

THE THIRSTY SOUL

By Margo Pitrone

Theme: Thirsting for a Relationship with Christ

Call to Worship: #852, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal,

Opening Song: *Praise to the Lord*, #1, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Closing Song: *Fill My Cup, Lord*, #493, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Scripture: Psalm 63:1-8

--

It was hot, and the sun was beating down on his head, searing its rays into his skull. If only he had some water, anything with moisture would be a miracle. Gary had entered the Sahara three weeks earlier. It had been his life-long dream to travel across the great desert by himself, and one month ago the dream had become a reality. Though now Gary had to laugh at the thought; he was not sure what reality was.

Gary had entered the desert with a guide, a camel, a map, and plenty of food and water. But the guide disappeared one night with the camel and most of the food and water. Gary had finished the food a week and a half before, and had run out of water the previous day. For over two weeks, he had wandered in the desert, unable to utilize the map, and now he was sure he would die there.

His one wish was for water. What he had taken for granted all his life was suddenly his deepest desire. Anything to cool him from the heat. His clothing was tattered, his skin burned, peeled, and burned again. His lips were swollen and though he imagined he was speaking out loud, he knew he wasn't because his lips were dried and stuck together. Oh, for some water to relieve his pain. He had never understood the term, "raging thirst" until now. He fell to the ground, the sound of his breathing ragged, panting—so dry.

Now I want you to use your imagination, if you haven't already. I want you to close your eyes and try to place yourself where Gary is.

Do you feel dirty? Do you feel the heat? Are you thirsty, to the point of your throat being parched? Do you feel like you may never rise up from the sand again? I have a vivid imagination and when I read the story of Gary I felt as if I was there, dying, thirsty and alone. If you are someone who does not have a vivid imagination it can be hard to place yourself in the story of another. But, I believe it is very important to be able to place yourself in the story of another in order to learn and to grow.

Gary did survive his desert trek; a bedouin tribe found him lying on the sand and took him in. Gary lived to tell his story, one of hunger beyond reason, and thirst that felt like fire. This story was most fascinating for me because several days later I read a text that came alive because of Gary's experience. Please turn with me to Psalms 63:1-8. (READ).

Once again I would like to recommend the ability of your imagination. Biblical stories, and biblical recommendations, will only become meaningful if we can make them applicable and realistic for our life today. And our passage this morning is a beautiful example of a biblical story becoming life-like so we can apply it to ourselves.

David, a man called by God in his youth, a man who dealt with a crazed king with love and forgiveness, a man who committed adultery and murder, a man who repented with sorrow and humiliation, and a man whose life story reads like a novel, will only come to life if we use our imagination to get into the story.

David wrote our passage for this morning. At the time it was written, David was fleeing from King Saul. He had been in hiding, moving from place to place to avoid being discovered, and was a truly lonely man. At this time in David's life, he had plenty of reason to be discouraged. He had been told that God had called him to be king, he had served Saul well in spite of that knowledge, had been assaulted by Saul, and now had left the court of the king, had left his family, and though not yet 20 years of age, is leading a small band of men to hide in the desert.

But David, though often discouraged and tempted in later periods of his life, is not discouraged here. He uses this difficult situation as an illustration of spiritual things. David is tired and thirsty. He is in the desert of Judah, his men are hungry, and there is no food. He and his men become increasingly thirsty as no water can be found. The heat is blistering, and there appears to be no reprieve. Then David, the fearless young man, sits down and starts to write. His men watch in amazement, wondering if the sun has gotten too hot on David's helmet.

David writes, "My God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, I am so thirsty for your presence it is like being here in the desert." David uses his physical thirst to show his men how deeply he thirsts after God. In spite of their circumstances, David is moved by his deep love for God. And David bursts into praise and adoration when he looks at Who God is. David did not write this psalm as a thanks for God's deliverance—he had not been delivered yet; he wrote this psalm just because he loved God for Who God was. His words become increasingly exuberant as he thinks about this wonderful God and he says, "My soul is fed as if at a feast when I think of You. My meditation is all the night, and I am under the shadow of Your care. My soul clings to You." David knew he was thirsty, and he knew Who could quench that thirst.

I love God. And I want you to love Him too. Often our experience with God is like a trip through the desert. David's psalm give hope to those of us who feel we are in a spiritual desert.

But before we can even utilize David's beautiful psalm in our own experience, we need to realize that we are in the desert and that we are thirsty. Many of us are thirsty and do not even know it. I am not speaking to people "of the world," nor am I speaking of those who are not here with us this morning, (though of course these people are thirsty as well); I am speaking to each one of you sitting here this morning.

Many of us here are thirsty. That sounds like quite a strong statement to make, but I believe it is true. Ellen White said in 1893 that "not one in twenty was ready to meet the Lord." when she looked at Adventism. I do not believe things have gotten better, but worse. We are even more

thirsty now, than then. Now, I am not going to stand here and point out who is thirsty—I don't know that. But if we were being filled, and our thirst quenched, we would not be struggling for our very church life. And we are struggling. The very sound of this church's breath is like that of Gary's as his parched throat burned. We need to recognize this fact, or we are going to die.

Ministers have been working for years to bring spiritual things to life for believers, whatever the denomination affiliation. We want to see our churches grow, we want to see people passionate about their relationship with God. We want to help "finish the work." I am sure you too want to achieve those goals in this church, be it today, this week, this year, or this decade. Yet, ministry can be so frustrating because so few people's lives appear to be changed, and we wonder if it is their fault or ours. You as a church get frustrated and wonder why the church isn't growing, and wonder if it is your fault or ours. I believe if there is fault to find, it lies with all of us. We ministers have so often been thirsty people who do not recognize our own thirst either. I have been a thirsty believer and I have also been a thirsty minister. I am learning where to quench that thirst, and believe each one here many learn the same.

Whether you are a traditional/conservative Seventh-day Adventist or a liberal/open Adventist, you may be a thirsty believer. Every Christian, I believe, comes to a point where they need to ask, "How do I know if my soul is thirsty?" There are several tell-tale clues—here are six:

1. A restlessness inside you. No matter what you do, there is a feeling that there must be something more to life. Sometimes you are aware that there is something you want, but you are not sure what. You cannot stand to be alone, or in silence; you need to be "doing" all the time. Ambition in sports, in business, in legitimate pleasures, may be the cry of the heart for something better.
2. A desire for love and acceptance. Trying to use your spouse, your children, your friends, or even your church, to fill that need for love. You expect any of the above to keep you happy all the time.
3. A curiosity about anyone who seems to be genuinely excited about their love for God. You see someone sparkling with the love of God, and you wonder, "is that for real?"
4. A desire to be around spiritual things, even if you are not personally participating in spiritual growth on your own. You know you should "be at church," or "read your Bible," or saying the "right things," but these activities are more work than fun. Feeling guilty that religion is such hard work.
5. Participating in religious life, and feeling no need of further spiritual growth or instruction. Desire to make others in the church behave as "Seventh-day Adventists should behave." A willingness to let others in the church know about the faults of the leaders or other members without even speaking to those being faulted first.
6. A hunger to learn more about God. Increased longing to know God, to understand how He can reveal Himself to you, not just through the church, the minister, or the Sabbath School teacher, but through His personal revelation to you.

If you experience any or all of these symptoms, you have the thirst. And if you have the thirst, you have a spot in your life that only God can fill. That God is waiting to fill. *Desire of Ages*, pg. 454 says this eloquently, "The cry of Christ to the thirsty soul is still going forth, and it appeals to us with even greater power than to those who heard it in the temple on that last day of the feast. The fountain is open for all. The weary and exhausted ones are offered the refreshing draught of eternal life. Jesus is still crying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." "Jesus knew the wants of the soul." *Desire of Ages*, pg. 454.

It is only when we recognize that we are thirsty, that our souls long for God, that we can take the words of David, visualize and experience them, and say, "You are my God and I seek You, my soul thirsts for You. When I look upon You in Your glory, I am moved to gratitude and praise. Under Your wings of care I sing for joy. My soul clings to You, oh God." And it is only when we individually start to quench this thirst, that we as a congregation will start to quench our thirst. The dying gasps of a life ending because of thirst, will, through the quenching of the Spirit, become the pulsing energy of life beginning anew.

Gary tells, at the end of his story, what it was like to wake up in a bedouin tent. He said, "It was so cool and refreshing. A young man was pouring water over my face, carefully wiping my parched lips. I had thought I knew what thirst was like, but I had not realized how thirsty I was until I started to be revived. I drank, fully and gratefully, and will never take the blessing of quenched thirst for granted again.

My soul is thirsty this morning, is yours?

Biographical Information on Sermon Writer: Margo Pitrone was raised in Ile Ife, Nigeria until 6 years old, then lived in Michigan for the next 16 years. She graduated from Andrews University with a B.S. in Social Work and from Princeton Theological Seminary and, at the time this sermon was written, was pastoring in the United States.