

Thirsting for God

“If you don’t find life before death, you can’t find life after death”¹

Every human being lives with a thirst. Some thirst for family approval... others for health, success, money, sports, exercise, music, or a thousand other pursuits. We chase what promises satisfaction, and we drink deeply from the wells of this world hoping they will quiet the ache inside. If you ask a Christian what they thirst for, many will give the expected answer: “Oh, I long for God. I walk with Him beside still waters.” But that is often our polite answer—not our honest condition. Look across the landscape of the modern church. It is filled with activity—services attended, hands raised, ministries served, prayers spoken. Some even prophesy in Jesus’ name, cast out demons, or participate in great works. And yet Jesus warns us soberly that not everyone who calls Him Lord truly belongs to Him (Matthew 7:21–22).

There is a kind of religion that is busy but not born again... active but not alive. The head is quick to claim, “I love God with all my heart.”

But the heart often whispers a different truth.

To be called carnal or lukewarm—or even half-hearted—feels offensive to many churchgoer. Yet the question remains: Do our lives match the Gospel we claim to cherish? Have we truly found the Treasure in the field... the Pearl of great price... the Savior worth losing everything else for?

Let me ask you gently but honestly:

- ❖ Is approaching the throne of grace your deepest delight?
- ❖ Is walking beside the still waters—hearing His voice, obeying His leading—your highest priority?
- ❖ Do you want Christ more than you want comfort, entertainment, approval, or even the closest earthly relationships?²
- ❖ When planning your day, your month, your year—do you truly submit your desires to the One whose ways are higher than your ways and whose thoughts are higher than your thoughts? (Isaiah 55:8–9)

Or has God become...

- ❖ a convenient addition?
- ❖ A helpful accessory?

¹ Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, [*Exalting Jesus in John*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 180.

² David Platt, Matt Mason, and Jim Shaddix, [*Exalting Jesus in Psalms 51-100*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2020), 117.

- ❖ A quiet voice drowned out by louder passions—your career, your hobbies, your pleasures, your other “gods”?

Because every person thirsts for something. The question before us is not, ‘Do I thirst?’ but rather, ‘What well am I drinking from?’”

Today’s message is an invitation to take an honest look at your walk with Jesus. As we open the Scriptures together, let the Spirit search your heart. Ask yourself: Am I truly saved? And if I am, what is slowing down my hunger for God? Consider your daily schedule and the things you chase after. Have the passions of this world begun to drown out your love for Christ? Are there areas where you still want to be “the boss” of your life—holding on to control instead of surrendering in obedience to the One who can always be found by those who seek Him? Bring before the Lord the pain of unanswered prayers, the weight of hardship, and the weariness of waiting. Trust Him with what you cannot understand. And above all, reflect honestly on whether God receives the first and best of your time and devotion—or only whatever is left over after the world has taken its share.

The Soul’s Deep Longing

Some of the most encouraging words in all of Scripture were forged in seasons of deep sorrow. After David’s grievous sins with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, the prophet Nathan declared God’s judgment: “The sword shall never depart from your house... I will raise up disaster against you from your own household... and your neighbor shall lie with your wives in broad daylight.” (2 Samuel 12:10–12). In time, these words came to pass through David’s own son Absalom.

- ❖ Absalom murdered his brother Amnon.
- ❖ He stole the hearts of the nation.
- ❖ He seized the throne.
- ❖ He forced David to flee Jerusalem in shame and anguish.

David climbed the Mount of Olives weeping (2 Samuel 15:30), crossed the Jordan, and took refuge in the wilderness regions of Gilead (Psalm 42:6; 2 Samuel 17:24). Psalm 42—written by the Sons of Korah—beautifully captures the anguish and longing of that season. They give voice to the inner cry of a king cut off from the presence of God. And what was David’s deepest yearning in that wilderness?

Not the royal palace in Jerusalem...

not the sweet water of Bethlehem’s well...

not the beauty of Sharon nor the strength of Lebanon...

David longed for God Himself.³

He longed to stand once more in the sanctuary and behold the Lord's glory (Psalm 63:2).

So Psalm 42 opens with one of the most powerful images in all of Hebrew poetry:

“As the deer pants for streams of water,

so my soul pants for You, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God?”

(Psalm 42:1–2)

The picture is vivid—like a hunted deer, exhausted and panting, as life drains away in the heat of drought⁴ ...so David's soul gasped for the presence of God.

He was far from the tabernacle.

Far from the songs of Zion.

Far from the courts of the Lord that had been his joy.

But God is the fountain of living waters (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13), and outside His presence, even a king feels spiritually dry.⁵

Beloved, our souls are no different. We will never be satisfied with broken cisterns—the empty wells of the world that promise joy but cannot hold water (Jeremiah 2:13). These cisterns offer temporary pleasure but rob us of intimacy with the God who knit us together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13–16). If we are to “live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27), then mere knowledge of God will not do. We must thirst for Him. We must desire that He shed abroad His love in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Charles Spurgeon expressed this holy longing with remarkable insight:

“To bow the knees before him is easy;

but to draw near to the throne,

³ C. H. Spurgeon, [“The Panting Heart,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 410.

⁴ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Psalms](#), vol. 1, *The Pulpit Commentary* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 330.

⁵ Willem A. VanGemeren, [“Psalms,”](#) in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 331.

to have our hearts enlarged in prayer,
to wrestle with God and obtain answers—
this is difficult.

It is our duty... and our privilege...
but few reach these heights,
and fewer remain there long.”⁶

If we are to experience true renewal — “the transforming of our minds” (Romans 12:1–2) — then we must thirst for God more than for anyone or anything else. Only His presence can satisfy the deepest cry of the human soul.

And if Psalm 42 reveals the imagery of David’s longing, Psalm 63:1 reveals the intensity of it, as David tells us in his own words what the wilderness did to his soul. Listen as the exiled king pours out his heart before God:

**“You, God, are my God;
earnestly I seek You;
I thirst for You,
my whole being longs for You,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.”**

(Psalm 63:1)

Anyone who has crossed a desert knows how precious water becomes—how every sense becomes trained to search for the faintest evidence of moisture.⁷ So, it was with David. In the barren wilderness, he did not cry out for comfort, protection, or even restoration to the throne. He cried out for communion.

As he looked across the dry and weary land of Gilead, he found nothing his heart desired more than the presence of his Lord, Savior, and King. His relationship with God was so supreme, so life-defining, that every other affection paled in comparison—just as Jesus later said that love

⁶ Charles Simeon, [Horae Homileticae: Psalms, I–LXXII](#), vol. 5 (London: Samuel Holdsworth, 1836), 329.

⁷ Gerald H. Wilson, [Psalms](#), vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 890.

for Him makes all other loves “look like hate”⁸ in contrast (Luke 14:26). David’s longing was not weakness; it was the mark of authentic, Spirit-born faith—a soul that knows its only source of life is God Himself. And his cry provokes a searching question for every believer:

Do you value your relationship with God above every earthly relationship?

Are you truly thirsting for the only One who can satisfy the deepest desires of your soul?

God’s Call to Come

But David’s thirst reminds us of a deeper truth: no soul will ever be satisfied until it first comes to God on His terms. And that is exactly what God invites us to do in Isaiah 55:

**“Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.”**

(Isaiah 55:1)

These words were spoken to Israel during their long exile in Babylon. Seventy years had passed, and many had settled comfortably into life in a foreign land. They built homes, raised families, cultivated businesses, and developed roots. Yet despite their outward stability, their hearts were empty.

Isaiah exposes this spiritual complacency with tender boldness: though Israel had become accustomed to Babylon, the quiet pools of worldly comfort could never satisfy the deep thirst of the soul. The human heart may chase a thousand lesser joys, but it remains restless until it rests in its Creator. As one writer put it, “Worldly things can never satisfy the heart—not even the heart of the worldly.”⁹ So God does not call them “poor” because they lacked resources, homes, or livelihoods. No—He calls them poor because they had squandered the greatest treasure they

⁸ David Platt, Matt Mason, and Jim Shaddix, [Exalting Jesus in Psalms 51-100](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2020), 117.

⁹ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Isaiah](#), vol. 2, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1910), 329.

possessed: their relationship with Him.¹⁰ They had money, but no satisfaction... activity, but no peace... blessings, but no blessing.

And so the Lord cries out through Isaiah:

“Come.”

Return.

Seek Me.

Drink deeply of the only water that will satisfy.

The invitation in Isaiah 55 was a shadow; the fulfillment came when the Son of David Himself stood in the temple and cried out with a greater call. Listen to how John describes Christ’s invitation to the thirsty.

**“On the last and greatest day of the festival,
Jesus stood and said in a loud voice,
“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.
38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said,
rivers of living water will flow from within them.”**

**By this He meant the Spirit,
whom those who believed in him were later to receive.**

**Up to that time the Spirit had not been given,
since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”**

(John 7:37-39)

Jesus spoke these words during the Festival of Tabernacles, a celebration that recalled Israel’s wilderness wandering — days when the nation faced dehydration, desperation, and death.¹¹ Into that setting of historical thirst, the true and greater Source of living water raised His voice.

Jews and Gentiles from across the land¹² heard Christ’s cry, and His invitation still confronts us today. For we too are wandering through a wilderness—not of sand and heat, but of sin and spiritual dryness. Scripture tells us plainly: “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23), and the

¹⁰ Andrew M. Davis, [Exalting Jesus in Isaiah](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 332.

¹¹ Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, [Exalting Jesus in John](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 179.

¹² James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of John: An Expositional Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 584.

wages of that sin is death (Romans 6:23). We are dying of thirst in a desert of our own making,¹³ trying to fill our souls with the “waters” of pleasure, entertainment, ambition, and self—but they satisfy nothing. Jesus alone offers what the heart truly longs for:

eternal life, satisfaction, and the indwelling Holy Spirit—“rivers of living water” flowing from within all who believe (John 7:38).

But this invitation is not casual; it is urgent. As one preacher said,

“If you do not find life before death, you will not find life after death.”

So, hear the Savior’s call:

Seek Christ while He may be found.

Come to Him with empty hands and believing hearts.

Surrender your life to Him—

and you will never thirst again.

Satisfied and Overflowing

Yet even after hearing Christ’s invitation, our hearts still drift toward the very things that cannot satisfy—the broken cisterns Jeremiah warned us about (Jeremiah 2:13). God Himself is the One who gives us life and breath and everything else, and He has placed eternity in our hearts so that we might seek Him (Acts 17:24–28; Ecclesiastes 3:11). But sin blinds us to this. Sin is not merely lying, cheating, stealing, adultery, or the outward acts we often list. At its core, sin is the attempt to find fulfillment apart from God.¹⁴ It is the refusal to let Him be our satisfaction and the determination to build a meaningful life on our own terms.

And when good things—fame, money, health, success, or even beautiful family relationships—are pursued at the exclusion of God, they cease to be blessings and become idols, because we place them on the altar of our hearts where God alone should reign.¹⁵ Yes, earthly pursuits can offer moments of enjoyment, but they are fleeting. As C. S. Lewis wisely observed, they create “an ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure.”¹⁶ They promise joy but deliver emptiness... they thrill for a moment but cannot sustain the soul. Only Christ can.

¹³ James Montgomery Boice, [*The Gospel of John: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 585.

¹⁴ Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, [*Exalting Jesus in John*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 93.

¹⁵ Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, [*Exalting Jesus in John*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 93.

¹⁶ Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, [*Exalting Jesus in John*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 94.

While Psalm 106 recounts Israel’s unfaithfulness during their years of exile in Babylon, Psalm 107 celebrates God’s deliverance and mercy. Even in the wilderness of captivity, they were not abandoned to purposeless wandering, for the psalmist declares that the Lord is the One who “satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things” (Psalm 107:9).

Centuries later, in Luke’s Gospel, Christ stood in the synagogue of Nazareth and read the very prophecy that promised this satisfaction—the Messianic passage from Isaiah 61:

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me,
because He has anointed Me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

(Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1-2)

Jesus was declaring that He is the One who brings release, renewal, restoration, and spiritual fullness. And if those who chase satisfaction in the broken wells of this world would pause long enough to examine their own hearts, then—as with the woman at the well—they might come to recognize the precious “gift of God” (John 4:10). Those who repent and believe will receive from Christ “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). The God who created us alone knows how to satisfy us—not with what we think we desire, but with what our souls truly need: a life-giving relationship with Him.

Broken Cisterns

Every invitation from God comes with a warning, and Jeremiah 2:13 exposes the tragedy that unfolds when we search for life anywhere but in Him. As Jeremiah confronted Judah before their exile, he used several vivid metaphors to describe their spiritual condition—but none more striking than this:

**“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.”**

(Jeremiah 2:13)

It is alarmingly easy to forget how deeply God loves us and all that Christ endured to set us free from sin and death.¹⁷ When that memory fades, our hearts begin to drift. Like ancient Judah, we start searching for satisfaction in things that cannot satisfy—careers, relationships, comfort, entertainment, or the approval of others. These broken wells may offer a moment of pleasure, but the eternity God has placed in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11) cannot be filled with substitutes.

If you find yourself like Israel—or like the church in Ephesus that “left its first love” (Revelation 2:4)—then hear the prophet’s plea: repent, return, and draw near. Come back to the only Source who can quench the thirsty soul. Come to the fountain of living waters and be satisfied.

Conclusion

Every heart in this room is thirsty. We thirst because God made us for Himself, and no broken cistern, no earthly well, no human achievement will ever quench the thirst of an eternal soul. David cried out in the wilderness. Isaiah invited the thirsty to come. Jesus stood in the temple and offered living water to all who believe.

The question now is simple:

Which well are you drinking from?

If your soul has been wandering... if sin, distraction, or disappointment has left you dry... if you have been sipping from the world’s broken wells—then hear the call of your Savior:

“Come to Me and drink.” (John 7:37)

¹⁷ Steven Smith, [*Exalting Jesus in Jeremiah, Lamentations*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 25–26.

Return to your first love. Repent of substitutes. Draw near to the fountain of living waters. And the God who satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things will cause rivers of living water to flow from within you.

Come. Drink. Live.

And never thirst again.