

He knew God was always faithful v.7-8

⁷ Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.

⁸ My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

I love this – David sang about the help of God in the past, and he clung tightly to the hand that has been holding onto him.

He may have been lacking and wanting and hurting, but he did not despair because he remembered the faithfulness of God. Yall, an essential part of our worship is recalling the

faithfulness of God. We need to repeat it for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters around us. The people around you this morning and in your small group need to hear you talk regularly and in detail about God's faithfulness to you. Hebrews 3:12 *See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God*. How are we supposed to do that? By encouraging each other to remember and trust the faithfulness of God.

Finally...

He knew God was absolutely sovereign v.9-11

⁹ They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth.

¹⁰ They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals.

¹¹ But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

David was confident that God's purposes and plans would not fail. Listen to what he's saying – God will not be defeated. Those who are trying to destroy me will themselves be destroyed. The praise of God will not cease but the liars will be silenced. Honestly y'all, I don't know if David was thinking short term or long term. I don't know if he thought this would be fulfilled in his lifetime or in eternity.

Psalm 33:10-11, 16-19

¹⁰ The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.

¹¹ But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

David trusted the sovereign purposes of God even when he didn't know just how it was all going to work out. And you and I have to learn to do the same. We have to choose to trust when we can't see, don't understand. That's the instruction of Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him (know Him) and He will make your paths straight." The most important thing we can do in any circumstance is look for God, know Him, set our minds and hearts on Him. Because who He is never changes and His plans will not fail.

So what's God saying to you this morning? What is He calling you to believe and set your hope on today?

Some of you are in a sweet season, things are going well. You're happy and fairly content. But maybe you realize this morning that you've started to look to something other than God for satisfaction and security. Whatever it is, it won't last, it won't ever be enough, it cannot bear the weight of your soul. Would you confess that today and repent and set your hope on Jesus?

Others of you are in a hard season...There's physical pain, loss, sickness, relational difficulties, financial hardship, some unrealized dream, emotional distress...I don't know what it is. But you're so tired of trying to find a way out; anxiety and fear have set in; anger and bitterness are knocking on your door. But you know that the Father is drawing you, calling you to trust Him. Ask Him to help you to lift up your eyes and see him, know him, trust Him. Cast all your anxiety on Him because he really does care for you.

One Pure and Holy Passion. Mark Altrogge

*Give me one pure and holy passion
Give me one magnificent obsession
Give me one glorious ambition for my life
To know and follow hard after You*

*To know and follow hard after You
To grow as Your disciple in Your truth
This world is empty, pale and poor
Compared to knowing You my Lord
Lead me on and I will run after You*