

THEN SINGS MY SOUL – ROBERT J. MORGAN

We can find great solace through singing hymns of faith – especially the sturdy hymns that strengthen and steady us when we are weary and worn. They are the ones that pop into our heads while on a walk or when we awake in the middle of the night. This morning we are going to hear the stories behind our hymn selections. These stories and many others were compiled by Robert J. Morgan in his book, Then Sings My Soul. In the prologue of the book he writes, “I especially love those hymns which are chock full of theology, such as Isaac Watts’ and the brother’s Wesley, which permeate our souls with the timeless truths of God’s word. Hymns help us praise God. They are shafts of brilliant sunlight through the clouds and they unite the Lord’s earth-bound church in heavenly harmony. Hymns help us to pray. Sometimes when we’re too weary or worried for words, hymns give us a way of talking to ourselves, or encouraging ourselves in the Lord, as we do when we sing, “be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side”. They also give us a pulpit for preaching to others, exhorting others to come to Christ just as they are, without one plea. And hymns connect us with generations now gone. Each week millions of Christians in local settings around the world, using hymns composed by believers from every era and branch of Christendom, join voices in united bursts of praise, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord.” (Morgan xi)

***His Name Is Wonderful** – Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name. (Philippians 2:9)*

“This song was born in a small church. In an era when bigger is better and success is usually measured by statistics, its’ important to remember that small churches can still do great things.

Audrey Mae Mieir was born on May 12, 1916 and attended L.I.F.E Bible College. After marrying Charles B. Mieir in 1936, she was ordained to the Gospel ministry in the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

Audrey was a gifted pianist and an inspiring worship leader, song director, and choral clinician. In the 1950’s she was working in her brother-in-law’s church, Bethel Union Church in Duarte, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. Christmas fell on Sunday that year, and the church was decorated with pine boughs. The choir loft was now a manger scene, and the young people had worked hard on the performance.

“As the morning service began,” Audrey later said, “I was almost overwhelmed with the fragrance, the sounds, and most of all, with the gentle moving of the Spirit in that church. The pastor stood to his feet, opened the Bible, and said, ‘His name shall be called Wonderful.’ I tell you the truth, that’s all it took. I wrote the words and music in the flyleaf of my Bible. In the Sunday evening service, I taught the chorus to a group of young people, and it was sung for the first time.”

But Audrey had only written the first part of the song, and though it was well-received, it needed more. A friend told her, “Audrey, it’s a good song but there just isn’t enough of it. Maybe you could write a bridge for it.” Audrey went to lunch that day with her friend’s advice ringing in her ears. She ordered a hamburger, opened her Bible, and found a list of names given to Jesus in the Scripture. She jotted some of them down on her napkin. After returning to her office, Audrey went to the piano and began writing: “He’s the great Shepherd, the Rock of all ages, Almighty God is He....”

Though it was inspired on Christmas day by a traditional Christmas text, “His Name is Wonderful” has never been pegged as a Christmas hymn. It’s been a favorite of Christians around the world throughout the year.” (Morgan 299)

***My Jesus, I Love Thee*** – *We love Him because He first loved us.* (1 John 4:19)

“The young people of today are utterly dissolute and disorderly,” fumed grumpy old Martin Luther in the sixteenth century. The philosopher Plato agreed. “The youth are rebellious, pleasure-seeking, and irresponsible,” he wrote. “They have no respect for their elders.” Socrates complained, “Children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority. They show disrespect for elders, and love chatter.”

A 6000-year-old Egyptian tomb bears this inscription; “We live in a decadent age. Young people no longer respect their parents. They are rude and impatient. They inhabit taverns and have no self-control.”

The next time you think the “modern generation” is going from bad to worse, remember that God always has a rich handful of teenage heroes ready to change the world. In Bible times, we read of Joseph the dreamer, Daniel in Babylon, David the giant killer, and the virgin Mary (likely still a teen).

As a teenager, Charles Spurgeon preached to great crowds, but when they referred to his youthfulness, he replied, “Never mind my age. Think of the Lord Jesus Christ and His preciousness.”

In our own day, we’ve been deeply moved by young people like 17-year-old Cassie Bernall of Littleton, Colorado, who was shot for her faith during the Columbine tragedy.

Some of our greatest hymns were also written by young adults. Isaac Watts wrote most of his memorable hymns at about the age of nineteen. “My Jesus, I Love Thee,” was written by William Ralph Featherston at age sixteen. Sixteen!

Featherston was born July 23, 1846, in Montreal. He died in the same city 26 years later. His family attended the Wesleyan Methodist Church and it seems likely that William wrote this hymn as a poem celebrating his conversion to Christ. Reportedly, he sent it to an aunt living in California and somehow it was published as an anonymous hymn in a British hymnal in 1864.

Little else is known about the origin of the hymn or its author, but that’s all right. It’s enough just to know that God can change the world through anyone – regardless of age – who will say, “My Jesus, I Love Thee, I know Thou are mine. For Thee, all the follies of sin I resign.” (Morgan 95)

***Sweet By and By*** – *In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* (John 14:2)

“In 1868, a pharmacist named Sanford Fillmore Bennett, 31, was filling prescriptions and handling sales at his apothecary in Elkhorn, Wisconsin. His friend Joseph Webster entered the store. Joseph was a local musician, vocalist, violinist, and amateur composer who suffered from periods of depression. The two men had occasionally collaborated on hymns and songs, Sanford writing the words and Joseph the music.

On this particular day, Joseph was unusually blue and his face was long. Looking up, Sanford asked, “What is the matter now?”

“It’s no matter, “Joseph replied, “it will be all right by and by.”

An idea for a hymn hit Sanford like a flash of sunlight. Sitting at his desk, he began writing as fast as he could. The words came almost instantly. Two customers entered the drugstore, but no attempt was made to assist them – Sanford was too absorbed in his poem – so they sallied over to the stove and visited with Joseph. Finally, Sanford rose and joined them, handing a sheet of paper to his friend.

“Here’s is your prescription, Joe,” he said. “I hope it works.” Webster read the words aloud:

*There’s a land that is fairer than day, / And by faith we can see it far;  
For the Father waits over the way, / To prepare us a dwelling place there.  
In the sweet by and by, / We shall meet on that beautiful shore.  
In the sweet by and by, / We shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

Instantly a tune suggested itself, and Joseph jotted down some notes. Picking up his fiddle, he played his melody over a time or two then said to the others, “We four make a good male quartet. Let’s try the new song and see how it sounds.”

As “Sweet By and By” was being sung for the first time, another customer, R.R. Crosby, entered the store. “Gentleman,” he said, “I never heard that song before but it is immortal.”

He was right. For over a hundred years we’ve been singing an immortal hymn that was written in less than thirty minutes in a drugstore.” (Morgan 173)

***And Can It Be That I Should Gain?*** – *But He was wounded for your transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.* (Isaiah 53:5)

Charles Wesley was born just before Christmas in 1707. He was premature and neither cried nor opened his eyes. His mother, Susanna, kept him tightly wrapped in wool until his actual due date, whereupon he opened his eyes and cried.

At age eight, he was taken to London to attend Westminster School. At thirteen, he became a King’s Scholar at Westminster, and upon graduation, Charles enrolled at Oxford. He was nineteen and full of life. He later said, “My first year at college I lost in diversions.”

During his second year at Oxford, he grew serious about spiritual things. Neither he nor his brother, John, had yet received Christ as Savior, but they began seeking to live the Christian life so methodically they were dubbed “Methodists” by fellow students.

Their studies completed, the brothers volunteered to go to Georgia, a new colony in America for those in Britain’s debtors’ prisons, funded by Colonel James Ogelthorpe. But as a missionary, Charles was an utter failure. He was demanding and autocratic, and he insisted on baptizing infants, not by sprinkling, but by immersing them three times in succession. One angry woman fired a gun at him.

Charles left America ill and depressed. Some time later, John also returned in low spirits. Finding themselves in spiritual crisis, the brothers began attending meetings led by the Moravian Christian,

Peter Boehler. Finally, on Sunday, May 21, 1738 Charles, 31, wrote, “I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ. I saw that by faith I stood.”

John came to Christ about the same time, saying, “I felt my heart strangely warmed.”

On Tuesday, May 23, Charles wrote in his journal, “I began a hymn upon my conversion.” We aren’t certain which hymn he meant, but many historians think it was “And Can It Be,” because of the vivid testimony in verse 4.”

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray – I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee. (Morgan 45)*

***Just As I Am, Without One Plea*** – *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. (John 6:37)*

She was an embittered woman, Charlotte Elliott of Brighton, England. Her health was broken, and her disability had hardened her. “If God loved me,” she muttered, “He would not have treated me this way.” Hoping to help her, a Swiss minister, Dr. Cesar Malan, visited the Elliotts on May 9, 1822. Over dinner, Charlotte lost her temper and railed against God and family in a violent outburst. Her embarrassed family left the room, and Dr. Malan was left alone with her.

“You are tired of yourself, aren’t you?” he asked. “You are holding to your hate and anger because you have nothing else in the world to cling to. Consequently, you have become sour, bitter, and resentful.”

“What is your cure?” asked Charlotte.

“The faith you are trying to despise.”

As they talked, Charlotte softened. “If I wanted to become a Christian and to share the peace and joy you possess,” she finally asked, “what would I do?”

“You would give yourself to God just as you are now, with your fightings and fears, hates and loves, pride and shame.”

“I would come to God just as I am? Is that right?”

Charlotte did come just as she was, and her heart was changed that day. As time passed, she found and claimed John 6:37 as a special verse for her: “... he who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”

Years later, her brother, Rev. Henry Elliott, was raising funds for a school for the children of poor clergymen. Charlotte wrote a poem, and it was printed and sold across England. The leaflet said: *Sold for the Benefit of St. Margaret’s Hall, Brighton: Him That Cometh to Me I Will in No Wise Cast Out*. Underneath was Charlotte’s poem – which has since become the most famous invitational hymn in history.

Charlotte lived to be 82 and wrote about 150 hymns, though she never enjoyed good health. As her loved ones sifted through her papers after her death, they found over a thousand letters she had kept in which people expressed gratitude for the way this hymn had touched their lives.” (Morgan 113)

***Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus*** – *Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness.* (Ephesians 6:14)

Dudley Tyng served as his father's assistant at Philadelphia's Church of the Epiphany and was elected its pastor when his father retired in 1854. He was only 29 when he succeeded his father at this large Episcopal church, and at first it seemed a great fit. But the honeymoon ended when Dudley began vigorously preaching against slavery. Loud complaints rose from the more conservative members, resulting in Dudley's resignation in 1856.

He and his followers organized the Church of the Covenant elsewhere in the city, and his reputation grew. He began noontime Bible studies at the YMCA, and his ministry reached far beyond his own church walls. Dudley had a burden for leading husbands and fathers to Christ, and he helped organize a great rally to reach men.

On Tuesday, March 30, 1858, five thousand men gathered. As Dudley looked over the sea of faces he felt overwhelmed. "I would rather this right arm were amputated at the trunk than that I should come short of my duty to you in delivering God's message," he told the crowd.

Over a thousand men were converted that day.

Two weeks later Dudley was visiting in the countryside, watching a corn-thresher in the barn. His hand moved too close to the machine and his sleeve was snared. His arm was ripped from its socket, the main artery severed. Four days later his right arm was amputated close to the shoulder. When it appeared he was dying, Dudley told his aged father: "Stand up for Jesus, father, and tell my brethren of the ministry to stand up for Jesus."

Rev. George Duffield of Philadelphia's Temple Presbyterian Church was deeply stirred by Dudley's funeral, and following Sunday he preached from Ephesians 6:14 about standing firm for Christ. He read a poem he had written, inspired by Dudley's words:

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus, / Ye soldiers of the cross;  
Lift high His royal banner, / It must not suffer loss.*

The editor of a hymnal heard the poem, found appropriate music, and published it. "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" soon became one of America's favorite hymns, extending Dudley's dying words to millions." (Morgan 135)