

YEARNING FOR GOD

Psalm 42

In our successes and failures, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows we frequently turn to the Psalms which express so beautifully our thoughts, feelings and desires, however varied they may be.

Psalm forty-two relates the story of a struggling soul in need of God. The writer's foes had chased him out of Jerusalem and driven him into exile. As a fugitive he was in hiding somewhere beyond Jordan, not far from Mount Hermon. It is believed that David wrote this psalm after he had been driven from his throne by the rebellion of Absalom, and when he was pursued by enemies who were thirsting for his blood.

When David fled from Absalom he left Jerusalem and the holy sanctuary, which was the place where God dwelt on earth. Being deprived of the privilege of worshipping God publicly in that appointed place grieved him even more than being unable to sit upon his throne or to have fellowship with his family. Although he was king, David had not been too proud to join the multitude in the accustomed place of worship. That was not an unpleasant task for him, but he had gone there with joy in his heart and praises upon his lips.

Being in exile, the memory of his lost privileges saddened David 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 opportunity of having communion with God in the temple. He wondered when he would have that blessed privilege again. Alas, so many take their blessings for granted and do not appreciate many of the best things of life until they have been deprived of them.

In his loneliness David felt that he simply could not go on without help from God. His desperate yearning for the living God was expressed beautifully and effectively in verses one and two. "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?" David had frequently seen a deer with open mouth and heaving flanks eagerly seeking water in dried-up brooks. Memories of that sight reminded him of his personal 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. To the Psalmist the living God, in contrast to idols, was an absolute necessity. Not only to David 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 God. Just as the deer and the stream of water belong together, so man needs to be rightly related to God. Nobody can have complete satisfaction apart from God. As Augustine said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and the heart of man is restless until it finds rest in Thee."

Some people do not pray because they think that they are so important and capable that they can get along without outside help. They remind us of a child with a new toy, struggling with all his might to make it work. His father stands by in readiness to assist, 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 solicited. 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. Any man is foolish who imagines he can get along and get the best and the most out of life without the strength and help of God.

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 with 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.

Kept away from public worship, David was heartsick. Ease he did not seek, honor he did not covet, but the enjoyment of communion with God was an urgent need of his soul. That he viewed not merely as the sweetest of all luxuries, but as an absolute necessity, like water to a deer. Any child of God will have a yearning for communion with his heavenly Father, Who alone can satisfy the longings and needs of his heart.

While David was in the midst of his distress and desperation others scoffed at him and disdainfully taunted and reproached him with the question, "Where is thy God?", implying that He had forsaken His servant. It is ever true that in times of religious perplexity that the unsympathetic world either misunderstands or taunts the children of God.

As often happens with God's children, Satan tempted the Psalmist to question the goodness of God. Because of his unfavorable circumstances and uncongenial environment, he concluded that he had been mistreated. It is so easy to think that our trouble is worse than anybody else ever endured.

Overwhelmed by his troubles, trials and tribulations, David was prone to be despondent. Concerning these things, which he regarded as having come into his personal experience by the directive or permissive will of God, he remarked, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Ere long he placed his implicit faith in God and was blessed wonderfully.

As long as we are here, we shall encounter temptations, disappointments, problems and trials that will tend to discourage us, but we must not become despondent for we have the blessed assurance that God is for us and will see us through. In His own time and way the help which we need will be made available to us.

"Hope thou in God." From Him cometh your salvation. He is your satisfying portion. He will not fail you, nor forsake you. As long as we are in this scene of things we shall continue to meet with trials, temptations, disappointments and problems that will naturally discourage us. But faith comes to the rescue and gives us the assurance that God is for us and will see us through.

"Trials many will beset my pathway
And temptations I shall surely meet;
But my Saviour promised grace to help me,
Till I lay my trophies at His feet."

Remember this -- there is never a time when we may not hope in God. In the Lord's own good time help will come. Therefore, cast down the black flag of discouragement and raise the white banner of hope.

Christ 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. He is the complete answer to the thirst of the human soul. You will never be satisfied without Him. If you will accept Him as your Saviour, He will never disappoint nor fail 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."