

YOU CAN'T GET ALONG WITHOUT GOD

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Psalm 42:1-2.

No portion of the Old Testament is more read and loved than the Book of Psalms. In our successes and failures, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, we turn to this book, and we find that it enables us to express our thoughts, feelings, and desires, however varied they may be. It affords us this help because behind the words we find a living soul telling us of its struggles with sin, of its failures and sorrows, of its conquests and joys, of its outlook on the world, of how it is perplexed at the triumph of evil; and listening to that soul we find that its experiences resembles ours. We have a striking example of this in the psalm which contains our text.

This psalm reveals the writer's circumstances. His bitter foes had chased him out of Jerusalem, and as a fugitive he was in hiding somewhere beyond Jordan. Instead of being in the midst of his family and sitting upon his throne in Jerusalem, David was apparently living among a hostile and ungodly people in the neighborhood of Mount Hemon. It is believed, therefore, that he wrote this psalm after he was driven from his throne by the rebellion of Absalom, and when he was pursued by enemies thirsting for his blood.

This psalm expresses the bitter sorrow of a soul which had been cut off from fellowship with God in public worship. It tells us how he was accustomed to going with the throng to the house of God. Although he was king, he was not too proud to join the multitude at the temple. It was not an unpleasant task to him, but he went with joy and praise.

Being in exile from the temple, and subjected to the taunts of his enemies who cried, "Where is thy God?", the memory of those lost privileges saddened him greatly. As the echo of the temple music sounded through his memory, and the festive scene of public worship flitted before his imagination, it all deepened his sadness. In his distress he longed for the privilege of having communion with God in the temple. His heart cried out for the opportunity of being there before the living God, unbosoming his burden and obtaining peace. With a great sense of loneliness he cried---text.

He feels that he must have help. He simply cannot go on without it. But where does he turn in his hour of desperation? What fountain does he seek for the slaking of his thirst? He turns to One whom he believes can do for him what the water brook can do for the deer, and far more.

What place does the brook fill in the program of the deer? David had seen a deer with open mouth and heaving flanks eagerly seeking water in dried up brooks. That sight had struck upon the heart of this exile an image of himself longing for the presence of God in the sanctuary. For the deer, the brook was a great luxury, but it was far more. It was an absolute necessity. And what place did God fill in the program of the psalmist? To him God was an absolute necessity. And not only to the psalmist was God an absolute necessity, but to us also. Just as the deer was dependent upon the water brooks, just as man's physical nature is dependent upon food and drink, so the soul of man is dependent upon the living God. There is simply no getting along without Him.

In his book entitled, "Wild Wales," George Borrow tells the story of how he fell in with a party of travelling tinkers near the city of Chester. They accosted him and insisted on taking him for a minister and talking to him about religion. He did his best to end the conversation and tried to leave them; but they pursued him with the cry, "O, sir, give us comfort in some shape or another; either as priest or minister, Give us God, Give us God!!" We could not, of course, express our deepest longings in such a blatant way, but the Psalmist, when he says, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God," and the tinkers when they cry, "Give us God," are putting into words the fundamental desire of the human race. However, we have to admit that in recent years there has not been much evidence of this desire for God, but that has largely been due to the mistaken idea that we could obtain from things what are essentially and only God's gifts. Men need God, and many want Him because they need strength, guidance, encouragement, and comfort in the tremendous task of daily living.

Some people do not pray because they imagine that they are so capable and important that they can get along without outside help. They remind me of a child with a new toy, struggling with all its might to make it work. The father stands by wanting to help, but the child will not allow him to help, because he is determined to manage for himself. But usually in the end the father's aid has to be called in. It is so much better for us to face the facts of life than it is to go on living in a fool's paradise. And any man is foolish who imagines he can get along and get the best out of life without the strength and help of God.

On all the continents of earth, and in all the ages of time, we come upon this fact that man can't get along without God. No matter where he lives, man is inherently religious and worships somebody or something.

In Egypt, near Thebes, are the ruins of the temple of Karnak. It is one of the marvelous ruins, unique in its architectural features. One is lost in wonder as he asks himself what mechanical contrivances could have been used thousands of years ago to transport those immense stones from the quarry one hundred and fifty miles across the desert and place them in the high walls of that temple. One gazes with amazement down that long vista of gigantic columns, near the top of which are religious symbols sculptured in curious designs. All these symbols cannot be interpreted, but we know that this temple was built ages ago by people who were reaching out after God and who felt that they couldn't get along without Him. In the midst of all the wealth and splendor of Thebes was the thirst for the living God.

In Syria we find the tremendous ruins of Baalbek --- nine acres of land literally covered with the remains of magnificent temples. No description can do them justice. How these temples were built remains a mystery. How these enormous stones were brought there no one can tell. Surely there were giants in those days. Those wondrous temples built two thousand years ago bear testimony to the eternal craving of man for God, and to the fact that he cannot get along without Him.

In Ephesus can be seen strewn over the ground the colossal columns of the temple of Diana. And the prostrate columns of that once majestic pile seem to cry out, "Man can't get along without God."

In Athens there is the Parthenon, perhaps the grandest and loveliest structure ever reared by human hands. Every column of that glorious structure, many of them still pointing upward, seems to shout, "Man can't get along without God."

This universal and timeless thirst for God bridges the gulf between the world of the long ago and the world of today, between lands afar off and those listening to me, and forms the deepest and strongest bond of unity in the human race. At heart every man is hungering and thirsting for something that the world cannot give, longing for something real and permanent amid the transitory things of time.

The Greeks had a beautiful word for man -- "anthropos," meaning the being with the upturned face. Man is so made that he cannot be content with forever looking down. He may look down a long time, so long that he may forget that he was made for God, until something happens, until some crisis comes. And then he remembers and looks up.

You can't get along, as you should, without God. The time will come when you wish that you had Him, if not for yourself, for your children and for your loved ones. You may cultivate the intellect, you may surround yourself with books and comforts and refinements, but the time is coming when these things will fail you. You may try to get along without God, but some day you will be struck with the impossibility and the absurdity of life without Him, and then you will ask yourself, "What is the use of living such a life? What good is life without God?"

Someone listening to me may seldom, if ever, think of God, any more than a man thinks of the beating of his heart -- till one day something goes wrong with the heart. Then he puts up his hand and says, "O my heart!" So men do about God. They go on their way and never think about God and their relationship to Him and their need for Him -- until something goes wrong.

You can't get along indefinitely without God. Faith can never be eliminated from the human heart. It may be hidden in the dust and rubbish of life, but it will break out again. There was that eminent scientist, George Romanes, who said that for twenty-five years he never prayed. He was a man of blameless morals and exemplary life in many respects, but he found no place for God. He tried to make life satisfactory without Him. He was crowned with honor in a way that falls to few. But was he satisfied? Not at all. All the time there was something lacking. All the time he was craving for something he did not have, and he knew not what. As he himself afterward confessed, he felt that he was like a starving man trying to feed himself with confectionery. He found that it would not do, and would not satisfy. Many are finding that out today. I wish that many more would do so.

Christianity is not an outgrown and waning interest of the world. We are not outgrowing religion or our need of God, and we never will. Man is incurably religious, and it is impossible to imagine any time in the future when he will be anything else. A large number of those who flock to the amusement places are trying to forget something -- trying to forget that there are such things as sin and shame; trying to forget that there are such things as trouble and disappointment; trying to forget disquieting thoughts about the futility of their lives. And deep within them they long for something, for One who can save them, and put meaning and happiness and usefulness into their lives.

I am so glad that there are those who are finding that they cannot get along without God. It is Jesus Christ who teaches us to listen to the cry of the heart for God. He said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." It is Jesus alone who can satisfy the immortal craving of the spirit for salvation, for goodness, for truth, for beauty, for forgiveness, for renewal, for usefulness, and who can bring us back to our best selves. You just can't get along without God. Don't try it. You will always need His comfort, strength, and help.

The guilty need and want His forgiveness, the sorrowful are seeking comfort, the godly are seeking a higher saintliness, and the weary are seeking rest, all of which are to be found in the Lord Jesus. I therefore commend Him to you as the one satisfactory answer to the plaintive and persistent cries which arise from your soul. He is the only One who can satisfy the needs of your soul, and your soul does not have a single need that He cannot supply.

You cannot meditate on the facts of life without reaching the conclusion that to have God is to have all, though you should lack all else, and that to lack God is to lack all, though you should have all else. Jesus Christ is the complete answer to the thirst of the human soul. You will never be satisfied without Him. And, if you will accept Him, He will never disappoint you. Millions have been able to sing out of their own experiences:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say, 'Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one, stoop down, and drink, and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him."