

An Attempt To Listen To God On

They Sang a Hymn

By

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Meditations on They Sang a Hymn

The Setting

There are few situations more solemn than the last hours of a persons life. The last words they say, thoughts they communicate, and the things which they do. In the upper room solemnity settled over the place on two levels:

- 1) To the disciples, it was a solemn occasion yet blended with joy as they recalled the deliverance of their fathers from the bondage of Egypt.
- 2) To the Lord, the solemnity was intensified because it was the last hours before His crucifixion and His being forsaken by God.

He now prepares His disciples for that which lies ahead. Yet, in that occasion of pensiveness, He has joy (Jn. 15:11). He had desired this occasion (Lk. 22:15).

When our Lord was facing death, He sang a hymn (Matt 26:30; Mk.14:26). This is utterly amazing for singing is something we do when we are joyful. It is very hard to sing when facing, or experiencing, great darkness and grief. The wonder is, "How could He sing when knowing that which lay before him?" How infinite was the spiritual and mortal strength of the man Jesus. This was no dark and melancholy Saviour, but with ram like determination and strength, He sings a hymn and goes out. There are three times when one of the Godhead sings.

- 1) In a future day when Israel is restored, then God will sing. Israel is told to rejoice and be glad with all their heart, the Lord hath taken away her judgments, and the Lord is in the midst of her. How rich are the words of promise: "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing". (Zeph. 3:17)
- 2) Still in a future day, but the scene is changed. The Lord is in the midst of His own, and the prophetic words will be fulfilled. "I will declare they name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise unto Thee". (Psa. 22:22; Heb. 2:12)
- 3) This time is also the singing of praise, but unlike the other two, it was a bitter sweet singing. He would have sung with deep thoughtful contemplations and appreciations. With intense personal affirmations, He would have sung the sentiments of "Great Hallel", which consisted of Psalm 113-118, and very possibly He would have led His own in the singing with:
Psa. 113-114 Before the meal and the emptying of the second cup.
Psa. 115-118 When the meal is over and the 4th cup has been filled.

It is with a holy astonishment we contemplate his singing as He sang the words, and as the disciples would respond with "Hallelujah".

The word "hymn" (humneo), in Matt. 26, indicates "a song of praise" and it is translated "praises"; by Paul and Silas in prison (Acts. 16:25), and "praise", where the Lord is spoken of as saying: "I will sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12).

This is the supreme example of our Lord for His people. In the hours when singing praise to God is so very difficult, times of loneliness, bereavement, business collapse, health , etc., then we can think of that lovely man, who when facing His darkest hour, sang praises to God.

- 1) In 2 Chron. 13, a battle is being waged against Abijah by Jeroboam. An ambush is laid by Jeroboam but they sound the trumpets and shout (vv. 14, 15). The Lord fought for Abijah and Jeroboam was smitten. The Lord here is going into battle, the religious and political powers are set against Him, but in the singing there is a remembrance of the mighty delivering power of God and ultimate victory.

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- 2) When Peter faced death he slept (Acts 12:6), for he believed the words of the Lord (Jn. 21:18) that he would live to be an old man. He knew that despite the plans of Herod, he would not die. Therefore, he slept.¹
- 3) When Stephen faced death he prayed, but his prayer was a reversal of the words of the Lord. When the Lord was about to enter death he said: "Father forgive them" (Lk. 23:34) and then: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46). Stephen said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit", and then "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:59-60).

There are at least three other truths which must be pondered:

- 1) The zeal of the Lord when He sang this.
- 2) The love that filled His heart for His own.
- 3) The love He had for the Father.

Nothing the Lord ever did was done in a casual or nonchalant manner, but with full energetic devotion begotten of the Holy Spirit. He would have acted in "ram like" determination. In a different context he could say: "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up" (Jn. 2:17). Of Him it could be said: "For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (Isa. 50:7). The resoluteness that marked His life was now manifested in the genuineness of Him singing the words of the hymn.

- 1) He who had spoken the truth throughout His life will not waver before Pilate.
- 2) He who had performed miracles, disregarding the traditions of the fathers, will not perform a miracle for Herod's curiosity.
- 3) He who had stood and spoken against the powers of darkness will not fall under them now.

His spirit would be inwardly agreeing to that which He was singing and with heart appreciation. This was not the "sitting back" and repeating non-thinking phrases, but with the attitude of His heart's meditations. It was not a mere formality of "this is the thing that was done" attitude, but as He sang, in spirit He who was the truth would have been entering into the sentiments of the words. Some would have told that which He came to save men from, others of His own devotion, others of His purpose in it all. As God looked into His heart, He saw the purest genuineness of fidelity in affection, and how this delighted His heart.

Therefore, He will sing the "Hallel". The first marvel is that in these four Psalms only one is thought of as Messianic. This is due to the words of Psa. 118:22-23 and 26. These are referred to again in Matt. 21:42 and Matt. 21:9. While our Lord would have sung all these, it is Psa. 115-118 that are referred to in Matt. 26:30.

He would have sung:

Psa.115:11 "Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield."

Psa. 116:1-4 "I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul."

Psa. 116:14-19 "I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, In the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD."

¹ The only other man we read of being wakened by an angel is Elijah. (1 Kgs. 19:5)

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Psa. 118:21-28 “I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day, which the LORD hath, made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee.”

Of all the occurrences of this expression the one repeatedly used in the New Testament is: “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner” (Psa. 118:22).

Christ is:

- 1) The Foundation Stone. (Isa. 28:16)
- 2) The Tried Stone. (Isa. 28:16)
- 3) The Chief Corner Stone. (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6)
- 4) The Living stone. (1 Pet. 2:4)
- 5) The Cut Stone. (Dan. 2:34)
- 6) The Head of the corner. (Matt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7)

Another expression which is wondrous to meditate on is: “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar” (Psa. 118:27). What exactly does this mean? The brazen altar of the Tabernacle had four horns (Ex. 27:2) and this verse records: “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar”. When the fierceness of the fire burning on the altar is understood, then it is logical that a rope, irrespective of how sturdy, would soon be burnt through. That which I believe is indicated is the sacrifice had the sentence of death upon it, there was no escape or evading it.

In the Scriptures dealing with the passion narrative, there are several bindings of the Lord.

He was:

- 1) Bound and brought to Annas. (Jn. 18:12-13)
- 2) Bound by Annas and sent to Caiaphas. (Jn. 18:24)
- 3) Bound by the rulers and sent to Pilate. (Matt. 27:2; Mk. 15:1)

Herein is a tremendous truth. He who came to set at liberty those who were bound was Himself bound. One can understand the demonics being bound (Lk. 8:29), Barabbas (Mk. 15:7), and also the woman bound by the power of Satan (Lk. 13:16). But Christ was devoted to God and could not be bound by satanic powers. He was never guilty of the offenses of insurrection and murder, yet He is bound! The wonder of it is that the Son of God is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and concerning Him, it is recorded: “He bound up the sea” (Jer. 5:22) and “He bound up the waters” (Prov. 30:4). Profound reality, the unbounded God, who cannot be restricted, is transcendent beyond all, yet was bound by the creatures he had made. This is condescending grace at infinitum.

Those who were rejecting Him were bound by sin and failed to see it. The reality is that while He was bound, He was the only free man: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (Jn. 8:36). He was free in spirit, undamaged by inherent sin, and undistorted by external corruption.

In the scriptures we read of others who were bound:

Others Who Were Bound in the Scriptures	
Isaac	The sacrificed son, because of obedience to the father. (Gen. 22:9)
Samson	A judge. (Judg. 16:8)

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Others Who Were Bound in the Scriptures	
Joseph	The suffering son, because of obedience to God's principles of fidelity. (Gen. 40:3)
The three Hebrews	Because of devotion to God. (Dan. 3:21)
Hoshea, Manasseh and Zedekiah	All kings. (2 Kgs. 17:4; 2 Kgs. 25:7; 2 Chron. 33:11)
Jeremiah and Agabus	Were prophets. (Jer. 40:1; Acts 21:10-11)
Paul	Because of the gospel. (Acts 22:29)
Zedekiah	Because of rebellion against the discipline of God. (Jer. 39:7)
Barabbas	Because of personal sinfulness. (Mk. 15:7)
John	Because of speaking faithfully the word of God. (Matt. 14:3)

Several truths become clear by way of similarity and contrast.

When the lovely Son of God was bound, He was the bound Son because of His obedience to God, obedience to God's principles, devotion to God, speaking faithfully God's word, for the providing of the gospel. But He was never bound due to his sin, rebellion against the discipline of God or personal activity in wickedness.

Repeating again that the cords which secured the sacrifice to the altar could not have been literal, but cords according to the will of another. So with Christ, the cords that held Him to Calvary were not the nails, nor the activities of man, but the devotion of His heart and the desire of the heart of God. In pictorial language it is making evident that for Christ there could be no wavering of the devotion of His heart and zeal for the glory of God. In the vastness of eternity past, the beloved Son was the appointed to be the Sacrifice for sin, and was bound to that commitment. (1 Pet. 1:20)

What were the cords that bound the Lord to Calvary's tree?

- 1) The love the Lord had for His own. (Jn. 13:1)
- 2) The love he had for His Father, the only one He specified in life. (Jn. 14:31)
- 3) His obedience. (Heb. 10:9)
- 4) The joy set before Him. (Heb. 12:2)

In two of these statements there is the going into the very heart of the Saviour. The Holy Spirit draws aside the curtain of His innermost motives and gives to the holy apostle the understanding of His love and His joy. This was not the love of a servant for His master (Ex. 21:5) but His love for His church which is symbolized as His wife and children (Rev. 21:9; Heb.2:13).

How is love to be measured? God told Abraham: "Walk through the length and breadth of the land" (Gen. 13:17) This was a horizontal aspect. However, when it comes to the love of God, Paul writes: "That ye might be able to understand with all saints what is the breadth and length, and depth and height, and to know the love of God" (Eph. 3:18-19). This is both horizontal and vertical. Thus the love of God and Christ is to be measured² by:

² Of course, it is impossible for us to measure the love of God.

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- 1) What it causes to be given up.
- 2) What it bestows.
- 3) What it endures.

Considering The Cords And Their Relevance To The Lord.

First Cord:

The first cord in John is: “having loved His own that were into the world He loved them to the uttermost”. Paul wrote: “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). Then bringing it closer he wrote: “The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20); but none of them indicate the intensity or length of that love. John goes beyond this and says He loves to the uttermost! How far was that uttermost? Perhaps an illustration would help.

Illus: In 1984 I was in Ireland with my family. On the last morning I was there I walked along the water’s edge and on the pathway I saw a large stone. On it I wrote: “R J 1984”. Counting the steps back I told mum and dad about it. About two weeks later I got a card from dad in Budapest, and in it he wrote: “Son when you left I took a walk on my own and counting the steps I found the stone with that which you had written. I began to cry, for son, you will never know how much you are loved”.

Saints of God, we look not to words inscribed on a stone but to the old rugged cross and hear the Lord say, “My child you will never know how much you are loved”. His love for each of us meant leaving the heights of glory and bliss. That’s what love caused Him to give up. He has granted to us eternal redemption, eternal life, and being blessed with all spiritual blessings. That is what He has bestowed to us. He suffered banishment from God, and with it, a grief no words can express or mind conceive. That is what His love endured. No wonder it says: “He loved them to the uttermost”.

Second Cord:

The second cord was His love for the Father (Jn. 14:31). This was the only time the Lord ever proclaimed His love for the Father. It is so remarkable for people being self centered will at times say to those who bestow gifts on them “I love you”, but it is because of that which they are receiving. One would have understood the Lord proclaiming His love for the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration, or when the people wanted to make Him king. Such was not the case, rather, it was when He was facing His darkest hours. The man who loved God with all His heart and who loved God consistently and perfectly, now was going to manifest not only by word but by deed the measuring of His love for the Father.

He would face the verbal humiliations by man, from the watching crowd (Lk. 23:35); the chief priests (Mk. 15:31); and the two thieves (Matt. 27:44). His love for the Father was greater than any verbal humiliation.

Added to this would be the physical humiliations of the Lord by the Roman soldiers. (Matt. 27:27-31; Mk. 15:6-20) and Herod’s men of war (Lk. 23:11). His love for the Father was greater than any physical humiliation.

Once again, added to this was the physical torturing of the Lord when He was slapped (Jn. 18:22); blindfolded (Lk. 22:64); spit upon (Matt. 26:67); buffeted (Matt. 26:67); scourged (Matt. 27:26); struck on the head (Matt. 27:30); and crowned with thorns (Matt. 27:29). But, his love for the Father was greater than any physical torturing.

In the offerings of the Old Testament the animal was laid on the altar, it was dead! However, when the Lord was put on the cross, not only was He alive, but in conscious awareness He deliberately went to the cross.

- 1) In perfect obedience and grace unto death even “the death of the cross”. (Phil. 2:8)
- 2) Manifesting His unreserved love for the Father. (Jn. 14:31)
- 3) Demonstrating unreserved determination to fulfill the Father’s will. (Jn. 18:11)

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He will give His body, “His own body” (1 Pet. 2:24); “His own blood” (Acts 20:28); Blood that was characterized as “Innocent Blood” (Matt. 27:24); and “Precious Blood” (1 Pet. 1:19).

On that cross, suspended between Heaven and earth, the son of God was declaring: “I love the Father”. He who had taught: “Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul and strength and mind” (Lk. 10:27), did that to the uttermost. Solomon loved the Lord and walked in the ways of his father David (1 Kgs. 3:3), but the love of Solomon was only a shadow of the love the Lord had for His Father.

Third Cord:

The third cord was His obedience to God (Heb. 10:7-8). Hundreds of times in the Old Testament the Lord is recorded as saying: “I will”.

- 1) “And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Ex. 3:17)
- 2) “And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.” (Ex. 4:23)
- 3) “And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” (Ex. 6:7)
- 4) “And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.” (Ex. 6:8)
- 5) “Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations.” (Neh. 1:8)
- 6) “I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh.” (Prov. 1:26)
- 7) “And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down.” (Isa. 5:5)

While so often He had said “My will”, indicating absolute sovereignty, yet, in the Garden of Gethsemane he said: “Not my will” (Lk. 22:42). His life’s purpose was to fulfill the words of the Psalmist:

“I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, In the courts of the LORD’S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.” (Psa. 116:14-19)

On that dark evening His obedience to God was marked by:

- 1) Singularity, doing all for the glory of God.
- 2) Irrevocability to do the will of God.

This man was the perfect fulfilment of the servant of Ex. 21 whose body was marked:

- 1) Because of the words of love: “I love my master, my wife and my children” (Ex. 21:5)
- 2) By the wounds of love, for his ear was bored with an aul. (Ex. 21:6)

He held the highest place above, Adored by all the sons of flame,
Yet such His self-denying love, He laid aside His crown and came
To seek the lost, And at the cost
Of heavenly rank and earthly fame He sought me—Blessed be His name!

It was a lonely path He trod, From every human soul apart;
Known only to Himself and God Was all the grief that filled His heart,
Yet from the track He turned not back,
Till where I lay in want and shame, He found me—Blessed be His name!

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Then dawned at last that day of dread, When desolate, yet undismayed,
With wearied frame and thorn-crowned head, He, God-forsaken, man-betrayed,
Was then made sin On Calvary,
And, dying there in grief and shame, He saved me—Blessed be His name!
C.A. Tydeman.

Fourth Cord:

The forth cord was: “The joy that was set before Him” (Heb. 12:2). As before, we tread in pathways far beyond human comprehension, for none can tell the anticipated joy He had and how deep His delight will be when He sees: “the travail of His soul and is satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). He, the Corn of Wheat that fell into the ground will have much fruit (Jn. 12:24); when He “brings many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2:10); when he is glorified in His saints” (2 Thess. 1:10); when He presents His “bride” (the church) to Himself without spot or wrinkle” (Eph. 5:27); and “present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).

Since the anticipated delight and wonder of Heaven’s vaults resounding, with ten thousand times ten thousands and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing”. Then we read, “And every creature which is in Heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea and all that are in them heard I saying, ‘Blessing and honour and glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever!’” It is no wonder the twenty-four elders fell down and worship Him, and say “Amen”. (Rev. 5:11-14).

In my mind, I can see across the arch of Heaven the words, in brilliance shining, “I will put my trust in Him” (Heb. 2:13) and “He trusted in God” (Matt. 27:43).

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by his Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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