

THEN SINGS MY SOUL | *Capturing the spirit of worship from the Psalms for Today*

Lesson 11 | The Hallel (type) Songs We Sing

In last quarter's Psalms study, we studied two primary Psalm structures, lament and praise, and grouped them in the following groups: Hallelujah Psalms, Lament, Confidence, Thanksgiving, Historical, Wisdom, Penitential/Imprecatory, Messianic, Hallel and Shepherd Psalms. In this lesson, we will consider again the modern songs we sing that mirror the Hallel Psalms. Last week, we focused on the liturgical use of Communion songs in the same way that the Hallel Psalms were used to celebrate the festival events of the Jewish Calendar – namely Passover since it is most likely these were the psalms that Jesus and his disciples sang after the Last Supper, a Passover meal, before their retirement to the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus' later arrest (Matthew 26:30). This week, I want to consider the liturgical (i.e., relating to liturgy or public worship) use of our songs.

First, we use some songs to mark the beginning of new creation. Because baptism into Christ was a significant event at Pentecost (Acts 2:38), in the life of the Apostle Paul (Acts 22:16) and in the lives of others (Acts 10:47-48) when it marked the beginning of their life – saved by the Christ (Romans 6:3-4; 1 Peter 3:21), it should be something we mark with songs "to one another" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) and "to Christ" in praise.

As examples for our class today, we have two that are sung at the event of someone's baptism into Christ and sometimes, they are used as exhortations to be baptized (in what we call "invitation" songs). Ironically, as significant as the event would be in a disciple as the sharing of the communion with disciples, there is (in our song book) just one "baptism" song for every three "communion" song – even though – song leaders have added titles to meet these needs that are not always listed as such in the topical indexes of song books.

When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way;
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise,
Not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear,
Not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

Not a burden we bear,
Not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief or a loss,
Not a frown or a cross,
But is blest if we trust and obey.

But we never can prove
The delights of His love,
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favor He shows,
And the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do;
Where He sends, we will go,
Never fear, only trust and obey.

Though your sins be as scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow; (repeat)
Though they be red like crimson,
They shall be as wool!"
Though your sins be as scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;

Hear the voice that entreats you,
O return ye unto God! (repeat)
He is of great compassion,
And of wondrous love.
Hear the voice that entreats you,
O return ye unto God!

He'll forgive your transgressions,
And remember them no more; (repeat)
"Look unto Me, ye people,"
Saith the Lord your God!
He'll forgive your transgressions,
And remember them no more.

Though Your Sins Be As Scarlet |
Fanny J. Crosby (1820-1915). Fanny Crosby, called the "Mother of modern congregational singing in America,"

wrote this song of invitation clearly based on Isaiah 1:18 and the melody and harmonization was by William Howard Doane (1832-1915). The first stanza gives the promise recorded in Isaiah. In the originally published song, the repeated first stanza was a duet followed by a chorus. The second stanza is a call to come to the Lord for cleansing (cf. Isaiah 55:6-7). The third stanza describes the wonderful result. The blessings of the New Covenant, established by the shed blood of Christ, include the implanting, by the Spirit of God, of a new desire to do His will, and a forgiveness of sins that the God describes as remembering them no more (Heb. 10:16-17). While Crosby wrote over 8000 hymn texts, and Williams Doane contributed the music to many of them, this hymn is quite unique for both. For Crosby, it is unique in that each verse contains the same line several times. For Doane it is unique in that most of his compositions were simple four-part harmony and this song contains duets and the shift to four parts as well as more nuanced chord structure. The end result, though, is a statement about Crosby's knowledge of the whole of Scripture, and it reminds us when we sing it to recapture the meaning of salvation in Christ!

Trust and Obey | John H. Sammis (1846-1919). This hymn was inspired in 1886 when the composer, Daniel B. Towner (1850-1919), was music leader during a revival of Dwight L. Moody. Towner's story is in Ira D. Sankey's biography, *My Life and the Story of the Gospel Hymns*: "Mr. Moody was conducting a series of meetings in Brockton, Massachusetts, and I had the pleasure of singing for him there. One night a young man rose in a testimony meeting and said, 'I am not quite sure—but I am going to trust, and I am going to obey.' I just jotted that sentence down, and sent it with a little story to the Rev. J. H. Sammis, a Presbyterian minister. He wrote the hymn, and the tune was born." Sammis was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., and was a successful businessman in Logansport, Ind. He worked in the YMCA and later became a Presbyterian minister in 1880. I can imagine that many a sermon has been based on these three words that encapsulate both the act of baptism and the call to obedience throughout Scripture.

But we also use the time to sing songs about our work in the Lord in this "singing one to another" part of worship. It could overlap with the idea behind the Wisdom Psalms which offered exhortations to wise living. But these that I have selected for more a more focused idea (at least in my mind) of the work we do in our liturgy (or

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public worship). When we gather, it is to “preach the gospel” as well as it is to “teach the whole counsel of God.” Yet, when you connect our focused events in our public worship, Communion and Baptism, the songs – and especially the preaching – focus on the sharing of the message of the gospel. And so it is no surprise that we sing songs that exhort to share the gospel with others or to proclaim what that gospel is.

To the Work, To the Work! and Rescue the Perishing | Fanny Crosby and William Doane. Again, we find examples, both from Fanny Crosby and William Doane, that are themselves straight forward and clear in the words. Fanny Crosby was blind. When she was six weeks old, a new doctor was called to care for the inflammation in her eyes from a cold since their usual doctor was away. The treatment, hot poultices, by the

To the work! To the work! We are servants of God;
Let us follow the path that our Master has trod;
With the balm of His counsel our strength to renew,
Let us do with our might what our hands find to do.

Toiling on, toiling on,
Toiling on, toiling on;
Let us hope, let us watch,
And labor till the Master comes.

To the work! To the work! Let the hungry be fed;
To the fountain of life let the weary be led;
In the cross and its banner our glory shall be,
While we herald the tidings, “Salvation is free!”

To the work! To the work! There is labor for all;
For the kingdom of darkness and error shall fall;
And the love of our Father exalted shall be,
In the loud swelling chorus, “Salvation is free!”

To the work! To the work! In the strength of the Lord,
And a robe and a crown shall our labor reward,
When the home of the faithful our dwelling shall be,
And we shout with the ransomed, “Salvation is free!”.

doctor by her account, “practically destroyed my sight” and he was never heard of him again. “But,” she added, “I have not, for a moment, in more than eighty-five years, felt a spark of resentment against him; for I have always believed that the good Lord, in His infinite mercy, by this means **consecrated me to the work** that I am still permitted to do. When I remember how I have been blessed, how can I repine?” As Christians, we care called to our work to “do with our night what our hands find to do!” And we need to herald, “Salvation is free!”

In 1869, Fanny J. Crosby was inspired to write “Rescue the Perishing” after she met the men who were housed in a New York City mission. She was an avid worker of sharing the gospel and was concerned about their spiritual well-being. The story is that she earnestly pleaded with them that if there was someone “who had wandered from his mother’s home and teaching,” to please come and see her at the end of the service. A young man came up to her and said that he would like to see his mother in heaven, but according to the way he was living his life, he was convinced it was not possible. Afterward, he became a follower of Christ. That night, when Fanny Crosby went home, she wrote the hymn “Rescue the Perishing” from

the words that Mr. Doane had sent her just days before. It should also be noted that Crosby wrote many song texts pertaining to the temperance movement and this hymn carries the same overtones.

Years later, the same man approached her and with a tear covered face told her that he was that boy who told her he had wondered from his mother’s God. But ever since then, he said he had tried to live a consistent Christian life. “If we never meet again on earth, we will meet up yonder.” He turned and left, unable to say another word. And when Ms. Crosby related the story it was to her, one of the most fulfilling moment of her life. And the reason is that the sharing of the gospel is, without doubt, the key work of the work of Christ in us – to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

So as we conclude, we should appreciate that these Hallel Songs captured for the Jew the spirit of worship where songs elevated the reason they were together. So too for us as Christians, our songs should elevate the reason(s) we have come together: The Communion Memorial of our Lord; the Celebrations of the New Life Christ has inaugurated in us in baptism; and the Exhortations to share that message every where we go.

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.

Though they are slighting Him, still He is waiting,
Waiting the penitent child to receive;
Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently;
He will forgive if they only believe.

Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, awakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.

Rescue the perishing, duty demands it;
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide;
Back to the narrow way patiently win them;
Tell the poor wand’rer a Savior has died.

So as we conclude, Take the name of Jesus with you, Child of sorrow and of woe; It will joy and comfort give you, Take it then where'er you go. Precious name! Oh, how sweet! Hope of earth and joy of heav'n; Precious name! Oh, how sweet! Hope of earth and joy of heav'n. Take the name of Jesus ever, As a shield from every snare. If temptations round you gather, Breathe that holy name in prayer. Oh, the precious name of Jesus, How it thrills our souls with joy; When His loving arms receive us, And His songs our tongues employ! (Lydia Baxter, 1870).