

CORNERSTONE HYMN SERVICE

Spring 2011

Complete Commentary

PRELUDE

Holy, Holy, Holy

Orchestra

Tim Goeller arr.

WELCOME

Why a hymn service?

1. What better way to celebrate all that our music ministry personnel have contributed?
2. What better repertory of music to celebrate in a conclusive service of worship?
3. What better opportunity to become better acquainted with the rich heritage of hymnody we've inherited and the doctrine with which hymn texts are replete? I have heard it said and rightly so, "what people believe can be readily determined by what they purpose to sing." For that matter, that they sing at all says a great deal about their faith or lack thereof. The Psalmist writes, "Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him." Psalms 33:1 (NIV) Psalm 92 reiterates this thought,

1 It is good to give thanks to the LORD and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
2 to declare Your loving-kindness in the morning and Your faithfulness by night,
3 with the ten-stringed lute and with the harp, with resounding music upon the lyre.
4 For You, O LORD, have made me glad by what You have done, I will sing for joy at the works of Your hands. **5** How great are Your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep. Psalms 92:1-5 (NASB)

What constitutes a hymn?

- 1. Paul lists hymns as a category of song which we are commanded to sing.**
The other two categories being psalms and spiritual songs are not inferior or secondary categories of song. They are all three equally useful for "teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom." Colossians 3:16
- 2. Hymns simply instruct us in a way that is unique from Psalms and Spiritual Songs.**
The classical definition of hymns is summarized well by distinguished church musician and worship scholar Don Hustad in his historic work *Jubilate II*:

"Hymns were probably the new songs that included expression of the [doctrinal] Christology of the new sect; their understanding that Jesus was the promised One, the Jewish Messiah, but also Christ, the Son of God, sent to be our Savior.

. . . A number of these hymns appear in Paul's epistles, written in the patterns of classical Greek poetry, and it is reasonable to assume that they were quickly adopted as 'Christ songs' by the churches which read the epistles. One is in the form a simple creed, or statement of faith:

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great:
He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit,
Seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles,
Believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.
1 Timothy 3:16

In another example, the poetic (and possibly responsive) form is obvious:

The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live
with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him;
If we deny him, he will also deny us;
If we are faithless, he remains faithful—
For he cannot deny himself.” (2 Timothy 2:11f)

Thus, the earliest Christian hymns were canonical, that is, taken directly from or written into the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul writes to the church concerning worship, “When you assemble, each one has a hymn / psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation.” In Greek, the word is *psalmos* which means “a new song of praise to God.”

Examples of Scripture hymns may be seen in the following passages: Rom 11:33-36, Eph 5:14, Phil 2:6-11, Col 1:15-20, 1 Tim 1:17, 3:16, 2 Timothy 2:11-13

Historically, hymns were crafted to clarify doctrine in the face of heresy and thereby defend the character of Christ or the Christian faith. **In a literary sense**, hymns tend to be objective versus subjective and generally display a higher level of poetic sophistication than spiritual songs.

All these characteristics are evident in the first and perhaps the most historic hymn we as Protestants can sing. “A mighty fortress is our God” has been called the “Battle Hymn of the Reformation” – the movement of rebellion against the Catholic Church crystallized by and most readily associated with the Martin Luther. **The hymn was inspired by the text of Psalm 46** which reads, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear . . .”

The popular belief is that “A mighty fortress” was the poetic result of Luther's dramatic encounter with the Devil in his prison cell prior to his appearance before the Diet of Worms. **The hymn speaks directly to the doctrine of God's omnipotence, sovereignty and ultimate purpose in Christ** to destroy the “Prince of darkness” by “the Word His Power” and establish the eternal reign of His Son whose “kingdom is forever.”

The hymn's historical ties are evident in phrases such as “And though this world with devil’s filled should threaten to undo us.” The plural designation of “devils” was level directly at the Catholic bishops who had convened to convict Luther of heresy at the Diet of Worms in 1521. The hymn was later sung by the German Lutheran Princes in protest of Emperor Charles the V at the Diet of Speyer in which he sought to enforce the edict of Worms banning any expression of faith other than Roman Catholicism.

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

ALL

Hart/Walker arr.

Immortal, Invisible

ALL

(G3) Noblitt arr.

Written by Stuart K. Hine, a British missionary to present day Poland and Ukraine, “How Great Thou art” was actually based on an earlier hymn. Carl Gustav Boberg composed “O store Gud” (O Great God) in 1885. The poem was transported to Estonia by Swedish Baptist exiles where it was heard and translated into German by Manfred von Glehn. His version which was given the name “Wie gross bist Du” – “How great thou art” and was popularized to the extent that it was subsequently translated into Russian. Stuart K. Hine learned it first in Russian and grew to love its captivating setting to a Swedish folk melody. During his missionary adventures in the Carpathian mountains of the Ukraine, “he started using it in evangelistic services ... re-writing some of the verses and writing new verses (all in Russian) as events inspired him.” (quoted in *Heartwarming Hymn Stories*, Lindsay Terry)

Stine’s second stanza bears close resemblance to the original Swedish text by Boberg who was penned his poem after the awe-inspiring experience of being caught in an afternoon thunder shower. He said of the meteorological encounter, “It was the time of year when everything seemed to be in its richest colouring; the birds were singing [everywhere in the trees.] It was very warm; a thunderstorm appeared on the horizon and soon thunder and lightning. We had to hurry to shelter. But the storm was soon over and the clear sky appeared.” Recalling these words Hine paraphrased,

“When through the woods and forest glad I wonder and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from mountains’ lofty grandeur and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze.
Then sings my soul, ... (“O store Gud” – “O mighty God”) “How great Thou art.”

Hine’s own experience in the Carpathian mountains of Ukraine inspired stanza one of “How Great Thou Art.” (According to Manna Music, which first purchased recording rights to the song on behalf of the Sons of the Pioneers) “In a village to which he had climbed, Mr. Hine stood in the street singing a Gospel hymn and reading aloud ‘John, Chapter Three’. Among the sympathetic listeners was a local village schoolmaster. A storm was gathering, and when it was evident that no further travel could be made that night, the friendly schoolmaster offered his hospitality. Awe-inspiring was the mighty thunder echoing through the [Carpathian] mountains, and it was this impression that was to bring about ... “O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy hands have made, I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, Thy pow’r throughout the universe displayed.”

The stories concerning stanzas three and four are especially touching. Stanza three is so familiar to us that we fail to be surprised by the haphazard syntax with multiple phrases piled one upon the other waiting for the conclusive action of some active phrase to make sense of the sentence structure. Listen as if for the first time to stanza three: “And when I think that God His Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in: that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin!” Such sentence structure seems so foreign because these are representations of actual phrases overheard by Stuart Hine in a Ukrainian village where a sinners were responding in repentance to the presentation of the Gospel from John 3. Like German, Ukrainian grammar oftens leaves the action of the sentence to the end. Moreover, Ukrainians repent of their sins publically and Mr. Hine simply wrote down the repentant expressions of these new believers.

Finally, stanza four which speaks of a future day of liberation and reunion is said to have been inspired by Hine’s encounter with a Russian refugee in England in 1948.

“One man to whom [the Hines] were ministering told them an amazing story: he had been separated from his wife at the very end of the [Second World] war, and had not seen her since. At the time they were separated, his wife was a Christian, but he was not, but he had since been converted. His deep desire was to find his wife so they could at last share their faith together. But he told the Hines that he did not think he would ever see his wife on earth again. Instead he was longing for the day when they would meet in heaven, and could share in the Life Eternal there. These words ... became the basis for the fourth and final verse to ‘How Great Thou Art’: “When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart. Then the original text states *we [that is, “my wife and I together”]* shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim, ‘My God, how great Thou art!’” (quoted from Michael Ireland, unknown website: www.assistnews.net/stories/2007)

The sum of numerous inspired experiences, resulting in the combination of four very diverse poetic texts, written over the span of 63 years, translated through four different languages produced what has become one of the most readily recognized hymns in the history of Christendom. There are more than 1700 documented recordings by an array of performers ranging from the original release by the Sons of the Pioneers to its most recent performance by Carrie Underwood on an ACM showcase, the single of which subsequently reached # 1 in the ITUNES category of Top Gospel Song and placed in the Top 40 of ITUNES All-Genre Song category. As of June 2011, the latest release has sold 200,000 singles in the USA alone. (quoted from <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/idolchatter/post/2011>)

Could Stuart K. Hine ever have imagined that a secular world would be hearing and singing along with the words that a young Swedish pastor, repentant sinners in Ukraine and a Russian widowed refugee proclaimed by faith, “MY GOD! How great Thou art!” Praise the Lord for His purposes and the greatness of His glory !!!

How Great Thou Art

ALL

HPW # 17

I Sing the Mighty Power of God

VE

Rouse acap. arr.

WATTS - Time does not suffice to discuss the significance of Isaac Watts to Christian hymnody. Suffice it to say that he is readily recognized as the "Father of English [Hymnody](#)", as he was the first prolific and popular English hymnwriter. Others preceded him in writing "hymns of human composure"; most notably the English Baptist Benjamin Keach who was among the first to suggest that congregational song should include something other than metricizations of the Psalms to which the church had thus far been restricted. Keach went so far as to declare in a work entitled *The Breach Repaired* that hymn-singing was an apostolic mandate of the Scriptures and followed the example of Christ, Himself, at the Last Supper. The absence of hymn-singing in corporate worship then represented a "breach" of authentic Christian worship practice that was needful to repair.

Watts went even further in his philosophy concerning the creation and implementation of hymns. He proposed that hymn-singing was the most adequate means of extolling Christ in Christian worship. The Psalms only speak to the Messiah in part but hymns have the ability to expound his character directly. Thus his first prominent collection of music for Christian worship was titled *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. (1707-09) He is credited with some 750 [hymns](#), many of which remain in active use today. Well known titles include:

Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed?
Come we that love the Lord (Marching to Zion)
I Sing the Mighty Power of God
Jesus Shall Reign
Join All the Glorious Names
Joy to the World
My Shepherd will supply my need
O God Our help in ages past
This is the day the Lord hath made
When I can read my title clear
When I Survey the Wondrous cross

The last of which has been called extolled by Eric Routley, perhaps the 20th century's most significant scholar of Christian hymns, as "the greatest hymn in the English language."

Subsequent to *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* Watts published a collection titled *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament, and apply'd to the Christian state and worship* (1719). Based on the assumption that Keach had been correct in his thinking that the Psalms were inadequate in their ability to expound and extol the glories of Christ, Watts made it his aim to "Christianize" the Psalms. "By this process the content of a psalm was interpreted in light of the life, death, resurrection, and teaching of Jesus. Thus, Watt's version of Psalm 72 -

- 1 Give the king Your judgments, O God, And Your righteousness to the king's son.
- 5 Let them fear You while the sun *endures*, as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

Was adapted as follows: "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does its successive journeys run
His kingdom spread from shore to shore
'Til moons shall wax and wane no more"

All Hail the Power. . .

Brass

Zimmerman arr.

Fairest (Lord Jesus)

ALL

Praise Charts

Commentary - It is surprising that many of our greatest hymns were written by those who belonged to Christian groups who did not historically afford the Lord Jesus the full esteem He is due; seeking rather to substantiate their lives of religious service up against the singular merit of the Savior who has saved us by grace through faith alone. For instance, "Crown Him with Many Crowns," Faith of our fathers living still," and "The Church's One Foundation" were all written by men who converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism. Such is also the case with "Fairest Lord Jesus" which was written by German Jesuits as *Schönster Herr Jesu* in the 17th Century. Though illegitimately born, we have been blessed to receive it none the less through the pietistic attention of Joseph A. Seiss, a man of Moravian lineage who was ordained a Lutheran pastor in 1848. He published the hymn and translated it from German to English in 1873.

Such is not the case with our next hymn that was born of evangelistic fervor. The famous evangelistic song leader of D. L. Moody, Ira Sankey wrote of "Man of sorrows, what a name," "I frequently sang this hymn as a solo [during revivalistic meetings in Paris] asking the congregation to join in the single phrase, "Hallelujah, what a Saviour," which they did with splendid effect. It is said that the word "Hallelujah" is the same in all languages. It seems as though God had prepared it for the great jubilee of heaven, when all his children shall have been gathered home to sing, "Hallelujah to the Lamb!"

Hallelujah, What a Savior

ALL

Tommy Walker arr.

Jesus Is Lord

ORCH

Getty/Sorenson arr.