

“Our Greatest Thirst” Psalm 42

When I was a boy at home in Catawba County, we always had a big garden over in the bottom land. The garden was a long way from the house and sometimes on a hot summer day we would borrow my Grandfather Yount’s horse and wagon so that we could haul the tools (and the four (4) boys) to and from the garden. Some days my three older brothers would take turns plowing the horse. It was not fair to the horse, because they took turns and rested frequently, but the poor old horse was constantly at work. Sometimes old Red got so hot that I wondered if he could go on. And then, when the work was done, the old horse was hitched up to the wagon and had to pull all the tools and four (4) boys over the rough farm road and back to the house.

About half-way between the garden and the house there was a fast running branch where flowed some of the most refreshing water a boy ever put his feet in. The branch was down in a valley. Going from the garden to the house we crossed over a railroad track, went down a steep hill to the branch and up a long, steep hill on the other side.

Old Red made that trip so many times that he knew the way without having to be guided. He knew exactly where that refreshing water was running there in the branch, and when we got to the railroad tracks one boy would take a firm grip on the reins and another boy would start applying the brake shoes to the back wheels of the old wagon. Old Red had worked hard, he was thirsty, he knew where the refreshing waters were and when he got to that railroad track he knew he had it made. Just down the hill was the life-giving, life-refreshing water. It took a tight grip on the reins and strong pressure applied to the brakes to hold old Red back and keep him from running so fast that he turned the wagon over. But when he got to the water there was a sudden stop. We never did try, but I don’t guess you would have made old Red move with a horse whip. He stayed there drinking up in great gulps the refreshing water flowing in that branch. He drank until his thirst was completely satisfied and then with renewed energy and vigor he pulled the wagon up the hill on the other side of the branch and on to the house.

In Psalm 42 the inspired Psalmist is writing about thirst. The thirst about which he is writing is even more intense and burning and stronger than the thirst which old Red experienced after a hard morning’s work in the fields. He is writing about what I like to think of as mankind’s greatest thirst. He is writing about spiritual thirst. His concern is with his own personal thirst and the universal thirst of mankind for the living God.

Three (3) powerful spiritual truths are emphasized in the verses of this Psalm.

1. Strong emphasis is placed on the degree and the intensity of the writer’s spiritual thirst. This fact is clearly revealed in verse 1 and the first part of verse 2: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

Notice the spelling of that word “hart” in verse one – not HEART but HART. In Webster’s dictionary the word HART is defined as “a male deer, especially when he has passed his 5th year and the crown antler is formed.” In his mind the Psalmist pictures a deer which is dying of thirst diligently searching for the refreshing and life-giving waters of a brook. The deer which the Psalmist sees is so thirsty that he is literally panting as he searches here and there for that water.

The degree and intensity of that physical thirst which the deer is experiencing is the degree and intensity of that spiritual thirst which the Psalmist is experiencing. With his soul perishing for spiritual water the Psalmist literally pants like the deer and cries out: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

The Psalmist is not alone in his condition of spiritual thirst. Deep down inside every person created in the image of God has that degree and that intensity of spiritual thirst. With their lips many people do not express it, but in their heart and mind they say over and over again: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

2. In Psalm 42, strong emphasis is also placed on the urgency of satisfying that intense and burning spiritual thirst. This urgency shines through in the last part of verse 2 where the Psalmist asks this soul-searching question: “When shall I come and appear before God?”

The Psalmist could not answer that question, no other person could answer it for him. He knew that one day he was going to stand before God in judgment, but only God knew exactly when that time would be. But in his heart the Psalmist knew that he was not ready to appear before God in judgment until his spiritual thirst had been satisfied.

What was true of the Psalmist is true of us today. We must face God in judgment. When we do not know. And we are not prepared for that time of divine judgment until our spiritual thirst is satisfied like the physical thirst of the deer or of old Red was satisfied when they drank the refreshing water from the brook.

3. The Psalmist found IN GOD complete satisfaction for his spiritual thirst. In verse 5 and again in verse 11 the Psalmist writes: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.”

Again, what was true of the Psalmist of old is true of us today. The separation by the centuries of time between the Psalmist and us does not alter the fact that spiritual satisfaction is found ONLY in God who made the Psalmist and us for Himself.

This is the message and the invitation which God spoke through the prophet Isaiah and said: “Ho, every one that thirsts, come ye to the waters . . .”

This is the message and the invitation which God spoke supremely through His only Begotten Son Jesus Christ who said to the Samaritan woman at the well and who says to us today: “If you know the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, give me to drink, you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

This is the message and the invitation of John chapter 7 verse 37 where we read: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying: ‘If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.’”

When I was serving as pastor of a Baptist church in the eastern part of North Carolina, we scheduled a series of revival services for the fourth week in June. It was a hot, dry summer. This was in tobacco land and the tobacco was literally burning up in the fields. The farmers were working from daylight to dark trying to irrigate the tobacco. Some of the farm ponds were pulled down so low that some fish died.

The series of services started on Sunday morning. Rev. Frank Taylor was the evangelist. Frank preached with spiritual power, extended the invitation and asked me to stand at the altar and receive those who made decisions. At first no one came forward. My eyes fell on one of our young men who had about 15 or 16 acres of tobacco in the field. It was evident that he was having a spiritual struggle. He was trying to sing and could not. He was trying to stand still and could not. Finally, he literally threw the hymn book on the pew and came almost running to the altar and with tears in his eyes he made a firm recommitment of his life to God and to God’s service.

That man was my neighbor and Sunday afternoon he shared with me something about the struggle he was having during the singing of the invitation hymn. I don’t recall the exact words but here is the essence of what he said to me: “Preacher, my tobacco is burning up in the fields, literally dying of thirst. I made up my mind last week that I was going to revival services Sunday morning and night but, unless it rained, I was not going any more. I decided that I was going to spend the week watering my dying tobacco. But in that service this morning God spoke to me and I decided that the old tobacco could dry up – could literally die of thirst and fall over in the field, but my soul was not going to dry up spiritually. I’ll be at every service and I’ll have thirsty people with me.”

Did we have a revival? Not before or since in my life have I witnessed the degree and quality of that experience of spiritual renewal in the lives of people and in a community.

With the hymn writer my friend could say:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give
The living water, thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live.”

And with the hymn writer my friend could say:
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.

Remember the invitation of Jesus who said: “If any man (person) thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” (John 37:7)

Are you thirsty?

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