

Exposition on Psalm 63

by St. Augustine

St. Augustine's exposition on Psalm 63 emphasizes the necessity of thirsting for God amidst the spiritual desolation of the world.

Scripture: Psalm 62:1-9, Matthew 5:6, Luke 20:36, John 14:6, John 19:15, Ephesians 5:14, 1 Timothy 2:8

Topics: "Spiritual Longing", "Godly Devotion"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the thirst of the soul and flesh for God in the desert of life, emphasizing the importance of longing for God's wisdom and righteousness. He highlights the promise of resurrection for both soul and flesh, urging believers to seek God's provision and protection in all aspects of life. St. Augustine encourages the congregation to lift up their hands in prayer and good works, to be mindful of God in rest and action, and to cleave to God with love. He warns against seeking earthly desires over God, as it leads to spiritual death and defeat by enemies, emphasizing the need to rejoice in the true King, Jesus Christ.

Transcript

1. This psalm has the title, For David himself, when he was in the desert of Idumæa. By the name of Idumæa is understood this world. For Idumæa was a certain nation of men going astray, where idols were worshipped. In no good sense is put this Idumæa. If not in a good sense it is put, it must be understood that this life, wherein we suffer so great toils, and wherein to so great necessities we are made subject, by the name of Idumæa is signified. Even here is a desert where there is much thirst, and you are to hear the voice of One now thirsting in the desert. But if we acknowledge ourselves as thirsting, we shall acknowledge ourselves as drinking also. For he that thirsts in this world, in the world to come shall be satisfied, according to the Lord's saying, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for the same shall be satisfied. Matthew 5:6 Therefore in this world we ought not to love fullness. Here we must thirst, in another place we shall be filled. But now in order that we may not faint in this desert, He sprinkles upon us the dew of His word, and leaves us not utterly to dry up, so that there should not be in our case any seeking of us again, but that we may so thirst as that we may drink. But in order that we may drink, with somewhat of His Grace we are sprinkled: nevertheless we thirst. And what says our soul to God?

2. God, my God, unto You from the light I watch Psalm 62:1. What is to watch? It is, not to sleep. What is to sleep? There is a sleep of the soul; there is a sleep of the body. Sleep of body we all ought to have:

because if sleep of body is not taken, a man faints, the body itself faints. For our frail body cannot long sustain a soul watching and on the stretch on active works; if for a long time the soul shall have been intent on active pursuits, the body being frail and earthly holds her not, sustains her not for ever in activity, and faints and falls. Therefore God has granted sleep to the body, whereby are recruited the members of the body, in order that they may be able to sustain the soul watching. But of this let us take heed, namely, that our soul herself sleep not: for evil is the sleep of the soul. Good is the sleep of the body, whereby is recruited the health of the body. But the sleep of the soul is to forget her God. Whatsoever soul shall have forgotten her God, sleeps. Therefore the Apostle says to certain persons that forgot their God, and being as it were in sleep, did act the follies of the worship of idols-- the Apostle, I say, says to certain persons, Rise, you that sleepest, and rise up from the dead, and Christ shall enlighten you. Ephesians 5:14 Was the Apostle waking up one sleeping in body? Nay, but he was waking a soul sleeping, inasmuch as he was waking her, in order that she might be lightened by Christ. Therefore as to these same watchings says this man, God, my God, unto You from the light I watch. For you would not watch of yourself, unless there should arise your Light, to wake you from sleep. For Christ lightens souls, and makes them to watch: but if His light He takes away, they slumber. For for this cause to Him there is said in another psalm, Lighten my eyes, that I may never slumber in death.. ..

3. My soul has thirsted for You Psalm 62:2. Behold that desert of Idumæa. See how here he thirsts: but see what good thing is here, Hath thirsted for You. For there are they that thirst, but not for God. For every one that wills anything to be granted to him, is in the heat of longing; the longing itself is the thirst of the soul. And see ye what longings there are in the hearts of men: one longs for gold, another longs for silver, another longs for possessions, another inheritance, another abundance of money, another many herds, another a wife, another honours, another sons. You see those longings, how they are in the hearts of men. All men are inflamed with longing, and scarce is found one to say, My soul has thirsted for You. For men thirst for the world: and perceive not themselves to be in the desert of Idumæa, where their souls ought to thirst for God....

4. Wisdom therefore must be thirsted after, righteousness must be thirsted after. With it we shall not be satisfied, with it we shall not be filled, save when this life shall have been ended, and we shall have come to that which God has promised. For God has promised equality with Angels: Luke 20:36 and now the Angels thirst not as we do, they hunger not as we do; but they have the fullness of truth, of light, of immortal wisdom. Therefore blessed they are, and out of so great blessedness, because they are in that City, the Heavenly Jerusalem, afar from whence we now are sojourning in a strange land, they observe us sojourners, and they pity us, and by the command of the Lord they help us, in order that to this common country sometime we may return, and there with them sometime with the Lord's fountain of truth and eternity we may be filled. Now therefore let our soul thirst: whence does our flesh also thirst, and this in many ways? In many ways for You, he says, my flesh also. Because to our flesh also is promised Resurrection. As to our soul is promised blessedness, so also to our flesh is promised resurrection....For if God has made us that were not, is it a great thing for Him to make again us that were? Therefore let not this seem to you to be incredible, because ye see dead men as it were decaying, and passing into ashes and into dust. Or if any dead man be burned, or if dogs tear him in pieces, do ye think that from this he will not rise again? All things which are dismembered, and into a sort of dust do decay, are entire with God. For into those elements of the world they pass, whence at first they have come, when we were made: we do not see them; but yet God will bring them forth, He knows whence, because even before we were, He created us from whence He knew. Such a resurrection of the flesh therefore to us is promised, as that, although it be the same flesh that now we carry which is to rise again, yet it has not the corruption which

now it has. For now because of the corruption of frailty, if we eat not, we faint and are hungry; if we drink not, we faint and are thirsty; if long time we watch, we faint and sleep; if long time we sleep, we faint, therefore we watch....Secondly, see how without any standing is our flesh: for infancy passes away into boyhood, and you seek infancy, and infancy is not, for now instead of infancy is boyhood: again this same also passes into youth, you seek boyhood and findest not: the young man becomes a middle-aged man, you seek the young man and he is not: the middle-aged man becomes an old man, you seek a middle-aged man and findest not: and an old man dies, you seek an old man and findest not: our age therefore stands not still: everywhere is weariness, everywhere faintness, everywhere corruption. Observing what a hope of resurrection God promises to us, in all those our manifold faintings we thirst for that incorruption: and so our flesh manifoldly does thirst for God.

5. Nevertheless, my brethren, the flesh of a good Christian and a believer even in this world for God does thirst: for if the flesh has need of bread, if it has need of water, if it has need of wine, if it has need of money, if this flesh has need of a beast, from God it ought to seek it, not from demons and idols and I know not what powers of this world. For there are certain who when they suffer hunger in this world, leave God and ask Mercury or ask Jove to give unto them, or her whom they call Heavenly, or any the like demons: not for God their flesh thirsts. But they that thirst for God, everywhere ought to thirst for Him, both soul and flesh: for to the soul also God gives His bread, that is the Word of Truth: and to the flesh God gives the things which are necessary, for God has made both soul and flesh. For the sake of your flesh you ask of demons: has God made the soul, and the demons made the flesh? He that has made the soul, the Same has made the flesh also: He that has made both of them, the Same feeds both of them. Let either part of us thirst for God, and after labour manifold let either simply be filled.

6. But where thirsts our soul, and our flesh manifoldly, not for any one but for You, O Lord, that is our God? It thirsts where? In a land desert, and without way, and without water. Of this world we have spoken, the same is Idumæa, this is the desert of Idumæa, whence the Psalm has received its title. In a land desert. Too little it is to say desert, where no man dwells; it is besides, both without way, and without water. O that the same desert had even a way: O that into this a man running, even knew where he might thence get forth!...Evil is the desert, horrible, and to be feared: and nevertheless God has pitied us, and has made for us a way in the desert, Himself our Lord Jesus Christ: John 14:6 and has made for us a consolation in the desert, in sending to us preachers of His Word: and has given to us water in the desert, by fulfilling with the Holy Spirit His preachers, in order that there might be created in them a well of water springing up unto life everlasting. John 4:14 And, lo! We have here all things, but they are not of the desert....

7. Thus in a holy thing I have appeared to You, that I might see Your power and Your glory Psalm 62:3....Unless a man first thirst in that desert, that is in the evil wherein he is, he never arrives at the good, which is God. But I have appeared to You, he says, in a holy thing. Now in a holy thing is there great consolation. I have appeared to You, is what? In order that You might see me: and for this reason You have seen me, in order that I might see You. I have appeared to You, that I might see. He has not said, I have appeared to You, that You might see: but, I have appeared to You, that I might see Your power and Your glory. Whence also the Apostle, But now, he says, knowing God, nay, having been known of God. Galatians 4:9 For first you have appeared to God, in order that to you God might be able to appear. That I might see Your power and Your glory. In truth in that forsaken place, that is, in that desert, if as though from the desert a man strives to obtain enough for his sustenance, he will never see the power of the Lord, and the glory of the Lord, but he will remain to die of thirst, and will find neither way, nor consolation, nor

water, whereby he may endure in the desert. But when he shall have lifted up himself to God, so as to say to Him out of all his inward parts, My soul has thirsted for You; how manifoldly for You also my flesh! lest perchance even the things necessary for the flesh of others he ask, and not of God, or else long not for that resurrection of the flesh, which God has promised to us: when, I say, he shall have lifted up himself, he will have no small consolations.

8. ...But you have heard but now when the Gospel was being read in what terms He has notified His Majesty: I and My Father are One. John 10:30 Behold how great a Majesty and how great an Equality with the Father has come down to the flesh because of our infirmity. Behold how greatly beloved we have been, before that we loved God. If before that we loved God, so much by Him we were beloved, as that His Son, Equal with Himself, He made a Man for our sake, what does He reserve for us now loving Him? Therefore many men think it to be a very small thing that the Son of God has appeared on earth; because they are not in the Holy One, to them has not appeared the power of the Same and the glory of the Same: that is, not yet have they a heart made holy, whence they may perceive the eminence of that virtue, and may render thanks to God, nor that to which for their own sakes so great an One came, unto what a nativity, unto what a Passion, they are not able to see, His glory and His power.

9. For better is Your mercy than lives. Many are the lives of men, but one life God promises: and He gives not this to us as if for our merits but for His mercy....For what is so just a thing as that a sinner should be punished? Though a just thing it be that a sinner should be punished, it has belonged to the mercy of Him not to punish a sinner but to justify him, and of a sinner to make a just man, and of an ungodly man to make a godly man. Therefore His mercy is better than lives. What lives? Those which for themselves men have chosen. One has chosen for himself a life of business, another a country life, another a life of usury, another a military life; one this, another that. Divers are the lives, but better is Your life than our lives....My lips shall praise You. My lips would not praise You, unless before me were to go Your mercy. By Your gift You I praise, through Your mercy You I praise. For I should not be able to praise God, unless He gave me to be able to praise Him.

10. So I will speak good of You in my life, and in Your name I will lift up my hands Psalm 62:5. Now in my life which to me You have given, not in that which I have chosen after the world with the rest among many lives, but that which You have given to me through Your mercy, that I should praise You. So I will speak good of You in my life. What is so? That to Your mercy I may ascribe my life wherein You I praise, not to my merits. And in Your name I will lift up my hands. Lift up therefore hands in prayer. Our Lord has lifted up for us His hands on the Cross, and stretched out were His hands for us, and therefore were His hands stretched out on the Cross, in order that our hands might be stretched out unto good works: because His Cross has brought us mercy. Behold, He has lifted up hands, and has offered for us Himself a Sacrifice to God, and through that Sacrifice have been effaced all our sins. Let us also lift up our hands to God in prayer: and our hands being lifted up to God shall not be confounded, if they be exercised in good works. For what does he that lifts up hands? Whence has it been commanded that with hands lifted up we should pray to God? For the Apostle says, Lifting up pure hands without anger and dissension. 1 Timothy 2:8 It is in order that when you lift up hands to God, there may come into your mind your works. For whereas those hands are lifted up that you may obtain that which you will, those same hands you think in good works to exercise, that they may not blush to be lifted up to God. In your name I will lift up my hands. Those are our prayers in this Idumæa, in this desert, in the land without water and without way, where for us Christ is the Way, John 14:6 but not the way of this earth.

11. ...Already our fathers are dead, but God lives: here we could not always have fathers, but there we shall always have one living Father, when we have our father-land....What sort of country is that? But you love here riches. God Himself shall be to you your riches. But you love a good fountain. What is more passing clear than that wisdom? What more bright? Whatsoever is an object of love here, in place of all you shall have Him that has made all things, as though with marrow and fatness my soul should be filled: and lips of exultation shall praise Your name. In this desert, in Your name I will lift up my hands: let my soul be filled as though with marrow and fatness, and my lips with exultation shall praise Your name. For now is prayer, so long as there is thirst: when thirst shall have passed away, there passes away praying and there succeeds praising. And lips of exultation shall praise Your name.

12. If I have remembered You upon my bed, in the dawns I did meditate on you Psalm 62:7: because You have become my helper Psalm 62:8. His bed he calls his rest. When any one is at rest, let him be mindful of God; when any one is at rest, let him not by rest be dissolved, and forget God: if mindful he is of God when he is at rest, in his actions on God he does meditate. For the dawn he has called actions, because every man at dawn begins to do something. What therefore has he said?

If therefore I was not mindful on my bed, in the dawn also I did not meditate on You. Can he that thinks not of God when he is at leisure, in his actions think of God? But he that is mindful of Him when he is at rest, on the Same does meditate when he is doing, lest in action he should come short. Therefore he has added what? Because You have become my helper. For unless God aid our good works, they cannot be accomplished by us. And worthy things we ought to work: that is, as though in the light, since by Christ showing the way we work.

Whosoever works evil things, in the night he works, not in the dawn; according to the Apostle, saying, They that are drunken, in the night are drunken; and they that sleep, in the night do sleep; let us that are of the day, be sober. 1 Thessalonians 5:7-8 He exhorts us that after the day we should walk honestly: As in the day, honestly let us walk. Romans 13:13 And again, You, he says, are sons of light, and sons of day; we are not of night nor of darkness. 1 Thessalonians 5:5 Who are sons of night, and sons of darkness?

They that work all evil things. To such a degree they are sons of night, that they fear lest the things which they work should be seen....No one therefore in the dawn works, except him that in Christ works. But he that while at leisure is mindful of Christ, on the Same does meditate in all his actions, and He is a helper to him in a good work, lest through his weakness he fail. And in the covering of Your wings I will exult. I am cheerful in good works, because over me is the covering of Your wings.

If you protect me not, forasmuch as I am a chicken, the kite will seize me. For our Lord Himself says in a certain place to that Jerusalem, a certain city, where He was crucified: Jerusalem, He says, Jerusalem, how often I have willed to gather your sons, as though a hen her chickens, and you would not. Matthew 23:37 Little ones we are: therefore may God protect us under the shadow of His wings. What when we shall have grown greater? A good thing it is for us that even then He should protect us, so that under Him the greater, always we be chickens.

For always He is greater, however much we may have grown. Let no one say, let Him protect me while I am a little one: as if sometime he would attain to such magnitude, as should be self-sufficient. Without the protection of God, nought you are. Alway by Him let us desire to be protected: then always in Him we shall have power to be great, if always under Him little we be. And in the covering of Your wings I will exult.

13. My soul has been glued on behind You Psalm 62:9. See ye one longing, see ye one thirsting, see ye how he cleaves to God. Let there spring up in you this affection. If already it is sprouting, let it be rained upon and grow: let it come to such strength, that you also may say from the whole heart, My soul has been glued on behind You. Where is that same glue? The glue itself is love. Have thou love, wherewith as with glue your soul may be glued on behind God. Not with God, but behind God; that He may go before, you may follow. For he that shall have willed to go before God, by his own counsel would live, and will not follow the commandments of God. Because of this even Peter was rebuked, when he willed to give counsel to Christ, who was going to suffer for us....Far be it from You, O Lord, be merciful to Yourself. And the Lord, Go back behind Me, Satan: for you savour not the things which are of God, but the things which are of men. Matthew 16:22-23 Wherefore, the things which are of men? Because to go before Me you desire, go back behind Me, in order that you may follow me: so that now following Christ he might say, My soul has been glued on behind You. With reason he adds, Me Your right hand has taken up. This Christ has said in us: that is in the Man which He was bearing for us, which He was offering for us, He has said this. The Church also said this in Christ, she says it in her Head: for she too has suffered here great persecutions, and by her individual members even now she suffers....

14. But themselves in vain have sought my soul. They shall go unto the lower places of the earth Psalm 62:9. Earth they were unwilling to lose, when they crucified Christ: into the lower places of the earth they have gone. What are the lower places of the earth? Earthly lusts. Better it is to walk upon earth, than by lust to go under earth. For every one that in prejudice of his salvation desires earthly things, is under the earth: because earth he has put before him, earth upon himself he has put, and himself beneath he has laid. They therefore fearing to lose earth, said what of the Lord Jesus Christ, when they saw great multitudes go after Him, forasmuch as He was doing wonderful things? If we shall have let Him go alive, there will come the Romans, and will take away from us both place and nation. John 11:48 They feared to lose earth, and they went under the earth: there befell them even what they feared. For they willed to kill Christ, that they might not lose earth; and earth they therefore lost, because Christ they slew. For when Christ had been slain, because the Lord Himself had said to them, The kingdom shall be taken from you, and shall be given up to a nation doing righteousness: Matthew 21:43 there followed them great calamities of persecutions: there conquered them Roman emperors, and kings of the nations: they were shut out from that very place where they crucified Christ, and now that place is full of Christian praisers: it has no Jew, it has been cleared of the enemies of Christ, it has been fulfilled with the praisers of Christ. Behold, they have lost at the hands of the Romans the place, because Christ they slew, who to this end slew, that they might not lose the place at the hands of the Romans. Therefore, They shall enter into the lower places of the earth.

15. They shall be delivered unto the hands of the sword Psalm 62:10. In truth, thus it has visibly befallen them, they have been taken by storm by enemies breaking in. Portions of foxes they shall be. Foxes he calls the kings of the world, that then were when Judæa was conquered. Hear in order that you may know and perceive, that those he calls foxes. Herod the king the Lord Himself has called a fox. Go, He says, and tell that fox. Luke 13:32 See and observe, my brethren: Christ as King they would not have, and portions of foxes they have been made. For when Pilate the deputy governor in Judæa slew Christ at the voices of the Jews, he said to the same Jews, Your King shall I crucify? John 19:15 Because He was called King of the Jews, and He was the true King. And they rejecting Christ said, We have no king but Cæsar. They rejected a Lamb, chose a fox: deservedly portions of foxes they were made.

16. The King in truth, is so written, because they chose a fox, a King in truth they would not have. The King in truth: that is, the true King, to whom the title was inscribed, when He suffered. For Pilate set this title inscribed over His Head, The King of the Jews, in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin tongues: in order that all they that should pass by might read of the glory of the King, and the infamy of the Jews themselves, who, rejecting the true King, chose the fox Cæsar. The King in truth shall rejoice in God. They have been made portions of foxes....Stopped up is the mouth of men speaking unjust things. No one dares now openly to speak against Christ, now all men fear Christ. For stopped up is the mouth of men speaking unjust things. When in weakness the Lamb was, even foxes were bold against the Lamb. There conquered the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Revelation 5:5 and the foxes were silenced.

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