

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

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## THE PANTING HART

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A Sermon

Delivered by

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*“As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.” — Psalm 42:1*

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**T**here is something to be lamented in this state of mind, for if the psalmist had maintained unbroken communion with his God, he would not have been so much panting after Him as enjoying Him. It is deeply to be deplored that we who sometimes bask in the sunshine of God's countenance cannot live so as always to enjoy it. Wherefore do we wander? Why do we grieve His Holy Spirit? Why do we turn aside from God, our exceeding joy? Wherefore do we provoke Him to jealousy, and cause Him to make us grope in darkness, and sigh out of a lonely and desolate heart? There is much of an evil heart of unbelief in these departings from the living God; if, therefore, we can join in the language of the text, we must not too much congratulate ourselves, for though it be a sign of grace to pant after God as the hart pants for the waterbrooks, yet it is an equally certain sign of a want of more grace, and the loss of a privilege which we should strive always to possess. We are yet but poor in spiritual things when we might be rich; we are thirsting when we might put flagons to our lips. At the same time there is very much which is commendable in the desire expressed in the text; the insatiable desire which burned in the psalmist's heart is a heavenly flame enkindled from above. If I have not my Lord in near and dear communion, it is at least the next best thing to be unutterably wretched until I find Him. If I do not sit at His banquets, yet blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness. If my beloved be not in mine embrace, yet so long as I am not contented without Him, so long as I sigh, and cry, and follow hard after Him, I may be assured that I am in the possession of His love, and that ere long I shall find Him to the joy of my soul. Our text, then, has a warp and a woof of differing colours, sin and grace are mingled: the

wine is mixed with water, yet it is wine; there is some alloy in the silver, yet silver it assuredly is. David sighs as none but a saint can do, and yet if he had not been a sinner too, such sighs had not been necessary. Brother, such good and such evil are in thee; search and look, and pray the great Spirit to remove the ill and nourish the good.

**I** Coming straight to the text, we shall notice, in the first place, **THE OBJECT OF THE DESIRE** which the psalmist here describes.

The hart pants after the waterbrooks, and David pants after his God, the living God. I do not find him expressing a single word of regret as to His absence from His throne. Probably he wrote this psalm when he had been expelled from his country by his ungrateful son, Absalom; but he does not say, "My soul panteth after my royalties and the splendor of the kingdom of Judah;" no, not a word of it; he lets the baubles go, he gives up these uneasy pomps, content to let all go for ever if he may but find his God. Well may we let the chaff go if we retain the wheat. I do not find him even mentioning his home, and yet he was a man of a loving spirit, who delighted to bless his household, but here I read not a word concerning his palace, his gardens, or his treasures; not even for his children can he spare a sigh: let him be banished from his own house, and it will not displease him if he be not banished from the house of God also. To him his dwelling place was the Lord, and dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, his joys were all complete. Nor is there even a word about his much loved country. David was a very prince of patriots, yet he sighs not for Jerusalem, he pines not for the well of Bethlehem; neither the roses of Sharon nor the lilies of the valley command his lamentations; for the excellency of Carmel or the glory of Lebanon he utters no cry of desire; but his one sigh is for his God, the God of his life, his exceeding joy. When shall he come and appear before God? When shall he join in the assembly and keep holyday? This one grief, like a huge mountain-torrent, swept away all minor streams, absorbing themselves into its own rush and volume; like an avalanche, which binds the snow masses to itself as it descends, so his one desire concentrated all the vehemence and force of his nature. His God, his God—he cannot live without his God. He cries for Him as a lost child for its father; as a bleating lamb he will not be content till he finds his parent.

David pined for permission to enjoy again the means of grace; he longed to go up to the tabernacle once again; he desired to see the priests offering the sacrifices, and himself to go unto the altar of God; but observe, beloved, that he does not dwell upon the outward worship, nor dilate upon its symbolic pomp and sacred splendor; he passes right through them all, as the priest of old passed through the outer court; only the innermost court will satisfy him. He penetrates within the shell and desires the inward kernel; the carnal ordinance cannot content him, he must have the spiritual life and substance. He does not so much pine for the sacrifices as for his God; neither for the priest, nor for the altar, nor for the tabernacle doth he cry, but for his God; for he had learned what modern professors have not learned, that the outward is as nothing, and the inward is as everything. "The kingdom of God is within you;" it is not meat, nor drink, nor outward worship; and the God whom you adore is not pleased with your words and your genuflections, and your outward forms of speech and observance, but He is only pleased when you press through

all this and come to Him, come into fellowship with Him, and speak to Him as a spirit speaking with a spirit, as one possessing a secret life speaking in the power of that life to the invisible and ever-living God. This is what David longed after then; neither his throne, nor his house, nor his country, nor even the outward means of grace by themselves alone, but his God he panted after, his God alone; and this was his cry, “When shall I come and appear before God?”

I suppose the longing of the psalmist to have consisted of the following particulars. He longed to appear before his God, that is to say, *heartily to unite in the worship of the assembled crowd*. He could have worshipped alone; but sympathy has great power over the human mind, and to join with our brethren of one faith is very helpful to our devotion; besides, in that age of types there was one spot sacred above all others, and every devout Israelite was bound to go up to the sacred shrine. David recollected when the great shout went up at the tabernacle-gate to him “whose mercy endureth for ever.” In his loneliness his fancy brought to his ears the song of the multitude as they chanted the glorious hallelujah, and he pined to be there to swell the strain. Not, however, because the merely being there would satisfy him, but because he felt, if he could join the throng, he was in such a state of soul that he could throw his whole heart into the worship. And, O my brethren and sisters, you and I, when we lose for awhile the freshness of our spirituality, how we desire to get it back again, that we may once more, in vitality of godliness, worship God with His people! Oh, it is blessed to be here when we can stand and sing unto our Well-beloved a song; when we can kneel with the congregation, and join in the common supplication, ourselves getting a grip of the angel, and holding him fast, and not letting him go until he blesses us! Is it not delightful to listen to the word preached in the great congregation, when the morsel is dipped in the honey for me in particular; when I can glean among the sheaves for myself and gather the handfuls that are let fall on purpose for me, and can carry home my part of the day’s provision with humble gratitude! Is it not so, beloved? And if you have fallen into such a state of mind that you do not now enjoy the services of God’s house as you once did, I would persuade you to ask the Lord to give you the strong desire of David, that you may again in spirit in very truth appear before God; for, I beseech you, never let the mere coming together content you, but let your panting be, like that of the stag, after the waterbrook and nothing else—for God, for God, for God Himself, and nothing short of Him. It is right to pine for the outward services when we feel that they are profitable to us, and when we have been banished from the church of God for awhile, or have been confined by sickness, or have been compelled to sit under an unprofitable ministry, we may well sigh for the very walls which enclose the people whom we love. Often in France, and Switzerland, and Italy, have I felt the power of this text, “As the heart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God,” and I have sung: —

*“Might I enjoy the meanest place  
Within Thine house, O God of grace!  
Not tents of ease, nor thrones of power,  
Should tempt my feet to leave Thy door.”*

Further than this, David's desire comprehended a longing after *a restored confidence as to his interest in the love of God*. He knew that God loved him. Three or four times over in his Psalm he speaks like a man whose faith holds its own, "For I shall yet praise him," saith he, "who is the health of my countenance and my God." A man may know his interest in Christ, and yet it may be a matter of some dispute with him—he may derive but little present comfort from it; but oh how delightful it is when we know whom we have believed, and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him. When the Lord's everlasting, unbounded, unchangeable love to us is no more a matter of question than our own existence; when we can say, "My Father, God," with an unfaltering tongue, this is the cream of life; and as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so ought we to pant after this, that we may always know by the infallible witness of the Holy Spirit, that assuredly we are in the love of God, our names written in the Book of Life, ourselves for ever dear to the eternal Father, and registered in the rolls of the family that He hath begotten. Oh, happy they who possess this! Dear friend, if you do not at this hour enjoy it, seek it, seek it ravenously, beyond all bounds of intensity; seek it until you find it in sweet dependence upon Jesus.

But David wanted more than this; not merely, as we have said, to worship God heartily and to have a confidence in the divine love, but he longed really to have that love shed abroad in his heart. You know, beloved, what this means, this outpouring of divine love, when it is not merely a belief with you that God loves you, but you even feel that love of God shed abroad within you by the Holy Ghost which is given unto you. Oh, what joy this is; when it is at its full it is ravishing, so that whether in the body or out of the body we can sometimes scarcely tell. The love of God often overpowers the believer with its delight; he is faint with glory, sick of love! Have you never felt as if you were dwelling in the suburbs of heaven, standing in the border-land between the glory-life and the life that now is, tasting the clusters of Eshcol, and drinking from the crystal cups of the marriage supper? Beloved, under these rolling skies there is no bliss like the earnest of the Spirit, that antepast\* of celestial feasts, that pledges of joys to come. Oh yes, beloved, when we have actual fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, our joy is divinely crowned with a coronet of loving-kindness; there is a floodtide of the river of life in our spirit—every thought is active, every power is inspired, every passion is elevated, and the whole man is filled with all the fullness of God.

***“Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea,  
And lost in its immensity.”***

Now, abiding fellowship with God ought to be our daily life. The enjoyment of God's love ought not to be a thing of yesterday, nor of today, but of all days: for evermore should we walk with God as Enoch did; and if for awhile this holy joy is broken or withdrawn from us, then ought we with incessant importunity to take up the language of

\* *Something to whet the appetite, a foretaste.*

the text, and declare that “as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth our soul after thee, O God.”

Beloved, it may be this morning that I am speaking to some of you, who at one time were very lively and active Christians, making great advances in the divine life; but alas, at the present moment you feel yourselves to be very dull and heavy, and you are uneasy that it should be so. I thank God for that uneasiness. May these waves rise higher within you until they drive you back to your first moorings, and drift you to the place where once you had so much of joy and peace. I think I know what your experience is— know it, alas too well, by having experienced it myself.

*“What peaceful hours we once enjoyed!  
How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill.”*

We had just found Jesus, and we did not know how to think enough of Him, or speak well enough of His dear name. Now, alas, day will pass after day, and we scarcely say a word to his honor, or try to bring one poor heart to be enamoured of Him. Then the services of God’s house were inexpressibly delightful; we wished that Sabbaths were never over, and when they ended we looked forward to the next occasion when we should meet with the saints of God. But now we come and we go like the door on the hinges, and find no water in the well of ordinances. Time was when we worked much for our Lord, and in all we did, we did it with our might, throwing heart and soul into every labour. We felt His sweet presence in all our service, and indeed at all times. If we walked by the way, we walked with Him; if we awoke in the night, our soul was still with Him; if we were busy during the day, yet ejaculations were darted up in the little intervals between our business. But now, alas, it is not so as once it was. We can go day after day—not without prayer, thank God, not without praise, not without the assembling of ourselves together at ordinary times, but, alas, without the life, without the energy, without the joy, without the peace, without the holy anointing which we then knew. Oh then, beloved, let us not settle upon our lees; let us tremble, for chastisement is near, the rod will surely come upon us. God will not leave his children unchastened when they thus decline from His love. Grey hairs are coming upon us here and there, and now that we are made to see them, let us return unto Him from whom we have backslidden. He gently this morning saith to us by a brother’s voice, “Return, ye backsliding children.” Let it be our business to return. Meanwhile let our spirits be filled with the earnest desire of the text, for it will give us wings with which to return. “As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.”

**II.** We will now change the subject by considering **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DESIRE**, which we have tried to describe.

These characteristics are brought out by a metaphor. David compares himself to a stag when tormented with thirst. The comparison brings out, in the first place, as the characteristic of this desire, *directness*. The hart panteth—what for? You need not repeat the question or pause for a reply. Everybody can see by its smoking flanks, uplifted head, its palpitating heart, its rolling eye, its thrust-out tongue, that it is panting for the waterbrooks. So with David—he is ill at ease, but there is no question concerning what he needs to give him rest of heart: “So panteth my soul after thee, O God,” saith he, and so he goes at once to the point. He knew what he was at; here is no beating about the bush, no tacking to and fro; he directs his arrow straight at the centre of the target. “My soul thirsteth for God—for the living God.” Beloved, it is a great mercy when you and I know what we want, for ungodly men do not know. They thirst, but like petulant children, they know not what they are crying for. They long, and they pant, and their question is, “Who will show us any good?” But you and I know that our great need is the light of God’s countenance, and we have come to this, and we will stand to this, and hold to this, that we will never cease pleading, till we really see that face which makes the heaven of angels, and is all the heaven we desire.

Now, dear brother in Christ, is your desire as distinct and direct towards God as was the desire of David in the text? If not, chide yourself; chide yourself that you should be hovering circles where the straight line is so much better. Bring out in plain words your soul’s desire, let it well up from the lowest depths of your spirit, “I want—I want my God. I do not languish for that which others are fascinated with; I do not crave what others are ambitious for; but my God, my God, let me serve thee, and enjoy thee evermore! Why hast thou forsaken me? Return unto me now! Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation! Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation! Reveal thy Son in me, and be thyself my ever-present friend.”

Notice next in the text, *the unity* of the saint’s desire. The hart longs after nothing else but waterbrooks. There may have been other times when the poor stag had other natural desires: it may have desired the grassy plains or the shady woods, but now, hunted, wearied, steaming, panting, it must drink or die: it has but one only thought—the waterbrooks, the cool rippling rills, the refreshing pools. Now, beloved brother or sister, if you are about to get a blessing from the Lord, you will have but one desire—your God, your God. You will have gathered up all your affections into one affection, and they will all be ascending towards your Lord; you will make no conditions, no stipulations with Him; if He will but come, even though He bring a rod with him, you will be contented if He will but come. If you may but have His company, you will accept poverty, or the weary bed of sickness, or bereavement, or anything and everything which He may allot to you, if you may but have fellowship with Jesus. Let others ask for the bursting wine vat, or the barn that is filled with corn; for you it will be enough if you find your Beloved, and may but hold Him and not let Him go, for this is the one only all-absorbing longing of your hungering and thirsting spirit, that you may find your God, and be comforted with His eternal consolation. Have you never seen a little child that has lost its way crying in the streets for “Mother”? Now, you shall give that child what you will, but it will not stay its crying for “Mother.” It has lost her, and cannot be content. Take the little wanderer into

your house, show it many toys, give it many sweetmeats, but all are of no avail, it wants "Mother," and its little heart will burst unless it finds her. Now just show the little one its mother, let it fly into her bosom, and what more does it want? How perfectly content it is to be there! So have I felt, that if I might but sob myself to sleep on the bosom of my dear God, if I must have all else taken away from me, if so it should please Him, if I could but be with Him, no other desire or longing could ever cross my soul. I know it is so with all the family of the Lord our God; their love to Him makes His presence their all in all. See that dove just taken from the cage to be set free. Tempt it to remain with you, cast down the seeds it loves to feed upon; no, it will not dwell with you, it mounts, it makes a few circles in the air, and then having turned its eye to the dear familiar dovecote, it is all wing for home. What can stay its flight? Call to it, allure it as you will, straight as an arrow from a bow it flies to its own beloved home, and rests not its weary wing till it rests in the house of its love. Even so is it with the believer's soul, let him but go free and have his desire, unbind him of his corruptions, strip him of his cares, liberate him from his unbelief, let him have his freedom, and he will fly at once to his Lord Jesus, nor will anything tempt him to linger or find solace save in that blessed bosom of infinite love. A saint must have Christ to abide with him, as the one thing needful to him, for this, like Mary, he leaves all Martha's cares to sit at Jesus' feet.

Observe next *the intensity* of this desire. "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee." The panting of a thirsty hart is something terrible to see. It appears to thirst all over; every pore of its body is thirsting. It is not alone that heated tongue, those snorting nostrils, that glaring eye, but the creature in every part, in every hair, thirsts and pants. And so with the believer when he is without his God; if his soul be in a right state, he longs with all the force of his being to get back into his former happy condition. There is no staying him; there is no making him pause. Surely the psalmist chose thirst for this reason, because it is a longing not to be appeased. Men have gone for days without food, but they could not during the same length of time abstain from drink. In a long and weary march soldiers have been able to endure much absence of solids, but we find in cases like the marches of Alexander, that soldiers have died by hundreds from want of drink. It has been said hunger you can palliate for awhile, but thirst is awful. You cannot reason with it; thirst has no ears; you cannot forget it—the more thirsty the man becomes the more does the want thrust itself before him. O my God, painful as is such a spiritual thirst, yet would I desire to be always in this state when I am not in immediate fellowship with thee. I would be so thirsty as never to find a moment's peace, nor ease, nor comfort, except when I am near to thee. "Tears have been my meat," says David, "day and night;" as though he could get nothing from himself by way of comfort, for his soul flowed over at his eyes in briny tears, which made him thirstier still. Still his cry went up at morn and midnight "My God, my God, I must behold thee, I must approach thee, I must enjoy thy love. Shut me not up in this dungeon, cast me not from thy presence, take not thy Holy Spirit from me, bring me to thyself again, for I long, I groan, I faint, I die, for thee. O come to me and manifest thy favour." Such is the strong desire of the text: such let ours be.

Further, we ought to say that the text manifests, as one characteristic of this longing, *a vitality*. As we have already said, thirst is connected with the very springs of life: men must drink or die. So the Christian comes to feel that it is not a luxury to walk with God—a luxury with which he may perhaps dispense, but it is an absolute necessity for his spirit. Consider, my brethren, what danger we are in when we live at a distance from God! What danger of backsliding further and further; what danger of being tempted to gross sin! Consider how we are grieving the Holy Spirit! Consider what comforts and mercies we are losing! Consider what dishonour we are likely to bring upon the holy name we profess! Consider how unkind we are to the Husband of our souls, to that dear heavenly Lover who did not spare His heart's blood that He might buy us to himself, that He might have all our heart's love! Consider all this, and we shall make it a vital point to return unto our God. It will not seem to us as though it might be or might not be, but we shall feel that it must be; we cannot be content without the light of Jehovah's countenance. O God, as the hart must die without the water, so must my soul die without a sense of thy love again restored to me.

It would not appear in our version, but it appears in the Scotch Psalter, and it appears in the margin of our old Bibles, that the text describes *an expressive* desire. Note the Scotch version—

***“Like as the hart for waterbrooks  
In thirst doth pant and bray.”***

In the margin of your Bibles you have, “As the hart brayeth after the waterbrooks; “it lifts up its voice; it is usually so silent, so all but dumb, but it now begins to bray in awful agony after the waterbrooks. So the believer hath a desire which forceth itself into expression. That expression may often be inarticulate, he may have groanings which cannot be uttered, and they are all the deeper for being unutterable; they are all the more sincere and deep, because language may not be able to describe them. In the Psalm before us, you find that David expressed his desire in prayers, and then, if these did not suffice, in tears, and then he turned to prayers again. The child of God will so continue to cry, and pray, and seek, and weep; nor will he be satisfied till by all manner of ways he has expressed before his God the insatiable longing of his thirsty spirit. I do therefore, dearly beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, speak to you now this morning, and say, if you have lost the presence of God, if the light of Jehovah's countenance has been withdrawn from you, and you are desiring to return, cultivate that desire, and bring it to the highest pitch of fervour. If it be but like one live coal, put another to it; pile your desires together till they glow like coals of juniper, which have a most vehement heat. Pray God the Holy Ghost to fill your heart with all-consuming flames, till your heart is hot within you with longings after God. Take care that you express your growing desires day by day and hour by hour, in perpetual solicitations that Jesus would come to you and manifest Himself to you as He doth not to the world. It is a blessed thing not to need thus to plead because you already rejoice in the smile of the blessed Lover of your souls, but the next best thing is to sigh and cry until your head is once again on the Master's bosom, and the kisses of His lips are yours. Do you know there is a sweetness about this bitter longing? For when the desire is

strong the veil is thin, and the longing soul feels some gleamings of love even while panting for it. Oh, it is sweet to pant and hunger after Jesus. It is a sort of heaven to pine after Jesus. The sweet smell which He leaves behind Him makes it sweet to follow Him. To meditate on Him is precious; to admire Him at a distance is delightful, but oh, to have Him! Angels cannot describe this joy. Yes, beloved in the Lord, it is a blessed thing to pine after Jesus, and even if the mountains of Bether rise between, it is precious to wait till, like a roe or a young hart, He comes leaping over the hills to reveal himself to His languishing ones.

**III.** We will now, in the third place, turn to another point, **THE EXCITING CAUSES** of this desire after God.

These exciting causes are, first, *something inward*. When a man pants after God, it is a secret life within which makes him do it: he would not long after God by nature. No man thirsts after God while he is left in his carnal state. The unrenewed man pants after anything sooner than God: he longs to escape from the presence of the Lord, for to him it is a dreadful thought that there should be a God at all; he would be glad enough if some one could prove beyond a doubt that there was no God. It proves a renewed nature when you long after God; it is a work of grace in your soul, and you may be thankful for it. It proves, however, that this renewed nature is not an independent thing, which can live on its own resources. A camel does not pant after waterbrooks, because it carries its own water within it; but the hart does, because it has no inward resources. After being hunted on a hot day, it has no inward supplies; it is drained of its moisture. So are we. We do not carry a store of grace within of our own upon which we can rely; we need to come again, and again, and again, to the divine fountain, and drink again from the eternal spring. Hence it is because we have a new life, and that life is dependent upon God, and has all its fresh springs in Him, that therefore we pant and thirst after Him. O Christian, if you had a sacred life which could be maintained by its own energies within, you might do without your God, but since you are naked, and poor, and miserable, apart from Him, you must come and drink day by day of the living springs, or else you faint and die.

But the causes of the thirst were also *outward*. The stag pants for the waterbrooks not only from within, but because of the heat of the sun, of the distance it has travelled, because also of the dogs that have hunted it so far. So the believer: so David in the text. Enemies said to him, "Where is thy God?" They were barking at his heels. His troubles had been multiplied — "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me;" and this made him turn to his God. I believe a man's enemies are often his best friends. To be pierced with sharp troubles now and then will serve for our enlivening if grace so sanctify the pain. Any outward affliction that drives us nearer to our God is a God-send for which we should be devoutly grateful.

Moreover, the source of David's longings lay partly in *the past*. The hart panteth after the waterbrooks because it has a recollection of the coolness of the streams from which it has drunk before, and therefore it longs to drink again. So David said, "I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the Hill Mizar." He remembered when he

went with the assembly to the house of God, with the multitude who kept holyday. So do we long after God because we have a cheerful recollection of the comforts we have had in years gone by, when we have been in His fellowship. Did you ever have such delightful seasons as when you lived near to God? Were you ever so happy and so blessed as when the Holy Spirit like a sacred dove brooded over your spirit? You know that these were the best of your days; then I pray you, recollecting these sweet things, pant after them again, and so let the past quicken your desires.

Further, the desire which David had, sprung from *the present* as well as the past. He was at that present moment in a position of eminent distress. "All thy waves and thy billows," saith he, "have gone over me." And this also should make us fly to God, for what distress is there which He cannot alleviate? What wound is there which the presence of God cannot heal? Our God is the cordial of our care, the balm of our woe—He is our all in all. Do but get to God, and you are like the mariner who has reached his port; the storms are over now for him; little cares he how the winds howl, or the waves roar. Believer, rest in your God, and you have obtained all your capacious powers can wish, and your troubles, and your wants, and your needs, will be forgotten in your overflowing joy.

Moreover, there was a fourth spring, namely, *the future*. "Hope thou in God," saith he, "for I shall yet praise Him." He panted after his God, because he had a keen perception that peaceful times would yet return to him. When a man is despairing, and fancies that the sun will never rise, it is hard to cheer him; but once indoctrinate him with the belief that there are happier seasons yet in store, predestinated periods when the light of God's countenance shall shine full in his face, and the man plucks up courage. O beloved, no child of God has any reason to despair. God will appear to His people; He cannot forsake them. "Can a woman forsake her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I never forget thee." It is not possible that He who counts the stars, and calls them all by names, should pass over one of His elect, His called, His adopted people. Be of good cheer, then, thou shipwrecked one; though each billow should be angrier than the former, and drown thee deeper in distress, yet the arm of God is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear. Look thou forward to better times, and looking forward, let thy pantings and thy longings increase. May God give thee a hunger because there is a banquet; may He give thee a thirst because there are flagons of which thou mayst drink. May He give thee great desires, for if thou openest thy mouth ever so wide He will certainly fill it.

I have thus tried to unveil the springs, the inward and outward, the future, the present, and the past, from which our desires come, and before I now conclude I would ask every deserted believer whether he does at this time feel such vehement pantings? If not, I do think it is a subject for most solemn anxiety. We ought to bestir ourselves lest we sleep ourselves into death. There are certain conditions of the human frame in which sleep becomes absolutely deadly: the poor patient must be kept in motion, must be wounded with needles, roughly treated lest he should sleep; and there are times when, if we are permitted to sleep spiritually, it must end in our eternal ruin. At such times, when we feel the slumbering tendency coming over us, we ought to be alarmed lest we should turn out

to be as others who sleep themselves into hell. May God awaken us, though it may be by thunderbolts; may He shake us, even though it be with His roughest hand, and break us with His fiercest tempest, sooner than suffer us quietly and calmly to glide down the stream of indifference until we are dashed over the precipice of apostasy and are lost. Of course, the true child of God cannot be cast away, but how if I should have been a deceiver, and after having preached to others, or united in church-fellowship with others, I should come to be myself a castaway? O that such thoughts may possess our minds till we are racked therewith, and driven with the insatiable desire of the text to long after the presence of our God.

**IV. Lastly, these words suggest, in concluding, a few COMFORTABLE ENCOURAGEMENTS.**

I do not like myself to be in the condition of merely longing after God; I trust I can say I have walked with God, and enjoyed the sense of His love for many a day; but ah — there is no thirst like the thirst of the man who has once known what the sweetness of the wine of heaven is. He that has never eaten manna may be satisfied with the gritty brown bread of earth, but heavenly manna is a hunger-making thing; if you once get the flavour in your mouth, you will never be content unless you have it always there. It would be an awful thing for a man who has once known spiritual life if he could be eternally cast away, because in hell no others would have known the joy which he has known, and consequently they could not know the misery which he feels in having lost it. Amongst all the miserable poor in this world, none are so wretched as those who once were rich, because they have acquired habits which make poverty unendurable. A poor king must be poor indeed. And what would it be for a child of God, if he once had been able to roll under his tongue the sweet morsel, and once had leaned on Jesus' bosom, if he could after all be tormented in the flames of Tophet; after having drunk of the wines on the lees well refined, should be doomed to cry for a drop of water, like Dives; and after having eaten of fat things full of marrow, should be cast into the land of drought and famine. Thank God, it cannot be—it shall not be while God lives, for the strong hands of Christ and of the Father will protect the chosen people. This shall not be, but still to lose a sense of the Lord's love, even for an hour, is dreadful enough. Yet there are one or two comforts which arise out of a longing and panting for the Lord. They are these: in the first place, if thou hast a longing after thy God, *where does it come from?* Certainly it is not rooted in the dunghill of human nature. This is too fair a flower to have been blown here, by the winds of chance, or to have sprung up naturally from thine own corruptions. The eternal Spirit gave thee that desire, thank Him for it; He has not quite given thee up, then. This desire is a gift from God, accept it gratefully, and see the Father's love reflected from the jewel.

Secondly, *if God has given me this desire, will He not fulfil it?* Is it after the manner of men to excite a desire and not fulfil it? And if we, being evil, could not be so unkind, much less shall our God. He will not tantalize His child; He will not make him hungry and refuse to feed him. Oh, no! My God, if thou hast made me thus to thirst and pant, I may rest assured thou wilt give me the waterbrooks to drink from, and I shall be refreshed with thy love.

For let me recollect, in the next place, that if I have wandered from my God, *He is very willing to forgive.*

Oh, how ready is our Father to receive His wandering children! It is a part of the consequences of our sin that we think hardly of Him whom we have grieved. We offend our loving Husband, the Lord Jesus, and then we think He will not take us back again into those dear arms, but He will—"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." He tells us that if our brother offend us seventy times seven, we are yet to forgive him, and will not He forgive us? Recollect how often He forgave His people in the wilderness. Remember, to come closer home, how often He has borne with us! How often when He might have swept us away with the besom of destruction, He has said, "They are my children," and He has again been a Father to us. Nevertheless, He has saved us for His name's sake, and when we have been foolish and ignorant, and have been as beasts before Him, nevertheless we have been continually with Him, and He has held us with His right hand. Let us return to Him, then, since He is so ready and so willing to forgive; let us return to Him this morning, and let us recollect that when we return out of the sadness and sorrow of our present estate, we shall very soon be uplifted into the light. It does not take the Lord long to make summer time in a wintry heart. One glance of His love turns the darkness of the soul's night into the brightest day. Come to Him, Christian, and before you are aware of it, your soul shall be like the chariots of Ammi-nadib; He will strike down Dagon in the temple of your heart, and set up the ark of the covenant in his place. He will turn your captivity as the streams in the south; you who were bound with chains shall be emancipated; you who were clothed with sackcloth shall wear fine linen and beauteous apparel; you shall anoint your faces with fresh oil, and you shall go forth in the dance with them that make merry in the Lord. For remember, time is not a thing to be taken into consideration with God: in an instant He wills it, and it is done; he commandeth, and it stands fast. To the dark earth He said, "Let there be light," and light flashed forth at once; and this very afternoon you may become amongst the very happiest of His people, though you came here this morning heavily burdened. I have been crying to-day, Lord, thou knowest what a dry, parched-up plant my soul is, like yonder poor brown grass, which has only a little root-life left, and no more, for it is all burnt up. Lord, there seems to be no dew nor rain these months for my soul, and therefore, O Lord, thy poor, pining plant is ready to die. Hast thou forgotten it? Will thy loving mercy never return? Beloved, the rain will come upon us. Perhaps even during this sermon the dew has fallen, and you who were like the heath in the desert are beginning to blossom and bring forth fruit unto His name. O may it be so, and may you who thought that the Lord had forgotten you, find that He remembers you in the fullness of His loving-kindness and in the plenitude of His grace. So may God do to each one of us, for His name's sake. Amen.

