

A Longing Soul in a Thirsty Land

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Afternoon, November 15, 1857

"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." Psalm 63:1, 2

Every saint of God is blessed with faith, but not every saint of God is blessed with appropriating faith. Every partaker of grace is a child of God, but not every partaker of grace has received the Spirit of adoption so as to cry, "Abba, Father." David was a man eminently blessed and specially favoured with this appropriating faith, for he could say, "O God, thou art my God;" but we must consider that David was signally distinguished, for he was a man "after God's own heart." In his early days, when but a youth keeping sheep, the Lord had signally blessed him with the grace of faith, for we read that "after Samuel had anointed him, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward." (1 Sam. 16:13.) By the help of this Spirit he slew the lion and the bear that came and took a lamb out of the flock; and by the same help he went out against Goliath single-handed, and achieved a glorious victory. Nor was the Lord less with him afterwards when he "took him from the sheepfolds to feed Jacob his people and Israel his inheritance." (Psal. 78:70, 71.) He led him safely through many paths of persecution and distress; preserved him from Saul's spear and bloodthirsty violence; fully accomplished every promise that he had given him; set him down upon the throne of Israel; and, in addition to great temporal prosperity and power, repeatedly blessed his soul with manifestations of his love. We must not, therefore,

altogether take David as an example of every child of God, and conclude that unless a man can rise up into the heights of David's faith, he is not a saint at all. Yet we should not be satisfied with anything short of appropriating faith. Nothing should content us but to be able to say, from the sweet Spirit of adoption, "Abba, Father;" nor should we feel as if we could die in peace without being able to say, in the full language of holy triumph, "My Lord and my God." It is one thing not to be favoured with it; it is another to be satisfied without it. It is one thing to be asking the blessing which God alone can bestow; it is another to settle down in quiet security without the prayer being answered. So that though I would not say for a single moment that a saint of God is always or often blessed with appropriating faith, I would say it is a saint's highest privilege and the greatest blessing that God can confer, wherever real and genuine, for if not so it is but a delusion; as it can only spring from the manifestation of God's love to the soul. We can only call him "our Father" as he calls us his child; we can only view him as accepting us in Christ as he is pleased to make Christ known to our soul; nor can we believe in, or love him as our sin-pardoning God, except through the application of the atoning blood of his dear Son to our conscience.

But we see, from the language of the Psalmist, not only here but elsewhere, in these holy breathings and utterances of his heart to God, that the strongest appropriating faith did not secure him from severe trials and deep exercises. Though he was blessed with the full assurance of faith to call God his God, that faith did not enable him to appropriate, at all times and under all circumstances, his power, his help, his presence, his smile, and the shedding abroad of his love. Thus we see in his case, as in that of many other saints of God, though he uses the language of appropriation, he is still hungering, thirsting, seeking, begging, imploring of the Lord

to be gracious to his soul.

With God's blessing, in opening up these words this afternoon, I shall

I.—First, show what it is to *seek, to thirst, and to long after God*; for these three things the Psalmist speaks of his soul as experiencing.

II.—Secondly, the spot in which David was when he thus sought, thus thirsted, and thus longed: he describes it as "*a dry and thirsty land where no water is.*"

III.—Thirdly, what David *desired to see: the power and the glory of God.*

IV.—And fourthly, *the reason* especially why he desired so to see them: *he had seen them before in the sanctuary*, and he desired to have a sight of them now as he had been favoured with a sight then.

I.—Desire is not enjoyment; but it is the high road to it. Seeking is not finding; but there is no finding without it. Knocking is not having the door opened; but the door of grace is only opened to those who do knock. Thirsting is not drinking; yet drinking, in a spiritual sense, is only suitable to the thirsty. So that though those wants and desires are very distinct from the possession of the blessings, yet as they are indispensable to the possession of those blessings, and beyond all question are wrought by a divine hand in the soul, they may be laid down as special marks of grace. In this way I shall now consider them.

i. And first, David's *holy resolution*, "*Early will I seek thee,*"—a resolution not made in the flesh, but prompted by the

teaching and power of the Holy Ghost in his heart. I expressly name this, because when we read resolutions of this kind made by David and other saints of God in the word we might, unless better taught, think they were resolutions made in the strength of the flesh. They were not so. Such resolutions drop off the heart that makes them, like the leaves of autumn before the wintry blast; they have no more endurance than the morning cloud or the early dew. Resolutions made in the flesh end in the flesh, for, in this sense, as in every other, "he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." (Gal. 6:8.) But we find in the Scriptures, scattered there by the fingers of the Holy Ghost, holy resolutions, formed by the saints of old, which were made in the Lord's strength, and emanated from the work and teaching of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Under this power and influence, as the blessed Spirit moved upon his heart, kindling now life and feeling there, he speaks out what he feels that he must do, and that at once without further delay, "*Early will I seek thee.*"

1. The allusion here is to not lying in bed, there sleeping and slumbering away precious time and opportunity when spiritual work is to be done; there letting every spiritual faculty of the soul grow torpid and benumbed like a foot asleep. "No," says David, "I will not thus sleep all my strength away." It is surprising how much is said in the Scripture of holy men of old rising early in the morning; I mean literally, not figuratively, and especially in the case of the patriarch Abraham. Early in the morning he got up to visit the place where he stood before the Lord to plead for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:27); early in the morning he rose up to send away Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 21:14); and early in the morning he rose up when at God's bidding he went with Isaac into the land of Moriah to offer him there for a burnt offering. (Gen. 22:3.) There must be some meaning

in all this; it would seem to be expressive of alacrity of his obedience, and that he could not rest in his bed from his earnest desire to serve the Lord and do his manifested will.

2. But we may attach another meaning to the word. It is good to be found seeking the Lord *early in youth*, for that is the time when the Lord usually calls by his grace. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." (Lam. 3:27.) Paul bids Timothy "flee youthful lusts;" but the best way of fleeing them is by fleeing to the Lord from them by the power of his grace. By seeking the Lord "early" we may also understand seeking him in the *beginnings of divine teaching*; in the quickening and awakening of the new man of grace, and in the arousing of the sleeping faculties of the soul or the slumbering graces of the Spirit that often are overborne with weariness and by the weakness of the flesh.

3. But yet whatever peculiar or distinct meaning we may attach to the expression, its general drift and purport are evidently to denote *earnestness, eagerness*, and the resolute bent of the soul to seek the living God. In expressing, then, the earnest desires of his soul in seeking the Lord, it is evident that David knew there was something to be found in him which could be nowhere else obtained. If you happen to drop a piece of money in the street or upon the carpet, you search for it, and as long as there is any hope of finding it you continue the search; nor till all hope of recovering the piece of money is gone, do you give up anxiously looking for it in every direction. This is the Lord's own figure in the parable of the woman who lost a piece of silver. "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?" (Luke 15:8.) The woman knew what she was looking for, nor could she rest until she found it. So it is in grace: before we can seek, we must know what we have lost,

or what we want to find. Now what is it that a seeking soul has lost and must find it or die? It has lost the favour and the image of God; has sunk through the full into a state of alienation, enmity, and death; is under the curse of the law, the wrath of God, the bondage of sin, the accusations of Satan, and the condemnation of a guilty conscience. A convinced sinner, fleeing from all this, seeks, as the first and greatest thing, the salvation of his soul. What can be so important to a man as his own soul? Weighed in the balance, what is everything compared with that? O, how light! As the Lord said, "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Put your soul in one scale and put all that the world calls good and great in the other. Think of everything that the heart of man can desire—riches, honour, pleasure, power: heap it well up; fill the scale until there is no room for more. Put in all the gold of Australia, all the diamonds of India, all the delights of youthful love, all the pleasures of wife and home, of children and friends, of health and strength, of name and fame; put in all that the natural mind of man deems the height of happiness, and everything that may weigh the scale down. Now, when you have filled the scale, put your soul into the other—the state of your soul for all eternity. Represent to yourself your deathbed; hold the scales with dying hands as lying just at the brink of eternity. See how the scales now hang. What if you had the whole world that you have put into the scale, and could call it all your own, but at that solemn hour felt that your soul was for ever lost, that you were dying under the wrath of God, and there was nothing before you but an eternity of misery! At such a moment as this what could you put in the scale equal to the weight of your immortal soul? Take the scales again: put into one every affliction, trial, sorrow, and distress that imagination can conceive or tongue express: let them all be yours. Distress of mind, pain of body, poverty of circumstances, contempt from man, assaults from Satan,

Job's afflictions, Jacob's bereavements, David's persecutions, Jeremiah's prison, Hezekiah's sickness—put into one scale everything that makes life naturally miserable; and then put into the other scale a saved soul. Surely, as in the case of worldly honours, and riches, and happiness, a lost soul must weigh them all down; so in the case of afflictions and sorrows and troubles, a saved soul must weigh them all down too. It is by working these feelings and convictions that God puts a soul to seek after him; for as he alone can save the soul, in seeking him it seeks salvation in and from him; for it knows that in finding him, it will find the salvation of itself in him. It therefore seeks pardon at his hands. Knowing the guilt, filth, and condemnation of sin; seeing its own ruined, desperate case as a transgressor of God's holy and righteous law, it craves pardon as a manifested blessing, for it knows it cannot die in peace unless pardon be sealed upon the conscience. To live and die an unpardoned sinner, the quickened sinner knows and feels is to live and die under the wrath of God. And knowing that manifested pardon is not a name or a notion, an enthusiast's dream, or a fanatic's fancy, but a divine reality and a gospel blessing, it craves to have this pardon revealed by God's own witnessing voice, the atoning blood of Christ applied and sprinkled by the Holy Spirit to purge the conscience from filth, guilt, and dead works to serve the living God.

4. But David speaks of seeking God for what *he is in himself* as distinct from what he has to give. His gifts are one thing; himself is another. Therefore he says, "O God, thou art my God: early will I seek *thee*;" thee as distinct from thy gifts. The bride may value her bridegroom's costly gifts; but what are his gifts apart from himself? So the Church highly prizes her royal Husband's gifts and blessings; but what are these compared to him who in her admiring eyes is the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely? Thus, as seen by

the eye of faith, there is that in his most blessed Majesty which alone can satisfy the soul, taught by his Spirit and influenced by his grace. The soul was made *for* him: it was gifted with immortality *by* him. Powers and faculties were given to it that might be expanded into an infinite capacity to know and to enjoy him. So that being created for God, nothing but God can really satisfy its cravings and desires. But there is that in him, as revealed to a believing heart, which can satisfy. His favour is life; his presence heaven begun; his love a foretaste of eternal bliss. Thus in seeking the blessings he has to bestow, we do not seek them independent of the Giver. We love the gift, but we prize the Giver more. Without the Giver, the gift would be worthless. The bridal ring is the pledge of union. But what would be the ring without the bridegroom? Mockery. So all the favours and blessings which the Lord has to bestow, if he gave all and withheld himself, would be but to mock us. But in giving them, he gives himself. As when the bridegroom puts the ring on the finger of his betrothed he gives himself with the gift; so when the Lord seals a sense of his espousal upon the heart of his beloved one, in giving his love he gives himself. Nor can anything else satisfy the desires of an awakened soul. "It is Jesus," it says, "that I want; without him, heaven itself would be hell; without him, life would not be life, nor glory be glory, nor immortality be immortality;" As without the sun, the earth could not exist; so the church could not exist without Jesus. And as in the absence of the sun, no tapers could take the place of heaven's own glorious light; so no sparks, however bright, of fires kindled by human hands, could make up to the church for the absence of the Sun of righteousness. He must be, as he is, our all; having him, we have everything; not having him, we have nothing. The Lord the Spirit write that truth deeply upon your heart that you may take it wherever you go and make it ever your bosom companion. If you have Jesus, you have everything; if you

have not him, you have nothing. This continual feeling of happiness in and with him, and of misery out of and without him, as maintained in your breast by the power of the blessed Spirit, will be leading you to seek him perpetually. This made David say, "Early will I seek thee." It is an inestimable mercy to have these earnest desires and fervent wrestlings kept alive in the breast until the Lord is pleased to manifest himself in love and mercy to the soul. He is worth seeking, for he is the pearl of great price; but he will be sought unto as well as sought after. Solomon speaks of this when he says, "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures" (Prov. 2:3, 4); and, again, "Wisdom," which is Christ, for he "of God is made unto us wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:30), "is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding." (Prov. 4:7.) In this way Jacob wrestled with the angel; and when he found him saying, "Let me go, for the day breaketh," he cried out almost in an agony of wrestling despair, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." (Gen. 32:26.) And what encouragement there is thus to wrestle! Has not the Lord himself declared, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain?" (Isai. 45:19.) But he must be sought unto diligently; and it may be long before he is found to the joy of the soul. Precious things are not easily found. Stones and mud and dirt may be gathered from every road; but diamonds, pearls, rubies, and sapphires are not to be found lying in every street. Pebbles lie by thousands on the sea-shore; but the pearl of great price, hidden in the sand, is very rarely found.

lii. But David speaks of another feeling of his soul, for one word was insufficient to express the cravings of his heart; and he uses a word which the Scripture has very much consecrated to set forth Spiritual desire. "My soul," he says,

"thirsteth for thee." Of all painful feelings—I mean all such painful feelings as admit of a natural and prescribed alleviation—none can exceed that of severe and protracted thirst. We can bear hunger. Shipwrecked sailors or wanderers in a desert have lived for days without food, but not without water. The dying can do without a morsel of food, but even the dying want the lips touched with liquid. The universal cry over the battle-field where the wounded are lying midst the heaps of dead, is for water; and as life drains away, if fainter the cry yet more intense the feeling. In hot climates especially—as we ourselves may gather from our scanty experience in our late hot summer—the feelings of thirst are in some proportion to the degree of heat; and all eastern travellers assure us that from no other source when water cannot be obtained is there suffering so great. The craving for water, then, when a supply is denied, is one of the most painful feelings that the body can experience. But does not the intensity of this feeling all the more aptly signify the spiritual craving of the soul for the water of life? To a man perishing of thirst in a wilderness, you might offer gold, silver, precious stones, heaps of merchandise, and all the camels with all their burdens on their backs in one hand, and a cup of water in the other. But would he not at once say, "One thing only, one thing only, I want: the cup of cold water: give me that, I am saved; deny me that, I sink and perish in the sand?" So in grace. Let God give his child everything the world loves; riches, honour, power, health, strength, and worldly happiness; and he will say, when brought into distress and trouble of soul, or lying upon a dying bed, "This is not Jesus. This does not take away the guilt from my conscience under which it grieves and groans; this does not fill my heart with peace, without which I cannot live or die; this removes not the sting of Death, who even now stands before me with his uplifted dart; this closes not the gate of hell which seems gaping at my feet, nor opens

the door of heaven whither my soul longs to fly. I feel myself a poor, perishing sinner, and all these worldly things only torture my mind; I cannot bear to think of them: they only plague and distress me. It is Jesus I want, in the manifestations to my soul of his blood, obedience, and love." This is thirsting for God, for the living God; and the more that you are enabled thus to crave him; the more simply, sincerely, and strongly that your soul goes out in desires after him for what he is in himself, the more do you come to the Scriptural description of "thirsting" after him. What a striking figure has David made use of, where he says, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." Conceive a wounded stag, with the arrow in his flank or pursued by a crowd of hunters and hounds, all eager to pull him down; conceive him to have run for some space of time under a burning sun and over heaps of sand; and conceive that at a distance this poor wounded or hunted animal sees water gently flowing along. Oh, how it pants! How its heaving sides gasp, and how it longs for the cooling stream, not only that it may drink large draughts of the fresh waters and lave its panting flank and weary parched limbs, but, by swimming across, may haply escape the dogs and hunters at its heels. How strong, how striking the figure! And yet, strong as it is, how earnestly does David employ it to set forth the panting of his soul after God. We cannot, perhaps, rise up into the fulness of this figure; we cannot, we dare not lay our feelings stretched fully out side by side with his, or use the same burning, vehement, ardent expressions. But we may at least see from them what the saints of God have experienced in times of temptation and trial in days of old; and we may in some measure compare the feelings of our soul with theirs—sometimes to fill us with shame and confusion at our short comings, sometimes to stimulate and encourage us so far as we experience a degree of similar teachings; for these things are written for our instruction,

"upon whom the ends of the world are come." Thus in various ways and to various ends we may, with God's help and blessing, look at and into such expressions as we find in our text, "My soul thirsteth after thee," and in the fear of God search our hearts to see if we can find anything there corresponding to the work of grace that the Holy Ghost describes as existing in David's soul. Nor be utterly cast down nor wholly discouraged if you cannot find a full or close similarity. Can you find *any*? If so, take encouragement, for the Lord despises not the day of small things. It is his own work upon the heart and his own work alone to which he has regard, as David felt when he said, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the works of thine own hands." (Psal. 138:8.) And that work will ever be a copy in full or in miniature, a complete or reduced photograph, of the work of grace described in the Scripture as carried on by the Spirit in the hearts of God's saints of old.

iii. But David speaks also of "*longing*" for God. We know what the word means in a natural sense, and indeed sometimes we know the meaning of the word too well; for we often, like children, long for things that were they given to us, so far from doing us good, would only do us a deal of harm. As a child will long for unripe fruit, rich food, or highly seasoned dishes, and cry for them, so that it can hardly be satisfied except the parent give them, though they are injurious to his health; so we have many longings that our heavenly Parent knows are but unhealthy cravings, the gratification of which would do us mischief instead of good. Sickly, unhealthy children generally long most for green fruit; and therefore we take these unnatural longings as marks of ill health and depraved appetite. To see them in our children fills us, therefore, with apprehension. But longing for healthy food we like to see in them; for as sickly longings manifest a

depraved appetite, so healthy hunger shows vigorous health; nor can a child hunger too much in a parent's eyes for good food, if he has it to bestow. So in grace. Your unhealthy longings; your sickly cravings for self-indulgence, fleshly ease, and a larger measure of earthly good; your lustings after wealth, worldly prosperity, respectability, with all the desires of the carnal mind for the enjoyments, such as they are, of sin,—all such base inclinations the Lord sees to be marks of disease, and as a kind as well as a wise Parent, in his providence or by his grace, denies you their gratification. But he does love a longing after himself, for he has inspired the feeling; he has himself created the desire; nor does anything please him more than to see a saint on earth longing for intercourse with himself as the God of heaven. It must be his grace to produce this feeling of desire toward him. He is invisible to the eye of sense; for he "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto." We have not heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. Whence, then, this longing in your bosom? What makes you at times, when you lie awake in the silent watches of the night, look up with anxious eye and wrestling heart, and long after God? What makes you fall upon your knees before the footstool of mercy, and cry with such vehement desires that he would come down and bless you? Why at other seasons, every now and then through the day, does a sigh or a groan burst forth from your soul that the Lord would manifest himself in love and mercy to your heart? Are these cries the product of nature? Are these longings and breathings so earnest, so continual, so spread, it may be, through days and weeks and months and years, the fruits of the flesh? Let me give you one proof that they are not. Do carnal, unregenerate men know anything of these holy longings and spiritual breathings after an invisible God, or after a manifestation of the blood and love of Christ? Though you feel them to be in your breast, you cannot perhaps take them altogether to yourself

as so many clear and indubitable marks of grace, for you find so much sin and carnality working in you that when you would grasp them as marks of grace, your hand seems palsied, and they drop out of your fingers before you can plant them firmly in your bosom as the Lord's work. But they are such, though you cannot take the comfort of them. Depend upon this, that no unregenerated man ever longed truly and really for God. He might desire to have his sins pardoned, under the convictions and stings of his natural conscience; he might even wish to go to heaven that he might escape hell; but he never desired God for what he is in himself. He is too pure and holy, too great and glorious a Being for a natural heart to love, or a carnal mind to desire. Even a convinced sinner often feels with Job, "For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness, I could not endure." (Job. 31:23.) But every unregenerate sinner says unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." (Job 21:14.) There must be a new nature raised up in the soul, a new heart and a new spirit, before God can be desired for his own sake. So that though you may not be able to take these desires and longings after God as gracious evidences; and so far it is a mercy that you cannot, as otherwise you would be satisfied without revealed blessings and sweet manifestations of pardoning love, yet they are marks of grace and tokens for good; and for this very reason the Lord has recorded them in his word, that they might be for the encouragement of his people. Just, then, before we pass on any further, compare what takes place at various times in the depths of your own soul with what David describes as taking place in his: "Early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee." If there are in your soul breathings similar, if not so deep, you have so far marks and evidences that God is your God, though you may not be able, in the sweet approbation of faith, to say with unfaltering lips, "*O God, thou art my God!*"

I fully grant were you able to say this, it would put more life into your longing, more earnestness into your seeking, and more power into your wrestling; for it is this appropriating faith which holds the Lord so firmly in the arms of wrestling prayer. But though you cannot, from various internal hindrances, rise up into the sweet appropriation of faith, yet, as having these longings, seekings, and desires, you have so far an indubitable, because scriptural, evidence that God has not left you devoid of a work of grace upon your heart.

II.—But I pass on to show the spot where David was when he uttered these words, "*A dry and thirsty land where no water is.*" We must not suppose for a single moment that David had respect to any local circumstances in which he then was placed. We have no reason to believe that he was at that time in a natural desert, or that his tongue literally cleaved to the roof of his mouth for the want of a flowing brook or a cooling stream; but the literal desert, of which there is no lack even in the very vicinity of Jerusalem, presented itself as a figure to his soul, to express his spiritual feelings. Viewed in this light, there is something very expressive in the words, "a dry and thirsty land where no water is." Thus looking at it as a figure, and seeking to gather from it spiritual instruction, we may enquire from the Scriptures and the records of inward experience, What is this "dry and thirsty land?"

1. First, we may explain the words as referring to the earth on which our lot is cast; this vale of tears in which we at present dwell. Now this to the natural eye is not a dry and thirsty land. The natural eye, especially when undimmed by sickness or sorrow, sees much beauty in it; and, indeed, in a sense, earth is still beautiful, though the fall has sadly marred its primitive and original beauty. But as this is not seen except by the believing soul, the natural eye gazes with delight upon the rich pastures, the verdant hedges, the

blooming meads, and the smiling rivers of our home scenery; and with still greater delight upon the lofty mountains and rich valleys of Alpine lands. Looking at these romantic prospects, many a heart swells with emotion; and at such seasons earth to the natural eye seems full of beauty and glory. But O, amidst all these scenes of earthly beauty, what does the spiritual eye see? Misery and wretchedness, and all flowing from one source—sin. It has often been remarked, that the fairest scenes hide the foulest sins; and that the most blooming portions of our earth are most polluted with crime; as if to show the greater contrast between the works of God and man. But whatever beauty earth may wear to the eye, sin, sin, horrid sin, has marred it all; the curse of God rests upon the whole, for the original sentence still remains unremoved and unalleviated, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life." (Gen. 3:17.)

David, then, viewing the prospect around him, spoke of earth as a "dry and thirsty land," as expressive of the feelings of his soul towards it. What did he want? What earth could not give. The earth, then, to him was "dry." What charm has a beautiful prospect to a dying man? What attraction has mountain or valley to a guilty conscience? Or, to use David's figure, what water to relieve a parched soul can gush from a romantic landscape? Earth could not give the Lord's presence to David's heart. Could it have given him what he longed so ardently to feel and enjoy, earth then would not have been "dry;" it would have been full of water, such a land spiritually as Moses described the promised land to be, "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills." (Deut. 8:7.) But earth could not give him what he wanted. He wanted God for what he was in himself, that he might personally enjoy the manifestations of his love, the blessedness of his presence, the smiles of his

countenance, the whispers of his favour. Especially he coveted God as his Father and his Friend, as his Rock and his Fortress and his Deliverer; his God, his strength; "his buckler and the horn of his salvation and his high tower." (Psalm 18:2.) These heavenly streams he thirsted to enjoy; but earth could not give him a drop of what he thus longed to drink. To him, therefore, it was "*dry*," because it did not give him that which his soul thirsted for. It might give him everything else; and we know that, as king of Israel, he had the largest share possible of earthly good. But that was not what he wanted. There was one thing his heart was fixed upon; and not having that, he felt he had nothing. Look at a poor widow just bereaved of her husband: she walks out in the flush of early spring, but is solitary and desolate, for she has lost the arm upon which she leaned; and sees the meadows clothed with beauty, and children gathering flowers in the mead; but what is all this to her? How looks earth to her dimmed, weeping eyes? Clad in sackcloth, dressed in the same mourning weeds in which she herself is clothed. Or look at a mother who has lost her only child; perhaps mourning over a daughter who perished in a miserable manner in India—hurled down the well at Cawnpore, or dragged naked through the streets of Delhi. She walks through London streets, where all is gaiety and splendour; she sees rolling carriages carry maidens which now are what her daughter once was. What is their beauty, or rank, or dress to her? As she sees these daughters of pride and fashion, she inwardly cries, "Oh, my daughter! my daughter!" The very contrast only fills her heart with racking thoughts of her miserable child, who perished far away from her in a way that chills her very blood. Now, why should not the fields in spring give to the widow the same delight they yield to others; and why should not the London gaieties afford the same pleasure to the mother sorrowing over her lost daughter that they do to so many spectators? Why but because her soul is filled with

bitterness and grief? So it is in its spiritual sense: the world is full of trouble and sorrow to distressed consciences and mourning pilgrims. The things of time and sense cannot amuse them as they amuse others; for they feel with David—"The troubles of my heart are enlarged:" "my spirit is overwhelmed within me: my heart within me is desolate." (Psalm 25:17; 143:4.) God is absent; the Comforter withdrawn; Jesus not there; and this makes earth to be a dry land where there is no water.

And what a mercy it is that it should be so. Unless earth be dry, heaven will not unfold to you its rich stores of wine and milk and honey. If you are full of earth, heaven has no charms for your soul. Drink in sin as the ox drinketh down water; take your fill of pleasure, and gaiety, and amusement, and all the things that delight the carnal mind; drink them all in; drink them all in! You have now no heart for Jesus or his love. But find all things dry, and barrenness and death stamped upon all below the skies, and wherever you cast your eyes earth a sterile desert because Jesus and his love and blood are not there: *then* you can enter into the feelings of the Psalmist, when he said "in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

2. But he calls the land "*thirsty*" as well as "dry." How can the land be thirsty? The figure is borrowed from our natural thirst, and the expression implies a quality of never being able to be satiated. "The thirsty land" is one of such a porous and sandy nature that through it all the showers of heaven run away; ever insatiable, yet never fertilised, for no amount of rain can communicate the moisture necessary to impart fertility. Such is *the world* in its cravings for happiness. All the bounties of God in his kind providence cannot enrich the world, and especially *the worldly heart* that still dwells in the saint's breast. The craving desires of the carnal mind are like

the two daughters of the horse leech, which are ever crying, "Give, give!" "Give, give!" cries covetousness. "Give, give!" cries pride. "Give, give!" cries every carnal desire of the earthly mind as its various lusts and passions are stirred up. But could all be given that sin could lust after, the result would be still the same: satiety for a time, but insatiability for the future. Sin is like a man in a dropsy, ever craving, ever craving liquid; or like a drunkard, who the more he drinks the more he wants to drink: ever craving, ever craving stronger and stronger drink, as if nothing but drink, drink, could cool his parched tongue or wind up his sinking spirits; and so he drinks till he dies, a poor miserable, drunken suicide. Such, as opened up by divine light, is the natural heart of man to himself—a "thirsty land, where no water is."

3. But taking the words in a wider signification, we may say that *wherever the love, mercy, and goodness of God are not to be found*, that place is to a child of God "a thirsty land." You may have providential mercies showered upon you; but like "the thirsty land," all these showers run through and run away, and leave your heart a barren desert. In fact, to a child of God all is "a thirsty land" where God is not. Search the world from pole to pole; rove and roam from land to land; cross seas and oceans; and whether you live in the crowded haunts of men, or inhabit a hut in an Australian wilderness, if the Lord's presence and power be not in your soul, every clime and country will be a thirsty land where no water is. As the same sun shines in every clime; as the same wind everywhere blows, and the same rain everywhere falls, so is man the same in every country, in every state, and every condition; and the heart that beats under the purple and fine linen is the same as that which beats under rags and dirt. Nor can the whole range of human intellect, or human knowledge, or the advance of human society, in any of its varied forms, take God's curse off the earth. It is the

pressure of this upon a spiritual mind and the view of this with a spiritual eye, which brings every one taught of God to the same conclusion as to what this world really is, and that it truly is to every believing heart a "thirsty land, where no water is."

4. But the words are not only expressive of what the earth is to the saint of God, but descriptive also of the dry and thirsty land of *his own soul*; for *there* we want the streams to flow; there we wish the springs to rise, and there we desire the water of eternal life to come. "Spring up, O well!" is the cry of the soul to the Lord continually that has ever felt his presence and his power, had a taste of his grace, or a view of his glory. To be then in those spots into which we sometimes sink; to have nothing within that seems like life; no enjoyment of his presence, no sweet peace or joy in believing, no feeling of love to the Lord, or to his people, no satisfaction or contentment with his dealings in providence or grace; to be thus in the feelings of the heart is to be in a "dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

The marginal reading gives us a very expressive term, descriptive of this state of mind, "a *weary* land." Is not this very expressive of the feelings of your heart when you are weary of everything and of everybody, and weary of nothing so much as your miserable self; weary of saints, weary of sinners; weary of professors and weary of possessors; weary of earth and weary of everything upon earth, but after all weary of nothing so much as your own miserable heart. "But," you say, "is it possible that a child of God can ever be in that state of mind?" May I not meet this question by another? How came the Psalmist so to describe it, if it were not so? For he could not mean that the land itself was "weary," but that he was weary in it; as we say, sometimes, "what a weary road," or "what a weary journey," when the

weariness is not in them but in us. Nor do I think that I have deviated from the teaching of the Holy Spirit in thus opening up the experience of the Psalmist's soul, as pointed out by the expression, "a weary land." Does not the Lord use the same language where he speaks of his dear Son as man, being "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land?" Oh, it is not the land that is weary, but the traveller in it; and "the shadow of a great rock" is only acceptable to the weary traveller. The Lord himself says, "the Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary" (Isai. 50:4); and again, "I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul." (Jer. 31:25.) And we may well ask why should the Holy Spirit have recorded these characters and these promises in the Scriptures of truth except the saints of God, and highly favoured saints of God too, were at times in the condition of mind, described in the character and addressed in the promise?

III.—But I pass on to our next point, which is, what David, in this dry and thirsty land, longed to see: "*To see thy power and thy glory.*" He had done with the power of man; at least as far as regards the things of God. If this psalm was written when he was driven from Jerusalem by the rebellion of Absalom, he had been a powerful monarch; he had sat upon the throne of Israel; thousands upon thousands had bowed before his sceptre; and his word had been law over a vast tract of country. But now in the wilderness he was not longing to see his own power re-established. That never had and never could satisfy his soul; and now in his eyes was nothing. What he now wanted to see was the power of God, and that by no external display of his greatness and majesty, but by the revelation of this power to his heart. As regards earthly power, we are but humble subjects compared to this mighty king as he sat upon his throne at Jerusalem. But in

spiritual things, we may have the same feelings as he experienced in the wilderness. We feel with him that it is not our own power, the power of the flesh, that we wish to see displayed. If any lesson has been written upon our heart by the finger of God, has not this been deeply printed there: our want of power to believe, to hope, to love, to obey; that there is no strength, wisdom, or goodness in the creature; in a word, that man by nature has neither will nor power to seek or serve God? As this sense of creature helplessness is felt in the heart and made known in the conscience, there is created by the same blessed Spirit, who gives us to feel our helplessness, a longing to see the power of God, and that as especially put forth in the Person, the work, the blood, the obedience, and the love of Jesus; for he is "the power of God" as well as "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24); and "the kingdom of God," of which he is the Lord and Head, "is not in word but in power." (1 Cor. 4:20.) It was "the power of God" that raised Christ from the dead; and the same power is put forth in every believing heart, according to those words of the apostle, "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places?" (Ephes. 1:19, 20.) Is not the gospel itself "the power of God unto salvation?" (Rom. 1:16.) Does not all true faith "stand in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4)? and does not God give "the spirit of power and love" to those who fear his great name? (2 Tim. 1:7.) In fact, we know nothing of true faith if we know nothing of "the power of God," for it is "the work of faith with power." (2 Thess. 1:11.) In longing, therefore, to see God's "power," we long to see first that power as displayed in the Person, work, and resurrection of Christ; and then to feel that power put forth in our own soul. Thus the desire of Paul was that he might "know Christ, and the power of his resurrection," as a

most blessed experimental reality in his own soul. (Phil. 3:10.)

Salvation by grace is the greatest act that the mind of God ever conceived, or the power of God ever accomplished. It was easy to create the world. God had but to speak, and the sun started in the sky; when he said "Let there be light," there was light. But to save a sinner, a rebel, a transgressor, taxed, if I may use the expression, God's wisdom to the utmost. And view the power displayed in the putting away, the blotting out, and the thorough removal of sin, and I may add, of millions of sins. Look at what sin has done! How one proud thought hurled thousands of bright spirits from heaven into hell, and turned holy seraphs into the foulest fiends, the implacable foes of God and man. Look at the Deluge; look at Sodom and Gomorrah; look at the siege and destruction of Jerusalem; look into the abyss of an ever opening hell; or to bring the matter nearer home, look at the weight of sin upon the conscience of one guilty sinner; and then, take the weight of all the sins of the innumerable millions redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and view them all charged upon the head of Jesus! What a power was put forth in him to sustain the weight of all those sins, and thus reconcile and harmonise all God's inherent attributes—that mercy should not triumph at the expense of justice; that justice should maintain all her claims, and yet mercy have her fullest exercise; that the Law should sustain to the utmost its rigid, unbending rights, and yet that the Gospel should hang around it its glorious trophies. What a display, too, of wisdom and power is continually manifested in the personal salvation and sanctification of every redeemed, regenerated child of grace. Fully, freely, everlastingly to save a poor, miserable, guilty sinner from the depths of the fall; to change him by the power of divine grace into a saint; to prepare him for the eternal participation and enjoyment of the glory which the

Son of God had with the Father before the foundation of the world; to make him meet for the inheritance of the saints in light by giving him a nature capable of enjoying all the holy perfections of a Triune God, as displayed in the glorious Person of Immanuel, and that to all eternity! What a power is displayed here! What is creation with all its wonders to this? What are seas, with all their strange, innumerable inhabitants; what is earth, with all its mineral, animal, or vegetable marvels; what is sun, or moon, or stars, however great or glorious this mighty host, compared with hosts of millions of sinners, all saved by sovereign grace, all washed in atoning blood, all clothed in Immanuel's righteousness, and all sanctified by the Spirit's work upon their hearts? Is not every saved soul a miracle of almighty power? Are not all the dealings of the Lord with him and for him acts of omnipotence? The way in which the Lord defeats Satan, with all his wiles and snares, overcomes the strength of sin, and delivers the believer from its dominion, a miracle which none but he can effect; begins, carries on, and completes the work of grace in his heart; overrules all events and circumstances, and makes them work together for his good; delivers out of every trial; subdues and subjugates every evil; and eventually brings him unto the eternal enjoyment of himself—O what a display of infinite power is revealed in every vessel of mercy! David longed to see this power, as the right arm of the Lord, displayed and especially put forth in his own case. For is it not in our own case that we want to see that power displayed; in our own heart that power made experimentally known? Have not unbelief and sin and guilt power there? And where should we want to see and feel the power of God but in the same heart, that he there might be stronger than they? I am very sure that if a man know nothing of the power of God in his soul he can know nothing of true religion or vital godliness. The strong man armed will keep the palace till the stronger than he comes upon him,

overcomes him, and takes from him all his armour wherein he trusted. Either sin must reign or grace; unbelief or faith; the flesh or the Spirit; Belial or Christ. Every true Christian is sighing, I may say daily, after the power of God; and the more that divine life springs up in his heart the more he longs after its felt, enjoyed manifestations; nor does he ever feel his need of it more than when he is in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.

ii. But David desired to see also "*glory*" as well as "power:" "*To see thy glory.*" Was not this also the desire of Moses? "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." And what is this but the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? for this is that which God gives and the soul sees when he shines into the heart, as the Apostle speaks, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.) The Lord Jesus Christ, as the eternal Son of God, is "the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his Person" (Heb. 1:3); and this was the glory which his disciples saw and which drew their heart toward him, as John speaks, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14.) It was in this way faith was raised up in their heart, as we read, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him." (John 2:11.) To see this glory by the eye of faith has a transforming efficacy, for by a view of it we are renewed in the spirit of our mind. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.) The glory of Christ, in his suffering manhood, was veiled from the eyes of all but those who were taught by the blessed Spirit and enlightened

to see it. And what glory is still to be seen by believing eyes in an incarnate God! The grandeur of Deity, tempered by the weakness of humanity, and yet shining through it, as the noonday sun shines through the clouds, which so far veil his rays that though they permit him to be seen they do not dazzle nor blind the eye! The Son of God in the babe of Bethlehem; the "only begotten of the Father," sweating great drops of blood in the Garden, and hanging upon the cross at Calvary; yet in his lowest state, when covered to man's eye with ignominy and shame, glory streaming from every pore of his sacred body, majesty and beauty shining forth from every lineament of his marred countenance; and love and mercy characterizing every word issuing from his languid lips! None will ever see the glory of a risen, ascended, and glorified Christ in the open bliss of heaven who do not first see him on earth in his humiliation as a suffering Christ; and indeed it is his suffering glory which is now so blessed and so suitable to a guilty sinner. To see this suffering glory of the Son of God revealed to his soul by a divine power, made over to him as his salvation, and containing in it the essence of all his present and future happiness; this is the glory that a redeemed and regenerated saint longs to see and feel. What glory can "the world give compared with the glory of the marred countenance of the suffering Son of God? By the side of his cross all earthly glory pales, withers, and dies; for death puts an end to everything naturally bright and glorious. Well has God spoken of the end of all human glory; "Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth shall descend into it." (Isai. 5:14.) But that glory which begins with the cross ends with the crown; for "if we suffer with him we shall also be glorified together." (Rom. 8:17.) To see this glory of a suffering Christ by the eye of faith; to feel the heart deeply penetrated and inwardly possessed by it; to have it for our daily bread and

our daily drink; to come as led by the Spirit to this ever-spread table of the flesh of Christ, this ever-flowing fountain of his atoning blood, and hear the Lord himself saying, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved. Here is food to feed your immortal soul; here are streams of pardon and peace; here the rivers of eternal life: Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will let him take the water of life freely;"—to see, to enjoy, to feel, and experience this in his own dry, thirsty, and weary bosom, this is to see the glory of God, as revealed in the Person, work, blood, obedience, and love of his dear Son.

IV.—But I pass on to our last point, which is, the remembrance that came over the Psalmist's soul of what he had seen and felt in time past, and the *place* where he had enjoyed it, "To see thy power and thy glory, so *as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*" We may understand by the "sanctuary" here not merely the tabernacle set up in the wilderness, or the temple afterwards erected at Jerusalem, though we have reason to believe that the Lord did specially manifest his power and glory there to believing Israel; but taking a wider view of the subject, we may say that every place in which the Lord manifests himself, is a sanctuary to a child of God. Thus the Lord promised to his scattered people that "he himself would be as a little sanctuary in the countries where they should come." (Ezekiel 11:16.) Jesus is now our sanctuary; for he is "the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man." The tabernacle of the wilderness was but a shadow, and the substance having come, the shadow is gone. As, then, David saw the power and glory of God in the sanctuary, so we see that power and that glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we may give a further sense to the word. Every place is a "sanctuary" where God manifests himself in power and glory

to the soul. Moses, doubtless, had often passed by the bush which grew in Horeb; it was but a common hawthorn bush, in no way distinguished from the other bushes of the copse; but on one solemn occasion it was all "in a flame of fire," for "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire" out of the midst; and though it burnt with fire, it was not consumed. God being in the bush, the ground round about was holy, and Moses was bidden to put off his shoes from off his feet. (Exodus 3:2, 5.) Was not this a sanctuary to Moses? It was, for a holy God was there. Thus wherever God manifests himself, that becomes a sanctuary to a believing soul. We want not places made holy by the ceremonies of man, but places made holy by the presence of God. Then a stable, a hovel, a hedge, any homely corner may be, and is a sanctuary, when God fills your heart with his sacred presence, and causes every holy feeling and gracious affection to spring up in your soul. If ever you have seen this in times past, you have seen God in the sanctuary; for then your heart becomes the sanctuary of God, according to his own words, "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them." (2 Cor. 4:16.) Are not your very bodies the temples of the Holy Ghost? (1 Cor. 6:19.) Does not Christ dwell in the heart by faith? (Ephes. 3:17); and is he not formed there, the hope of glory? (Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:27.) It is then not only in Christ *without* but in Christ *within* that we see the power and glory of God. It is in this way that we become consecrated to the service and glory of God, set our affections upon heavenly things, and obtain a foretaste of eternal joy.

But, alas! the soul is not often or long here. We lose sight of these blessed realities and get into a "dry and thirsty land where no water is." But the Lord in mercy again revives his work upon the heart, and then springs up afresh the longing desire to see his power and his glory. If we have once seen

it, we shall long to see it again: if we have once enjoyed it, we shall desire to enjoy it again. Nor will the Lord deny the earnest desires or turn a deaf ear to the cries of his people. Every visit of his presence is a pledge for another; for whom the Lord loveth, he loveth to the end, and the grace that he gives he will most certainly crown with glory.