

SINGING IN THE RAIN
(MATTHEW 26:30)

Some time after the conclusion of World War I, a remarkable event took place in the theater of a cruise ship. The entertainment center was crowded with appreciative people when one of the passengers walked to the stage to sing. The listeners expected to hear a popular melody, but instead heard "Jesus Lover of my Soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly." As the wonderful baritone voice filled the theater, the audience was spellbound. The soloist possessed a rare voice, and his singing of the hymn was electrifying.

One of the listeners was very thoughtful; the rendering had stirred memories. Approaching the singer, he asked: "Sir, were you in the war?" When the answer was given in the affirmative, he continued, "Were you with a certain regiment?" and the name was given. Astonished the singer answered: "Yes, I was, but how did you know?"

The two men sat at a table and reminisced. The questioner was a German who said: "On that particular night I, with others, was ordered to reconnoiter the enemy's position, and my assignment was to kill the sentry. We crawled through the darkness, and finally, I was very close to my objective. Unless I am mistaken, you were the man. Suddenly, you began to sing softly the hymn you sang tonight, and I knew you were a Christian. I returned to the German trenches to tell my officer it would be foolish to attack; the British had received reinforcements. Our plans were then changed."

The singer thought for a moment and then replied: "Yes, I remember that night very well. When I was posted to a dangerous position as a sentry I was apprehensive and believed I was about to die. There in the darkness I began to sing, for I knew only the Savior could help me."

The German replied: "Friend, that hymn saved your life."

Music is a God-given gift, but when a man sings in adversity, his action reflects the greatness of his soul. His voice is a window through which may be seen his finer attributes.

This was particularly true of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the close of His final passover, Jesus sang with His disciples. Per-

89

haps the Lord often hummed tunes and sang psalms, but such occurrences were never mentioned in the Gospels. His singing at a time of extreme adversity was astounding and inspiring.

The disciples were bewildered. What was meant to be a joyous occasion had become a time of tension, fear and suspicion. For many years those men had observed the Passover celebration, and their souls had been refreshed with memories and gratitude. At each feast they remembered the miraculous deliverance of the nation from bondage, and reverently partook of the herbs and spices ordained to commemorate that event. Time was meaningless when those worshiping people thoughtfully ate their portion of the lamb, and recalled how the Angel of Death passed through the land of Egypt. Each time they sang the Hallel—the specified psalms of praise—they sang lustily and joyfully; their souls rejoiced in praising God. Passover was always the greatest event in Israel's year.

Nevertheless, the disciples recognized this commemoration left much to be desired. The atmosphere within the upper room was oppressive. The entire proceedings chilled their spirits; they were apprehensive, for treachery within their ranks had been exposed. They were mystified, for although the host had made ample preparation for their passover requirements, the all-important lamb had been neglected. Jesus had substituted Him-

SINGING IN THE RAIN

self, and had spoken of His body and blood. It was confusing.

The ceremony terminated; the time for praise had arrived. But how could broken hearts rejoice, and fearful people sing praises to God? How could they rejoice over an event from antiquity, when their future was ominous? Their silence was unbroken until Jesus announced the famous Hallel, and, with His strong resonant voice, pitched the tune and began to sing. Slowly, uncertainly, the men emulated His example, and years later, remembering that moment, Matthew wrote:

"And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives."

The Song Which Stirred Memories

To many harassed people, the fact that Jesus sang at such a moment was one of the strangest incidents in the New Testa-
90

ment. The disciples only suspected what might happen, but the Lord knew rejection; a flogging and crucifixion awaited Him. His face would be marred beyond recognition, and even His perspiration would appear as drops of blood falling to the ground. Ordinarily, men would have feared those sufferings, but resolutely the Lord expelled such thoughts, and began to sing the praises of God. That strange, yet glorious, fact defied human understanding.

The Lord and His disciples did not sing a short chorus, or even one psalm. The Hallel included several sonnets. Therefore, it may be concluded the singing continued for ten, fifteen, or even twenty minutes. How the Lord maintained His composure may never be fully understood. It is safe to assume the music that night stirred His heart, for this was a repetition of something done annually; it was a testimony to the faithfulness of God, Who had preserved Israel through extreme adversity.

There is reason to believe the Lord had memorized every word of those psalms. As He sang, the Savior's thoughts encompassed Israel's history. Repeatedly, God's people had been attacked by their enemies; their land had been devastated; crops were destroyed and Jerusalem ransacked. The people had survived many ordeals, the greatest of which was prolonged captivity in Babylon. Yet, God's faithfulness had never faltered, and the existence of the nation during our Lord's sojourn upon earth was evidence of the dependability of Jehovah. He had honored His promises.

When Jesus sang at the Passover, He knew He could safely confront His future, assured of ultimate victory. He could trust His Heavenly Father. Later, when all seemed to be lost, He exclaimed: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). His faith was completely justified, for "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of his Father" (Rom. 6:4). No man nor woman can be wrong trusting Cod.

Charles Wesley, who lived from 1707 until 1788, wrote 6500 hymns, but his greatest composition was probably the hymn, "Jesus Lover of my soul, Let me to thy bosom fly." It is interesting to know that when this hymn was first offered to his brother John, the great preacher rejected it as being too senti-
91

mental, and it was not until after the author's death, the sacred song came into general use among churches.

Henry Ward Beecher, one the greatest American preachers wrote: "I would rather have written that hymn of Wesley's than to have the fame of all the kings that ever sat on earth. I would rather be the author of that hymn than to hold the wealth of the richest man in New York. He will die after a little while, and pass out of men's thoughts. What will there be to speak of him? But people will go on singing Wesley's hymn until the last

SINGING IN THE RAIN

trump brings forth the angel band; and then, I think, it will mount upon some lips to the very presence of God."

Many stories have suggested incidents which inspired Wesley to write his sonnet. Perhaps the most popular account is that which describes Wesley's frightening experience in a terrible storm while returning from a brief visit to America. When his ship safely reached land, Wesley wrote in his journal for that date, December 3, 1736, "I knelt down and blessed the hand that had conducted me through such inextricable mazes."

It was said that during that storm, a frightened bird flew into the cabin and sheltered itself inside Wesley's coat. The preacher-singer recognized that as the bird found refuge in his bosom, so he had found shelter in God. When he wrote his famous hymn, his soul was singing even before the words were uttered. He was singing in the rain!

The Song Which Stressed Mercy

All commentators, both Jewish and Gentile, agree the Hallel was composed of certain specific psalms which were divided into two categories. Some writers mention The Great Hallel, but others describe the lesser Hallel. It is impossible to state accurately which was used by the Lord, but that at least is of little importance since both renderings emphasize the same truth. The Pulpit Commentary says: "This was probably the second portion of the Hallel (Psalms 115-118) or, if the then ritual was the same as the latter, Psalm 136" (Rev. A. Luke Williams, M.A., The Pulpit Commentary, "Matthew," pg. 524). One of the most important statements in the first collection of sonnets was "The Loin hath been mindful of us." This evi-92

dently referred to many events in the history of the nation, but primarily to the deliverance from the Egyptians. The reaction to the kindness of Jehovah was an intense desire to praise Him. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? . . . I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord" (Pss. 115:12 and 116:12, 17). The first section of the famous Hallel was comprised of 68 of our verses; the second only had 26, and in all probability was favored by worshipers.

It is interesting to note the psalmist, in every verse of his sonnet, repeated a statement "for his mercy endureth forever." Twenty-six times in twenty-six verses the writer used this sentence "obviously, he was trying to emphasize something! The mercy of Jehovah had delivered Israel from Egypt, and His kindness had continued throughout the centuries.

The message of the Psalmist had a profound effect upon the Savior, for He knew the same mercy would soon be extended to the entire world. He realized that all nations were slaves in the bondage of sin and Satan, but God intended to deliver His people in an unprecedented manner. This knowledge was as a rising sun before which the shadows of night vanished. Alas, many modern Christians sing hymns without giving attention to the words being sung; Jesus considered what He sang, and rejoiced.

It might be wise to consider the truth expressed by the writer to the Hebrews when he wrote: "Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross . . ." (Heb. 12:2). The heart of Christ was great enough to welcome the world, and His vision to encompass it. The Lord saw the thief, Saul of Tarsus, and an innumerable host destined to find happiness through His reconciling death. Even the thought of providing an opportunity of salvation to perishing men and women filled the Lord with ecstasy. The Savior knew mercy received led to delight; mercy

SINGING IN THE RAIN

rejected led to doom. He could not guarantee that every person would accept what was offered, but was determined all people should have an opportunity to become recipients of God's abundant mercy.

Many years ago, the people in the small Welsh community

93

in which I lived were shocked by a great tragedy. A well-known citizen, in a fit of unprecedented anger, shot his three children. He had looked into a bar to see his wife drinking with other men, and that unfortunate incident led to murder. He was convicted and sent to prison.

I shall always remember a night when I attended an evangelistic service in the local Methodist church. Another man, a notorious drunkard, had been converted in a Salvation Army meeting, and, desiring to tell his friend—the murderer—the good news, went to the prison. He described what had taken place. He was not permitted to enter the cell, but was allowed to speak through the small opening in the door. He said: "I looked through the bars to see my friend, and said: 'Bill, I have to tell you some good news! I have been saved, but I want you to see something for yourself.'" He continued, "I held up my Bible to the bars so that he could read John 3:16, and as he did, he groaned and said, 'That is what I need!'"

If we multiply that incident a millionfold, and then realize how Christ thought of every individual who would find peace through believing, it will not be difficult to appreciate why Jesus sang so enthusiastically at the close of the Passover feast.

The Song with Specific Meaning

Psalm 136 is unique in that it emphasizes three major facts: (1) The Majesty of God; (2) The Mercy of God; (3) The Mission of God. The eyes of the Savior became pools of delight when He sang, for He knew the truths were as relevant to His generation as they had been throughout the history of Israel. As His gaze swept down the corridors of time, He was thrilled that His Father intended to extend mercy to all generations; salvation would be known by millions of people who would hear and believe the Gospel.

1. The Majesty of God

Some of the psalmist's statements were exquisite word-pictures. For example, he wrote: "To him that by wisdom made the heavens." "To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn And brought out Israel from among them." "And slew famous kings.... And gave their land for an heritage." "Who remem-

94

bered us in our low estate.... And hath redeemed us from our enemies." "O give thanks unto the God of gods." The psalmist insisted God was on His throne far above all principalities and powers, and that every good and perfect gift came from Him (James 1:17).

2. The Mercy of God

Evidently, the ancient writer was overwhelmed by the compassion of Jehovah. It seemed incomprehensible that the Ruler of the Universe should be involved with undeserving humans. "He remembered us in our low estate" (Ps. 136:23). Apparently, when this psalm was written, the writer could not forget that God's mercy extended to all people. No man could appreciate that fact more than Jesus.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God (that is, divinity was not something to be coveted as was the case when

SINGING IN THE RAIN

Lucifer fell from heaven). But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8). When the Savior considered the events of history, and compared them with future events, He knew the mercies of His Father were limitless.

3. The Mission of God

Perhaps this was the most important of all revealed facts. Psalm 136 verses 23-25 mentioned three wonderful truths: He remembered, redeemed, and refreshed us. At the precise moment when Christ sang, only He understood the full significance of the words being sung. God had foreseen the needs of mankind when He sent the Lord to live among men. Jehovah had planned eternal redemption through the sacrifice of His Son - the Lamb of God was destined to remove the sin of the world. Redeemed people would become the temple of the Holy Spirit, and God had promised: "No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly." The mission of God was to rescue humanity and bring souls to an eternal home. The fact that Jesus was to be the Agent through which millions of peo-

95
ple would find eternal happiness added zest to the Master's singing.

Probably the best loved, and most appreciated American poetess was Miss Fanny Crosby, who was born blind. She possessed the marvelous capacity for singing in the rain! Even from childhood it became obvious that God had compensated her for the absence of eyesight, and even at the early age of eight years, she wrote:

Oh, what a happy soul am I
Although I cannot see.
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't;
To weep and sigh because I'm blind
I cannot and I won't.

On one occasion a well known clergyman said to her "I think it is a great pity that the Master, when He showered so many gifts upon you, did not give you sight." Her instantaneous reply was: "Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition to my Creator, it would have been that I should have been born blind?" The minister asked: "Why?" Miss Crosby said: "Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior." That astonishing but thrilling answer revealed she was an expert at singing in the rain!

The Song Which Silenced Murmuring

The Savior never questioned His Father's plans. Ordinary people would have avoided unprecedented suffering, but the Lord welcomed the inevitable. The writer to the Hebrews said: "Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). When the Lord led the singing on that memorable night, His song of praise expressed anticipatory triumph. His soul was thrilled; his faith resplendent. When others might have sought seclusion in which to complain, weep and indulge in self-pity, Jesus triumphantly led His followers in

SINGING IN THE RAIN

an anthem of immortal praise. The Lord never feared the Cross
He welcomed it!

His victory was shared by some of His disciples. When Paul and Silas were incarcerated in the prison at Philippi, their backs were lacerated, their pain intense, and their future apparently hopeless. Yet at night Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." This did not take place during a festive occasion; they sang in the storm!

It is thought-provoking to read and compare the singing of Christ at the Passover, and the disciples within the prison. The Master and His men were as trees confronting a storm. Their roots went deep into the promises of God; their leaves transformed the blasts of the hurricane into vibrant music. This is the essence of Christianity; only resilient faith can produce such harmony.

97□

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.