

The Hymns We Sing
Sermons on the Great Hymns
Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing

With Study Questions

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3/3/2002*

Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing

John 4:1-14

This hymn was written by Robert Robinson in 1758. Robinson was saved under the ministry of George Whitefield, entered into the Christian ministry but still tended to wander from God. Some believe this hymn to be a bit autobiographical. It seems this would be the case for all of us. Our hearts ever battle to find the godly tune.

One day, late in his life, while he was on a stagecoach, a female passenger wanted to share her faith with him. He had obviously given some indication to her that his soul was in need of saving. She quoted this hymn saying, "These words might help you as they have helped me." He sobbed, "Madam, I am the poor, unhappy man who composed that hymn many years ago. I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then." Robinson's problem may have been found in the nature of this statement. I am not sure of Robinson's final or genuine state before God, the hymn is rich nonetheless.

Let us look at the hymn text.

*Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.*

Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13, 14).

There is no shortage of passages in Scripture portraying Christ as the fountain of every good and perfect gift. When we believe we shall never thirst (John 6:35); the Lamb shall keep His own from thirst and hunger, wiping the tears from their eyes and leading them to the fountain of living waters (Revelation 7:16, 17); we come to Jesus and from our heart will flow rivers of living water (John 7:37, 38) and so on. From truth to mercy to salvation to justice to life, it all flows from the fountain of Christ. He is simply the author of everything that is good. Goodness itself is defined by His very character.

What does seem odd about this is that the Fount of every blessing would need to tune a heart to sing His grace. We are like a race of un-tuned instruments whose songs are death and destruction. We will not and cannot play the tune properly and sweetly until corrected by the Master.

Humanity's lackluster response to the never ceasing mercies of God, which call for loudest praise (even among Christians), strongly testify of hearts in need of adjustment.

*Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of thy redeeming love.*

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (Revelation 4:8)!

The Lord's Prayer petitions God that His will be done on earth as in heaven. We are seeking to imitate on earth that which is taking place in heaven. In heaven God is being praised. I don't know to what extent this will be our full-time job in eternity. But I know this. For me to enjoy singing day and night for eternity would require a major tuning of my heart. But of course I will then fully realize the mount upon which I am fixed. This mount is discussed in Hebrews 12.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of Abel*" (Hebrews 12:22-24).

The mount is the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem (including the singing angels), it is the universal and eternal fellowship of the saints, the presence of God the Father and of Jesus the Mediator of the covenant who redeemed our souls from God's divine justice.

One of the reasons I so enjoy this hymn is that it contains the prayer that God will teach my heart to sing as it should based upon the redemption that is mine in Christ. It is so much more realistic for me to pray that God would help me to be thankful than it is to give thanks.

*Here I raise mine Ebenezer;
Hither by thy help I'm come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.*

Then Samuel took a stone and set *it* up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us” (1 Samuel 7:12).

The Ebenezer was a memorial stone erected by Samuel to mark where God helped Israel to defeat the Philistines. It was a sign of God’s might and faithfulness. The Israelites thought they could defeat the Philistines by wielding the ark as if it were their private weapon. They lost both the ark and their lives. The ability for God’s people to overcome their adversaries (including death itself) is dependent upon the power and faithfulness of God.

When we raise our Ebenezer we are recognizing that all our efforts are consigned to the dust apart from the grace and power of Christ. Robinson seemed to be quite aware of his own nature, as we should be, so his hope (our only hope) of arriving safely into eternity is the good pleasure of God.

*Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed his precious blood.*

Jesus tells us that we did not choose Him but He chose us (John 15:16). Paul informs us that the mind of the unsaved is enmity (or hostile) toward God; it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be (Romans 8:7). Paul also informs us that there is none who seeks after God (Romans 3:11). And in a passage Paul will later quote, Isaiah writes,

“I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me (Isaiah 65:1).

We all, no doubt, remember seeking after God. And there is little doubt that many of us (at least those who came to faith later in life) came into the Christian faith after a great deal of emotional and psychological searching and struggling. But if we have truly come to faith, we later are informed by the Scriptures that this was the result of God seeking and finding us, not the opposite.

We have been rescued from blindness and death by Christ placing His blood where ours belonged. This, by the way, was a rescue mission that would not—could not—fail unless one wishes to plead the inefficacy of Christ’s ability to save. It was not a mixture of His blood and my blood or His blood and my will (John 1:12 & 13). It was His act of free grace.

*O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to thee.*

In light of God's grace, Paul considers himself in debt to all (Romans 1:14). We often operate in this world in reaction to the behavior of the creatures rather than the Creator. We are called to extend mercy, forgiveness, love and grace to others because our Lord has extended that to us. God has placed us in a position where we owe that to others.

It is the grace and goodness of God that, like a fetter or tether, binds our wandering hearts to God. Paul writes,

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance (Romans 2:4)?

This is why churches must be full of God's grace. The preaching of the full, unencumbered gospel, the Lord's Supper and baptism are expressions of God's grace that bring comfort to the sinner and are the power of salvation and perseverance. We should not think God was more gracious at our conversion than He is any moment we acknowledge our need for His grace.

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for thy courts above.*

Who, when singing this hymn doesn't, at least secretly, acknowledge the overwhelming truth of the first two lines of this last stanza? Calvin taught that until we die we are all partial unbelievers. Emotionally, psychologically and even spiritually it is the nature of 'yes even' the Christian, to have wandering eyes and affections. And as much as we needed to be rescued from death and blindness we need to be preserved by Him who lives to intercede on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25). Keep in mind that if we don't acknowledge we need Him now as much as the hour we first believed (which is argued by some), then we certainly won't have that comfort either. We ought not operate as if He saved us then left us on our own to maintain our own salvation.

Ezekiel writes of the new covenant.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

Our hearts belong to God. To acknowledge this is merely to acknowledge its rightful ownership and proper management. Those who seek to own their own hearts declare their own divinity, become their own God and pronounce their own destruction. There are times when it is better to trust someone else rather than yourself. I wouldn't fix my own brakes nor would I operate on myself. There are others more qualified. No one is more qualified to seal your heart for an eternity of bliss and life than Jesus the Savior.

Questions for Study

1. How is Christ like a fountain? What flows from Him (page 2)?
2. Why must our hearts be tuned to sing His grace (pages 2, 3)?
3. What is happening in heaven that we should learn here on earth (page 3)?
4. Discuss the mount Christians are fixed upon (page 3).
5. What is the Ebenezer (pages 3, 4)?
6. Did we seek God or did He seek us? or both? Explain your answer (page 4).
7. Does a person help when they're being rescued by Christ (page 4)?
8. Is it possible that the rescue mission of Christ might fail or leave someone behind? What are the implications of this thought (page 4)?
9. How does grace make us a debtor (page 5)?
10. What attribute of God leads us to repentance? How is that attribute best displayed (page 5)?
11. Are even Christians still prone to wander? What should our response to this be (pages 5, 6)?