



**CHURCHES TOGETHER
IN CENTRAL BROMLEY**

CTCB Lent Course 2021

My Favourite Hymn

Session 3: Charles Wesley

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

Ephesians 5:18b-20 NIV

Starter activity (in small groups): ***The Lord's my Surfboard?!***

Here are some lines from well-known hymns but unfortunately they each contain a mistake. What *should* the line be?

1. How precious did that grace appear the day I first believed!
2. For why? The Lord our God is good; his kindness is for ever sure
3. Speak through the earthquake, hail and fire
4. Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with your light and glory
5. Each little flower that opens, each little bee that stings
6. Bring me my sparrows of desire!
7. Blessed insurance, Jesus is mine
8. Through many dangerous toys and snails I have already come
9. Jesus loves me? Yes and no.
10. Good Mrs Murphy all my life shall surely follow me

For further details about this course or other church events please contact:
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Bible passages for reflection and discussion

The New Testament passages printed below were part of the inspiration for Charles Wesley's great hymn *And can it be?* Having sung the hymn, we will read the passages, then break into small groups to consider the questions on the right.

Philippians 2

New International Version

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!

Romans 8

New International Version

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. [...]

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. [...]

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now consider the following questions in your small group:

1. The hymn begins with a tone of surprise, wonder and awe. What are the answers to the three big questions Wesley asks in the hymn's first verse? (*Clue: Wesley answers his own third question in the hymn's second verse.*)
2. The hymn's third verse (*He left his Father's throne above...*) contains a summary of Philippians 2:6-8, plus Wesley's comments on the events Paul describes. In the final two lines of the verse, how does Wesley explain *why* Jesus came down from heaven and died? How do other people explain Jesus' death? Why might Wesley's explanation be better?
3. In the last verse of the hymn, Wesley clearly refers to Romans 8:1 in saying that Christians not need to fear being condemned by God. Paul gives three reasons in Romans 8 to show why we don't need to be afraid – they are in verses 32, 33-34 and 38-39. Can you find all three?
4. Is Wesley right to be *bold* in approaching God's throne? Isn't this rather a proud attitude? Does this line link to the story of Wesley's talk with Böhler?
5. Have you noticed how many times the words *I / me / mine* occur in the hymn? Why so many? What is Wesley trying to teach us?

Time to share

Choose your favourite one of the five 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 Charles Wesley,
for the gifts you gave him, his seriousness and his zeal,
and for the fruits of his work which we enjoy today.
As we sing about your amazing love and mercy,
and about how Jesus' death enables us to approach you with boldness,
please help us to respond by committing ourselves personally to him,
in repentance, faith and obedience. Amen.

Fact file: *Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

“The mantle of Isaac Watts was picked up by Charles Wesley.”

(Susan J White, *Foundations of Christian Worship*, 2006)

Charles Wesley was born into a family or succession of hymn-writers, his father being the Rector of Epworth and the author of various hymns. The young Charles could easily have become a man of wealth and rank, when a rich namesake in Ireland offered to adopt him as his heir. Although only a schoolboy at Westminster, young Charles had a life-plan, and declined the proposal. (His cousin Richard Colley Wesley was adopted in his stead, changing the spelling of his name to Wellesley. Richard's grandson was Arthur Wellesley, the famous Duke of Wellington.)

Charles Wesley had a long and complete classical training. He studied for nine years at Christ Church, Oxford and became a deft master of pure English, thereby being prepared for writing some of our richest and most classic hymns. At Oxford he began a course of such systematic study, such scrupulous regularity in the use of his time, and in attendance at the services of the Church, that he was nicknamed “Methodist.” However, despite his serious studies (in company with his brother John), neither had learnt the simple Gospel. They were intensely religious, but their religion was one of rigorous Churchism.

After spending a year in Georgia on a rather unsuccessful mission, Charles returned to England and became tutor and friend to a Moravian Christian called Peter Böhler. On one occasion Peter asked him, “Do you hope to be saved?” Charles answered, “Yes.” “For what reason do you hope it?” “Because I have used my best endeavours to serve God.” Peter Böhler shook his head and said no more. Charles later wrote: “I thought him very uncharitable, saying in my heart: Would he rob me of my endeavours? But that sad, silent, significant shake of the head shattered my confidence and taught me to hope, not in endeavours, but in the merits of a perfect Saviour.”

Full of new zeal, Charles resumed preaching in July 1738, and became curate at St Mary's, Islington; he read daily prayers, preached constantly in London churches, visited Newgate, and held private meetings for exposition and devotion. In 1739 he began an itinerant ministry like that of his brother John, and for the next 17 years pursued his journeys, finding hearers up and down England and Wales, from the keelmen of Newcastle-on-Tyne to the tanners of Cornwall. However it is for his hymn-writing that he is remembered today – a work which assured not only his fame but the spread of the Good News of Christ. So Charles Wesley sang the Gospel into hundreds of hearts that would never have been touched by the preaching of his brother.

(text adapted from R E Welsh, www.wholesomewords.org)

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: th'Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean;
his blood availed for me.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.

My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of thy name.

Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of His train:
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
God appears on earth to reign.

Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide, till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide; O receive my soul at last.

Other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone, still support and comfort me.
All my trust on Thee is stayed, all my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head with the shadow of Thy wing.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want, more than all in Thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint, heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is Thy Name, I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin I am; Thou art full of truth and grace.

Plenteous grace with Thee is found, grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound; make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art, freely let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart; rise to all eternity.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word:
What more can he say than to you he hath said
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

Fear not, he is with thee, O be not dismayed;
For he is thy God, and will still give thee aid;
He'll strengthen thee, help thee and cause thee to stand
Upheld by his righteous, omnipotent hand:

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
His grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee, his only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus has learned to repose
He will not, he will not, desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
He'll never, no never, no never forsake.

From *A Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors*
by John Rippon (1787), attributed to John Keene or John Keith

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