

THE SPIRITUAL WASTELAND
April 24, 2016 Psalm 63: 1-4
The Church of the Covenant

It is a blessing to have been in Haiti again at the beginning of April. It is with great joy I would go up on the roof of the New Testament Mission each morning and watch the sunrise over the cut in the far away mountains and pray to the Lord to bless the people of Haiti. But each late afternoon I would watch a different spectacle. Each afternoon, large black clouds laden with rain would appear like clockwork and tarry over those same faraway mountains, but it would not rain. Haiti is in the midst of a two-year drought where even what little they have has been taken away. It is a dry and barren land. The people are hungry, even desperate. There is little food and water. Wasteland. If you go up high enough on the mountains and look over to the Dominican Republic what a contrast you see. The Eastern two thirds of the Island of Hispanola is where the Dominican Republic is located; the Western third is Haiti. The Eastern two thirds is lush and tropical, a Caribbean paradise, flowing with water and abundance, a tourist mecca and place where Americans seek to vacation and retire. The Western third looks like a desert; few trees, dirt as dry as dust; the sun scorching and searing. Wasteland. The French, the former colonialists, cut down all the Mahogany forests; the people cut down the rest of the trees to make charcoal. No trees, no rain. No rain, no vegetation. No vegetation, no food. On my trek over the mountain from Lacoup we asked the guide if there were any wild animals in the desolate mountains. He laughed and said they were eaten long ago. The causes of "wasteland" are many. Voodoo is prevalent in Haiti; up until this past President every President of Haiti had at least one Voodoo high priest in his cabinet. The colors of the Haitian flag are the colors of Voodoo. Voodoo invokes evil and dead spirits. Worship any God other than the One True and Living God and you create a spiritual wasteland in your soul. Just as dry and barren as Haiti. Dabble in any spirituality apart from the Christ-centered, Bible-focused spirituality of the Holy Spirit and you set yourself up for spiritual wasteland in your life. I served a church in Alexandria, VA and there was a spiritual "heaviness" over the city. There was a spiritual blockage and a depression over the city. I finally came to believe that any place where the evil of slavery was tolerated, and Alexandria was a major slave port on the East Coast, has a pall of spiritual wasteland cast over it. Haiti was one of the worst slave nations under the French, who exploited it terribly. There is political corruption in Haiti. Much of the money is siphoned off by corrupt officials who have no love for their people, only a love for themselves and a love for money. They exchanged one set of brutal taskmasters for another. There are reasons why after the earthquake in 2010 there are still tent cities of homeless people in Port au Prince. There are reasons why lush and verdant lands turn into wastelands. There are reasons why people are starving and there is no rain. There are reasons why any nation can fall and become a wasteland. And most of them relate to our spirituality. The antidote for spiritual wasteland is to thirst after the One, True and Living God, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and the living waters of the Holy Spirit of the Lord God Almighty.

Our scripture from Psalm 63 is helpful in understanding. The Psalmist writes: *"I seek thee. My soul thirsts for thee. My flesh faints for thee."* (Psalm 63: 1) The spiritual metaphor is clear –like a person in a dry desert is someone who needs the Living God. To drink deeply of God's Spirit through Jesus Christ the Son, is to quench our spiritual thirst. Without HIM we "faint" and are weak. Without HIM and HIS PRESENCE in our lives it is, as the Psalmist writes, *"as in a dry and weary land where no water is."* (v. 1) Our souls need the living water of the HOLY SPIRIT just to live. As Psalm 42: 1 notes: *"As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for Thee, O God."* The image is of a deer out in the wilderness on a steep mountainside, and it is thirsty, for it has not had water in many, many days. So it hungers and thirsts after God's righteousness. It has a thirst for what only God can give. The soul is empty, a spiritual wasteland, until it is filled with the Spirit of the Living God. And the thirsting, the heart-felt need, the desperation for the presence of the Living God, is the very thirst that propels us to find the water that only God can give. *"My soul thirsts for God"*, says Psalm 42, *"for the Living God."* Exactly.

Jesus, in His exchange with the woman by the well, promises her "living water" of the Holy Spirit. Her life has made her heart a spiritual wasteland, a desert where there should be lush tropical forest. Jesus sees through her in an instant. He points to the literal water from the well and says, *"Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again."* (John 4: 13) *"But everyone who drinks from the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that*

I shall give him," promises Jesus, "will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4: 14) "Sir, give me this water", asks the woman by the well. Lord, Jesus Christ, give us this water and we shall live!!!!!! And our wastelands shall bloom again!!!!

The beautiful thing about Haiti is its people. The beautiful things about Haiti are people like Pastor Pierre, and the strong Christians at the New Testament Mission in Lacroix. You go and visit a remote village where the New Testament Mission is, and you see a church, and a school, and a clinic, and a well, and the little village is green with trees. All around it is dry and dusty. Any place where the New Testament Mission isn't, it is a dry and barren wasteland. Any place where it is, where Christ is, there are young people with hope, and children with a future, and people thirsting after the One, True and Living God. We have everything, but have dry and barren hearts. They have nothing, but their hearts are alive in the power of the Living Waters of the Holy Spirit. They may have nothing in terms of money; but they have everything in relation to God. Like a hart they have longed for streams of living water. Their souls have thirsted for the Living God and God is pouring out His Spirit. And Haiti is being reclaimed one small village at a time from spiritual wasteland to new life in Jesus Christ.

I love their chapel service on Friday. The children at the New Testament School in Lacroix all gather for worship at 8:15 a.m. And Pastor Pierre at the last minute asked me to preach and, of course, I said, YES. So imagine 600+ children packed into a sanctuary that maybe holds 250. And imagine them singing praises to God at the top of their lungs. And imagine them bouncing up and down, excited to be singing and worshiping the Lord, the sound of their little voices traveling miles to every little village for miles around. Powerful praise lasting until 10:30 a.m. –more than two hours of worship and praise by those little children. Spiritually powerful; the room electric with the presence of God; the waters of the Holy Spirit flowing in abundance. They sang in Creole –“Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong, they are weak, but HE is strong.” “Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.” When you have a lot, then we place God in a little part of our life. When you have nothing, then God is everything.

When I realized sometime last fall the enormity of the drought and the situation of hunger in Lacroix I began to pray about it. And specifically I began to pray that the Lord would provide rain for Haiti. O Stu, you are so naïve. That isn't how rain comes. God won't hear your prayer or answer it. How, quaint you are; how naïve and simple-minded to believe that God would care and do that for the people of Lacroix. So we go to Haiti and it is Tuesday evening. And every evening the mission team gathers for prayer on the roof of the New Testament Mission and to share what happened to them that day. This particular night it is led by the wonderful, faithful effective team leader, Denise Douglass. And at the very moment she begins, the rain begins to fall, heavy rain, buckets full of rain, and so much rain we have to run off of the roof and to safety. When our soul thirsts for rain, and we pray to God for rain, God provides and in abundance.

As a Christian, from time to time, we all find ourselves in a dry place, spiritually speaking. Me, too. Our heart and soul may feel like a barren desert, not a lush tropical-forest-Promised-Land, flowing with milk and honey. But may I say --The wasteland always precedes the rain. Our souls thirsting for God always brings the Living Water. Our hearts crying out to God in desperation always brings the water from which we will never thirst again. Would we be willing to pray for it to rain in Haiti and believe it will? Would we be willing to pray for the dry and barren portions of our own lives and believe it will rain down Living Water? Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*