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THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

YEARNING FOR THE LIVING GOD

(Lesson for December 12)
Psalms 42; 84; 102:25-27

Golden Text—This God is our God for ever and ever.—Psa. 48:14

THE LESSON AS A WHOLE

Approach to the Lesson

There are Psalms which lift the soul into the presence of God by their spiritual sweetness, their noble passion, and their lofty vision. Such as 23, 103, and 145. On the other hand there are Psalms which strike a harsh note, and leave us perplexed. These are the imprecatory Psalms, which seem to breathe hatred and revenge, so contrary to what we have learned in the New Testament. A notable example is Psalm 109. In between these we have a vast range of human emotion—longing and satisfaction, perplexity and confidence, discouragement and cheer, sorrow and comfort, fear and faith.

There is a tendency to regard those which most inspire us as the most inspired, others as less inspired, with a grave doubt as to whether some are inspired at all, particularly those which have the note of cursing.

With regard to the last, it should be noted that the writer of these imprecatory Psalms takes his stand on the righteousness of God. His enemies are God's enemies, the wicked who oppose the servant of God and sow wickedness in the nation. The "curses" are what he sees to be the inevitable workings of divine justice, and the judgments which finally will purge the earth and establish righteousness and truth. There is a prophetic note in them. They are not simply expressing personal revenge and vindictiveness.

At the same time, we must recognize the fact that these Psalms were written before "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Law was still the dominating revelation, and its spirit reflected in the reactions of men. This does not mean that grace was absent, any more than the note of judgment is absent in grace. David could search out one of the house of Saul to show him the kindness of God (2 Sam. 9:3), while Jesus could hurl passionate anathemas at the hypocrites of Jewry (Matt. 23:13).

The Psalms, then, run the gamut of human emotion in the sphere of the soul's relation to God. They tell the story of the psalmists' dealings with God in an almost infinite variety of circumstances and moods. The Spirit of inspiration moved these men to record, in poetic fashion, these spiritual experiences, directing them in their expressions so that we might have an accurate account of God's ways with them, as a guide and encouragement to us in our own varied experiences and temptations. There are none more inspired than others. They are all fully inspired, for they are all part of the Lord's revelation to us. Even the least inspiring of them have their own necessary lessons for us, if we only look to the Holy Spirit to teach us.

Finally, let us remember that the Psalms are part of the Scriptures, which testify of our Lord Jesus, and we should be looking for Him there (Luke 24:44).

Verse by Verse

Psalm 42:1—"As the hart... so panteth my soul after thee, O God." This surely means that what the water brook is to the beast of the forest, God is to the soul, an indication of the vast superiority of the soul of man over the beast. What has happened to the soul, then, that is satisfied with water brooks, and has no thirst for God?

Verse 2—"My soul thirsteth for the living God: when shall I appear before God?" The gods of the nations cannot fill the soul. Only the living God can quench the inner thirst.

Verse 3—"My tears... continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" The situation which brought the tears we do not know, but we have all known occasions when our tears have challenged our faith.

Verse 4—"I remember... I had gone to the house of God with a multitude that kept holiday." Apparently the psalmist is being hindered from going up to the house of God and he remembers former occasions when he was one of the joyous, worshipping throng. Now, while others go, he is left alone with his grief.

Verse 5—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?... hope thou in God... the help of his countenance." But he takes himself in hand, and reproves himself for his despondency,

as if he could not know the light of God's countenance except in the Temple. Hope and praise spring up together.

Verse 6—"... therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan." The psalmist is somewhere in northern Gilead, whose wild and stormy scenery corresponds to the desolation of his soul.

Verse 7—"Deep calleth unto deep, thy billows are gone over me." The torrents from the melting snows make roaring cataracts which echo the agonized cries of his own soul.

Verse 8—"... his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song." Again faith springs to life. God is the portion of His people at all times, supplying the needs of the day and giving songs in the night.

Psalm 84:1—"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house... praising thee." As in Psalm 42 we saw the grief of the man who could not go to God's house, so here we have the joy of the man who can, and does. For the occupation there is praise, and what can be more joyful.

Verse 9—"... whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways..." Another benediction on the man who draws strength from the Lord, and whose heart turns spontaneously to the ways of Zion.

Psalm 102:25—"... the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands." See the setting of this remarkable passage. It is part of the psalmist's plea that his own days be lengthened, which he presses on the ground that God has no shortage of days. He is the creator of all things.

Verse 26—"They shall perish, but thou shalt endure... they shall be changed." The material universe will fulfill its purpose and pass, but God who made it abides forever. See Peter's description of this change (2 Pet. 3:10-12).

Verse 27—"But thou art the same... no end." Amid all cataclysmic changes God abides the same, the changeless one. See Hebrews 1:10-12; 13:8.

The Heart of the Lesson

It will be noticed that Psalms 42 and 84 both belong to the group attributed to the sons of Korah, the Levites who had charge of the doors of the Temple. While some, like Dean Plumtree, have ascribed this whole group to one period, the reign of Hezekiah, others have given them dates widely apart. For instance, some believe that Psalm 42 describes David's plight when a fugitive from Absalom, while Psalm 84 is brought down to the period of the Captivity. However, it is clear that these two Psalms express the longings of devout souls to come up to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, and to worship Him in the place where He had set His name. In both cases the writer seems to be hindered from the desire of his heart.

But there is a distinct difference between the two. In Psa. 42 the spiritual experience of the writer is definitely clouded. He is occupied with his grief to such an extent that he is utterly cast down and disquieted, and his longing for God is linked with the thought of deliverance from these oppressive circumstances. His soul is in conflict, swaying between complaint and trust. He gives way to depression, then makes himself to task and reproves himself, assuring his soul of God's mercy and help.

Psalm 84 has the same longing for the courts of the Lord, but it is a purer longing. What the circumstances were which kept the writer from the desire of his heart we are not told. Whatever they were, they are not allowed to enter the picture. Here the psalmist desires God for Himself. He is meditating on the ineffable joy of the Lord's house, and the blessedness of dwelling there. The altars of God are to him what the nest is to the swallow or the sparrow.

Psalm 102 was written before the revelation had been given of the immediate blessedness of the departed believer, "with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). To the psalmist, to die was to be cut off from the presence of God, and to go down into the pit where the praises of God were not known (Psa. 88:12). Here we have the lament of a saint who is fast approaching the grave, and who cries to God not to cut him off in the midst of his days for he wants to enjoy the presence of God as long as he may. In pressing his plea, he argues the eternity of God. There is no scarcity of years with God that He must be frugal in distributing them! God will endure when Heaven and earth perish. He is the abiding, the unchanging one.

We remember that these words are referred to Christ in Hebrews 1:10-12, with a very different application. We are taught to trust Him in joy and sorrow, in life and death, because He abides unchanging.

It's a pity that the right of free speech isn't predicated upon the obligation that something sensible be said.

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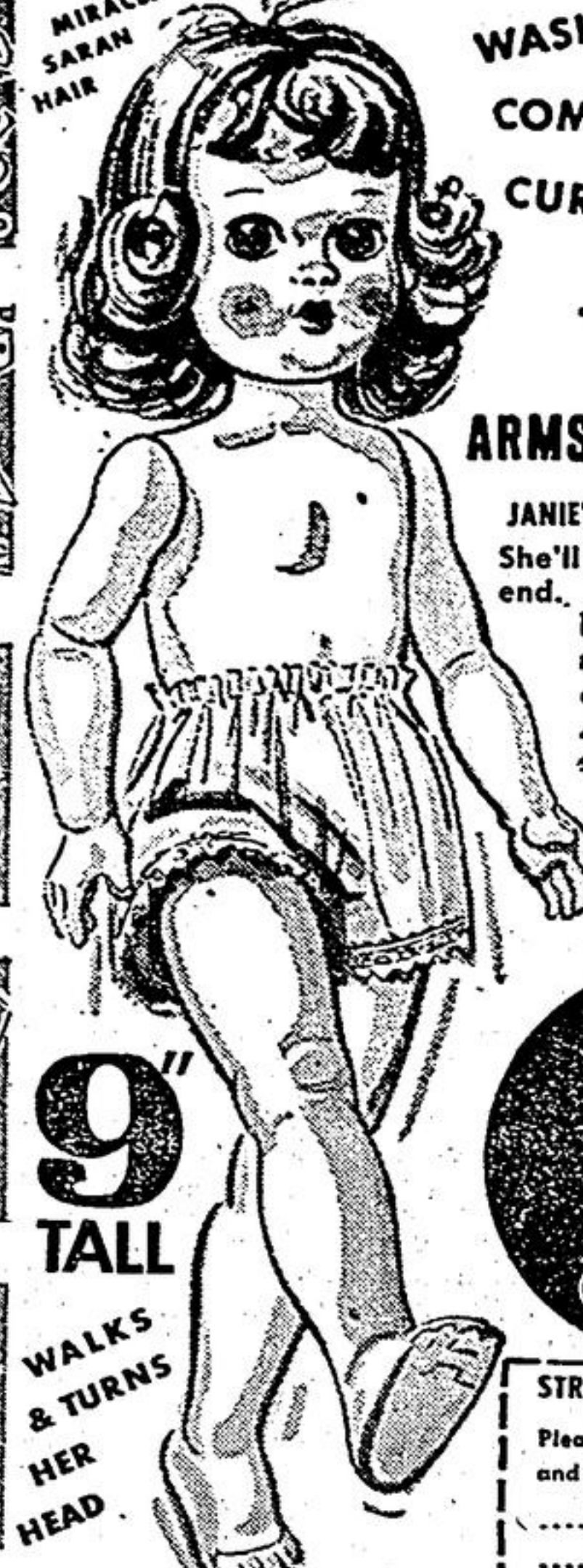
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