

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

Revelation 22:20

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Revelation 22:20

**He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20)!**

Introduction

This hymn, which dates back to the 14th century, is among the most profound of all hymns. Its beauty is almost haunting; so much that nearly every type of choir—both Christian and secular—have mouthed these words for hundreds of years. The hymn is a plea—a cry for help. But it makes you wonder how many have merely exhaled these glorious lyrics.

Let us seek to avoid taking rank with those who, as Jesus taught,

...draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. ⁹And in vain they worship Me (Matthew 15:8, 9).

May the words of this hymn, which are inspired by Revelation 22:20, be our plea—and the plea for those we are called to love.

Ransom Captive Israel

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

One can hardly miss the geo-political tone of this hymn—the nation of Israel held captive, in exile. Captivity and exile was so often the condition of that nation. But clearly the political captivity of Israel in the Old Testament served to foreshadow the sin which holds all men captive (1 Corinthians 10:1-5). Herein lies the heart of this hymn.

The cry is for Emmanuel to ransom the captives. So who is this Emmanuel? Emmanuel means *God with us* (Matthew 1:23)—the eternal Son of God who became flesh (John 1:1, 14). So deep and dark is this captivity—so strong the bondage of sin—that none other than God Himself can deliver. And how would this deliverance come? By might or ingenuity or political overthrow? No, a ransom would be paid.

...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

Although the tyrants of our soul are the world, the flesh and Satan, the Bible teaches that ransoms are paid to God (Exodus 30:12; Psalm 49:7). The Son paid the Father (the payment being His sacrificial death on the cross) to set the captives free (Ephesians 4:8).

The Bondage of the Law

*O come, O come, thou Lord of might
Who to Thy tribe on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Delusional best describes those who think they don't need Emmanuel. "Emmanuel is your crutch," they mutter. "The Lord of might is only for those who haven't the fortitude to assemble their own might." Oh that they might merely smell Sinai. Or perhaps they should feel themselves tottering on Sinai's height—wondering if they might fall to their doom, only to realize that the plummeting has already begun. Why such strong talk regarding Sinai?

Sinai is where God gave His law. This was more than good advice from a wise person. The Law of God given at Sinai produced much more than a system of ethics. The mountain quaked and smoked. To touch the mountain meant death.

One of the specific designs of the law was to reveal the holiness of God and man's inability to approach God through His own law-keeping. The Spirit-led man looks at the law and the law (spiritually speaking) kills him (Romans 7:11). The Apostle taught,

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

The height of Sinai is impassable apart from the Lord of might.

The Death of Death

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Specific, the Bible is, as to who this Savior would be. He is the Rod of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). Jesse was King David's father. Matthew's genealogy traces Jesse to Jesus. "Free thine own from Satan's tyranny," the hymn says. This mirrors the angel's proclamation found in Matthew's gospel.

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

The Rod of Jesse had a specific mission to save His people from their sins. He would not fail in His mission. His ransom is sufficient and powerful to save. How do you know if this is you? Do you believe? Then He died for you.

His death rescues from the depths of hell. But unlike many who rescue, He was not left unscathed. And unlike *any* who rescue He bore the full throttle of the sin and toil of those He came to save. We are taught that He died that we might live (1 Thessalonians 5:10).

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

It wasn't merely a physical death or a social poverty, lest the extent of our redemption be merely physical or social. His sorrow and sacrifice plummeted to the depths of the soul. He tasted our Hell that we might abide in His heaven.

The Morning Has Broken

*O come, Thou Day-spring, from on high,
And cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

The world can be a very dark place—gloomy and obtuse—Like so many blind men wandering in the mire of their own confusion. Praise God that He has sent light. The father of John the Baptist sung of Jesus, that He would bring

...salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,⁷⁸ through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:78, 79).

The morning began with the coming of Christ and He has put death's dark shadows to flight.

Sin and death are insurmountable foes to mere men. But death itself, as an entity, is ground to dust by the power of God. God will have no pity for death.

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes (Hosea 13:14).

The Faithful Deliverer

*O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens" (Revelation 3:7).

The deliverance of God is supremely efficient. The ransom is accepted and the victory sure. That which Christ has opened to His beloved is open indeed. Feel the impact of Paul's encouragement:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?³⁶ As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

Beware of those who cavil at this passage and seek to break its heart when, in their quibbling, they spew, "But there is one thing not mentioned, my own will. "Distress" they assert "may not separate me from the love of Christ, but my own volition may."

How violently shortsighted when they miss the force of Paul's meaning. For who would ever think that nakedness could extract us from the loving arms of God unless by the nakedness our hearts become so dampened as to expel the very faith which is the instrument which holds us to Christ. Paul's point is not that a sword can amputate the arm of God thus setting us free from His love, but that a God-given faith will persevere in the face of these toils. A godly faith recognizes faith *and* suffering are granted by God.

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Philippians 1:29).

The reason the path is safe which leads Christians to their heavenly home is because God has graciously overcome man's most bitter enemy—his own nature. In doing so He has closed the path to misery. What are we to say to such things!? Rejoice! Rejoice!