



**CHURCHES TOGETHER  
IN CENTRAL BROMLEY**

# CTCB Lent Course 2021

## ***My Favourite Hymn***

### Session 2: Isaac Watts

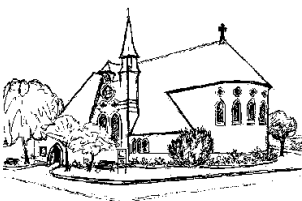
<sup>18</sup> ...be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Ephesians 5:18b-20 NIV*

### Starter activity: ***Name That Hymn!***

Here are some lines from well-known hymns. But what's the *first* line?

1. Be thou still my strength and shield
2. We've no less days to sing God's praise
3. Yea, Amen! let all adore thee
4. Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide
5. Mountains bow down and the seas will roar at the sound of your name
6. And keep us in his grace
7. And may the music of thy name refresh my soul in death
8. How great is God Almighty who has made all things well
9. Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
10. The vilest offender who truly believes



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## Bible passages for reflection and discussion

The two New Testament passages printed below were part of the inspiration for Isaac Watts' best-known hymn *When I survey the wondrous cross*. Having sung the hymn, we will read the passages, then break into small groups to consider the questions on the right.

### *Philippians 3*

*New International Version*

<sup>1</sup> Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup> Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh – <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

<sup>7</sup> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

### *Romans 5*

*New International Version*

<sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Now consider the following questions in your small group:

1. Isaac Watts' line "My richest gain I count but loss" is a paraphrase of the apostle Paul's words in Philippians 3:7. What things was Paul talking about when he referred to "*gains*"? The clue is in the previous paragraph of the Bible passage (verses 4 to 6). What things might be our equivalent of Paul's *gains*? Try to think of at least five different ones!
2. According to verses 7-8, how much did Paul's *gains* matter to him once he heard what Jesus had done for him? Why was this different from what he had thought before? Does Isaac Watts share Paul's view? Do you?
3. In the hymn Watts imagines watching Jesus die on the cross, where "sorrow and love flow mingled down". How does this relate to Paul's words in Romans 5:8? What is the big surprise in this Bible verse? (The clue is the contrast Paul draws between verse 7 and verse 8.)
4. Sometimes we think of the death of Jesus and his Resurrection as being two parts of the same story, neither one making sense without the other. If this is the case, why does Watts not mention the Resurrection in this hymn? How might this help us adjust our view of Jesus' death?
5. The final verse of the hymn tells us about Watts' personal response to the death of Jesus. Is his response reasonable or a bit over the top?

## Time to share

Choose your favourite one of the Isaac Watts hymns we have considered this evening, and try and work out three different things you like about it. Then share them with the rest of your group.

## Closing prayer

Heavenly Father,  
We thank you for your servant Isaac Watts,  
for the gifts you gave him, his poetry and his passion,  
and for the fruits of his work which we enjoy today.  
As we sing about your amazing love for us,  
demonstrated supremely by Jesus' death on the cross,  
please help us to respond in whole-hearted obedience to you  
for his name's sake. Amen.

## Fact file: *Isaac Watts*

Isaac Watts, the man who rose to be called “the father [or godfather] of English hymnody”, was born in Southampton in 1674 into a family of rather humble origins. Isaac was the eldest of nine siblings, the children of a Huguenot mother and a father bold enough to be jailed twice for his religious convictions. He was educated by his father in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, then received his higher education from a Nonconformist (ie non-C of E) Academy. Upon graduating at age twenty, he returned home where he took to writing hymns.

Since the Reformation, Protestant churches had desired to remain faithful to their battle cry of “*sola scriptura*” (=only Scripture) in every detail of faith and life. One implication of this was found in their view of church music. The great Reformer John Calvin for example thought that church music should consist of nothing more and nothing less than the Psalms. The Psalms, therefore, were set to a metrical tune and used almost unaccompanied for the first few generations following the Reformation.

One day Watts made known to his father his *ennui* with the metrical psalms. His father challenged him not to complain, but rather to produce something himself worth singing. Watts accepted the challenge and eventually produced upwards of 700 hymns, Psalms, or spiritual songs, the bulk of his great works being produced in a period of just two years after his graduation.

Watts believed that, if one could pray to God spontaneously and in words not exactly Scripture, it should be acceptable to compose hymns which paraphrased or responded to, rather than simply borrowed from, the words of the Bible. He noted that the Psalms, though undoubtedly inspired, were *Jewish* texts, with little specifically Christian doctrine. Watts, in response, appended “some wherever possible, to give what he called ‘an evangelical turn to the Hebrew sense’...”

As one author states, “[Watts’ hymnody] celebrates the glory of God in the created world, but it does not stop there, because it insists on the importance of revealed religion and on the saving grace of Jesus Christ.” He did not completely abandon the singing of Scripture, however, and wrote a number of Psalms in rhyming English verse, including his well-known “Joy to the World”, based on Psalm 72.

Today, though hymns have been replaced by the modern praise chorus in many places, Watts' influence on England, America, and the rest of the Christian hymn-singing world must not be overlooked. He was "radical, experimental, and adventurous" for his day, and we can thank him for his great hymns that point toward God's mercy and man's sinfulness in a way that makes God seem sweet to the soul.

(text adapted from Kristen Johnson, [www.wholesomewords.org](http://www.wholesomewords.org))

## Five well-known hymns by Isaac Watts

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Does his successive journeys run,  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

For Him shall endless prayer be made,  
And endless praises crown His head;  
His name, like sweet perfume, shall rise  
With every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue  
Dwell on His love with sweetest song;  
And infant voices shall proclaim  
Their early blessings on His name.

Blessings abound where'er He reigns;  
The prisoner leaps to lose his chains,  
The weary find eternal rest,  
And all the sons of want are blest.

Let every creature rise and bring  
Peculiar honours to our King;  
Angels descend with songs again,  
And earth repeat the loud Amen.

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Come, let us join our cheerful songs  
With angels round the throne.  
10,000 thousand are their tongues,  
But all their joys are one.

“Worthy the Lamb that died,” they cry,  
“To be exalted thus!”  
“Worthy the Lamb,” our hearts reply,  
“For He was slain for us!”

Jesus is worthy to receive  
Honour and power divine;  
And blessings more than we can give,  
Be, Lord, forever Thine.

Let all that dwell above the sky,  
And air and earth and seas,  
Conspire to lift Thy glories high,  
And speak Thine endless praise!

The whole creation join in one,  
To bless the sacred Name  
Of Him Who sits upon the throne,  
And to adore the Lamb.

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
And Heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth, the Saviour reigns!  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills  
and plains Repeat the sounding joy.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love.*

O God, our help in ages past,  
our hope for years to come,  
our shelter from the stormy blast,  
and our eternal home:

Before the hills in order stood,  
or earth received her frame,  
from everlasting thou art God,  
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight  
are like an evening gone;  
short as the watch that ends the night  
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
bears all its sons away;  
they fly, forgotten, as a dream  
dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,  
our hope for years to come,  
be thou our guide while troubles last,  
and our eternal home!

*For further details about this course or other events please contact:  
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