

THIRSTY SOULS

"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.

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 Hermon. 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 "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).

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, hot and tired after being chased by the dogs, 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.

People today are thirsting or longing for something better, anxious for a change, desirous of seeing things different from what they are. Here is an individual who has traveled in many nations, but he is not satisfied. He is still thirsting for something else. Or here is a person who has amassed a fortune, but he is not satisfied. John D. Rockefeller said that he got more satisfaction out of the first thousand dollars that he made than he

got out of any million that he made thereafter. The things of this world just simply do not satisfy. There is always the longing for something different and better. This is also true of that individual who seeks and achieves fame. There is a thirst that fame will not quench. When Alexander the Great had conquered the then known world he sat down on the shores of the Aegean Sea and wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. He was not satisfied; he was thirsting for something else.

Thirst is a word that describes the deepest desire and the most intense longing of a human being. There is no craving like the craving for water. Man can live a long time without food, but not long without water. The expiring cry of the soldier on the battlefield is the call for water. The first words of the patient coming out from under the anesthetic, following an operation, is the call for water.

Thirst is a word that denotes the dependency of man. Man is not self-sufficient and independent. He must look outside himself for the supply of his needs. Man does not have springs within himself from which he can slake the thirst of his soul. All supplies for the soul must come from God. Of Him we read: "For he satisfieth the longing soul and filleth the hungry soul with goodness" (Psalm 107:9).

In his natural or fallen state man has an unconscious and unsatisfied thirst or longing after God. Every man has a soul that thirst for God. No man is made to be satisfied from himself. For the comfort of our own hearts, for the satisfaction of our own natures, for the joy and strength of our being, we must go beyond ourselves and fix our hope on something external to ourselves. But, it is a sad fact that man in his natural state misinterprets the thirst of his soul. He does not say, "My soul thirsteth for God." This is indeed what his soul thirsts for, but he does not know it. Sin has ruined human judgment, so the unbeliever thinks that he can get along without God. The sinner thinks his soul is crying for things, and that it will be satisfied with things, but when he gets them his soul still cries out in its thirst. The sinner takes the wrong medicine for the needs of his soul. Fallen human nature is in a state of unrest, panting, and desperately thirsty, but deceiving itself as to where it should go to slake its thirst.

Some think that soul rest can be found in wealth, so they dedicate all their powers to the service of mammon and perhaps they get their coveted prize. But they are not satisfied. God's Word says, "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Others think that soul satisfaction comes through the eye, so they travel much and look upon the works of human achievement, and gaze upon the wonders of nature, but they are not satisfied for God's Word says, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing" (Ecclesiastes 1:8). Others search for satisfaction in the ways of the world, but as Paul said, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (I Timothy 5:6).

God is the only One Who can satisfy us. The Bible says, "For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness" (Psalm 107:9). Soul rest is to be found in a Person, and not in things. God's satisfying portion is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In a state of grace after regeneration there is a conscious longing. David was in a state of grace when he said, "My Soul thirsteth after God, for the living God." He knew God, but he was away from the temple where God's presence was seen in the shekinah glory. He was craving the manifest glory of the presence of God. He wanted to be closer to God. There is one sense in which the believer is satisfied, and another sense in which he is not satisfied. He is satisfied with God, but he is not satisfied with what he has of God. He longs for more of the divine fulness.

You can't get along as you should without God. The time will come when you will wish that you had Him, if not for yourself, for your children and 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?"

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. 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.

When Christ saw the people wearied and thirsty as they rushed hither and thither at the Feast of Tabernacles, His heart was stirred. He had great compassion and unbounding pity. Standing on an elevated spot, He saw the crowds going away with aching consciences and unsatisfied minds. He had witnessed their ceremonies and, although they had sung and shouted and gone into raptures, after it was all over they were going home with their same old heartaches and cares and fears. It was a perfect picture of the fact that keeping the law could never assuage the thirst of the human soul. Moreover, it symbolized the utter inability of the waters of earth, its pleasures and possessions and philosophies, to satisfy the weary soul.

But there stood among the throngs on that feast day One Who could satisfy the thirsty souls. He cried aloud to the multitude saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37). There is no distinction with Him. He provides the blessing for all irrespective of class or age. The only condition on which the approach to Him is made is that of thirst.

Some are thirsting for the forgiveness of their sins. Christ is the One to Whom they must come if their thirst is to be quenched. He alone has power on earth to forgive sins. Those of us who are Christians will never forget the peace and joy and satisfaction which came into our hearts when we came to Christ and He forgave our sins. To those who are now thirsting for salvation Christ says, "Come unto me." Notice that He did not say, "Confess your sins, be baptized, join the church, take the Lord's Supper, or live by the Golden Rule." Rather, He said, "Come unto me and drink." This means that, if one has a need and a desire for salvation from sin, he is to come to Christ and receive it. The Lord gives and we receive. If your thirst is to be quenched, you must come to the Lord Jesus Christ and trust Him. You are not to bring anything to Him, but to take everything from Him, as the thirsty ground drinks in the showers of rain. If any man thirst, let him receive Christ in Whom there is salvation, satisfaction and sufficiency.

An invaluable blessing which results from coming to Christ is the pardon of all your sins. You will never have peace of mind, joy of heart or satisfaction of soul until you know that your sins are forgiven. The forgiveness of your sins is the greatest need of every unsaved person, and it is only through Christ that you can obtain this great blessing. He purchased it for you with the price of His own precious blood and He offers it to you as a gift. Another great blessing which results from coming to Christ is that of eternal happiness. If you will come to Christ and drink, all will be well with you both here and hereafter. I have never seen a Christian who has ever regretted his acceptance of Christ as his or her personal Saviour. In relating his Christian experience Horatius Bonar said:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast.'

I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad,
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad.

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.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'I am this dark world's light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
Till traveling days are done."

Jesus Christ is the complete answer to the thirst of our soul. You will never be satisfied without Him. If you will receive Him, He will forgive you, save you, and satisfy the thirst of your soul. Those who come to Him are satisfied and never thirst again. When a thirsty sinner comes to Christ, his thirst is quenched for time and eternity. Come to Christ now. If you will come to Him, He will save you, and send you away from this place with your spiritual thirst fully satisfied.