

Sunday, April 30, 2023 pm

## SINGING WITH THE UNDERSTANDING

Tonight, is the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday. For the past decade or so, I have devoted this time slot to examining songs that we sing from time to time. It is imperative that when we sing, we do so, “with the spirit and with the understanding” (1 Corinthians 14:15). We also realize that in our singing, we are edified (built up) in the faith as we are “speaking to one another” (Ephesians 5:19) and “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16). Realizing this, we need to understand what we are singing. It is an act of worship that is about more than sounding good and developing our musical talents. It is an avenue to teach. Therefore what we sing needs to be true to God’s word and understandable.

As I announced with our last hymn study, tonight I want to do something a little different. I want to talk about some of the songs we sing and in particular emphasize WHAT we are singing. I want to notice some of the more obscure and archaic words and briefly discuss some phrases I have been asked about.

NOTE: This is a challenging lesson as I will deal with subjects that no matter what I say, someone is likely to disagree. In such matters, let us be willing to engage in discussion with open minds and Christian love

### I. Some things to consider when we sing

- a. Since we are teaching and admonishing one another, what we sing needs to be scriptural and understood. That is our FIRST priority in choosing songs. It has more impact than the tune. If a song has an unscriptural message, then we are teaching error. If a song has an unclear message, we MAY be implying error, if the message is not clarified.
- b. BUT, we also need to understand that songs use poetic devices for the sake of rhyme, cadence and flow. That is often why word order is changed, and sometimes obscure or multi-defined words are used. We will see that in the wording of songs we are examining.

### II. “What does that word mean?”

- a. Many of the songs we sing are decades, if not centuries, old. Because English is a living language, the meanings and usage of words change. In songs, we are often left with some of these words and we need to take time to explain them. Let us consider some of the expressions we find in songs: NOTE: We will notice these in song order of Hymns for Worship.
- b. #109 – Higher Ground – *Heaven’s table land* is mentioned in the Chorus. The idea of a “**table land**” is a plateau – a broad level place. Heaven’s table would be reference to our hope of spending eternity in heaven, a place that is higher than anything on this earth.
- c. #152 – By Christ Redeemed. A Lord’s Supper song. Vs. 3 speaks of, ***with the last advent we unite***. The word “**advent**” means the coming, arrival or appearance of something. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we are remembering the arrival of the night that would lead to His crucifixion and thus our redemption. NOTE: Advent also has a religious connotation referring to the time when Jesus was born. I point this out, because our song is NOT dealing with that occasion but using the word in its common usage as the song was written in 1857 AD.
- d. #155 – Wonderful Love of Jesus. The song begins, ***In vain and high and holy lays***.” The word **lays** is an archaic word for a song. This is about singing about the wonderful love of Jesus. OF course, the word “vain” means empty or useless. The expression here is indicating that my praising Him in song is empty in comparison to His greatness.
- e. #162 - Night with ebon pinion – this is a song about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and some of the sufferings He endured. The expression ***ebon pinion*** – is reference to blackness (ebon) and pinion (the wing of a bird). The expression alliteratively is saying that that night was as dark as a black bird’s wing (e.g, a raven’s wings are purely black). This is poetically descriptive of the **moral darkness of that occasion** which would lead to the betrayal, arrest and ultimately crucifixion of Jesus.

- f. #183 – Tis Midnight: And on Olive’s Brow – What is Olive’s brow? Like other songs this is dealing with the garden of Gethsemane. A “**brow**” is a ridge projecting out of a hill or mountain. Olive’s brow would be reference to the Mount of Olives, where the Garden of Gethsemane was on its western slopes. Thus this is simply a poetic reference to where Jesus was on the night of His betrayal.
- g. #218 – Just over in the Glory-Land – a song where we anticipate heaven when this life is over and what it will be like there. Vs. 3 mentions, “**glad hosannas to Christ the Lord and King**.” The word hosannas is from a Greek word that means “help, I pray” or “save, I pray”. In Matthew 21:9 as Jesus enters the city triumphally, they are saying, *Hosana to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!*” The idea is that we are singing praises to the one who has saved us.
- h. #231 – Soldiers of Christ Arise – a song reminding us that we are spiritual soldiers. Vs. 3 calls for us to stand in His great might and arm ourselves with **the panoply of God**. The word panoply simply means, armor and is a reference to Ephesians 6:10-18 (esp. vs. 11, 13). Actually the expression, “Whole armor” in Greek is, πανοπλία (panoplia) – so the word is a Greek transliteration. NOTE: *pan* is a prefix that means “all”.
- i. #338 – The Great Physician. Clearly a reference to Jesus as our “healer” (cf. Matthew 9:12). The chorus mentions, “**Sweetest note in Seraph song**”. Seraph is simply a word describing an angel, perhaps a specific class of angels. We read about the Seraphim in Isaiah 6:2 & 6 where he has a vision that leads to his being called to prophecy to Israel. If I understand correctly, Seraph is the singular word. The chorus is addressing how wonderful the name of Jesus is.
- j. #396 – We’ll Work Till Jesus Comes – a song about being busy. Vs. 3 notes that we flee to Jesus for rest (cf. Matthew 11:28-30). The expression, “**Lean for succor on His breast**”. **Succor** is defined as assistance in times of distress, or relief, help, aid. The message is, I will trust in Him and “lean on Him” “till He conduct me home” – until this life is over.
- k. #407 – He leadeth Me – A song that reminds us we need to be led by our Lord (through His word today). Vs. 2 says, Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom, **sometimes where Eden’s bowers bloom...** – the word **bowers** is key here. It is an archaic word for a beautiful garden or pleasant, shady place, what we might call an arbor today. Eden’s bowers would be the garden where Adam and Eve dwelt BEFORE the curse and they were driven out (cf. Genesis 3:24). When you look at the song, the expression is saying, whether we are dealing with times of deepest gloom (sadness), or enjoying the beauties of joy, as in a garden (gladness), we will be thankful that He is leading us.
- l. #420 – O Thou Fount of Every Blessing – vs. 2, “**Here I raise my Ebenezer**.” The word Ebenezer means a stone of help. It is based on 1 Samuel 7:12. Based on the first chapters of 1 Samuel, we read because of Israel’s in the ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines and returned shortly thereafter. When it was returned to Israel it was taken to a place called Kirjath Jearim and kept there for 20 years. Israel asks Samuel to intercede for them. He does and challenges them to take away their idols and return to the LORD. When they did, the LORD defeated the Philistines. AT a place between Mizpah and Shen, Samuel took a stone and called it Ebenezer – which means, “stone of help” and reminded Israel, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.”  
In our song, **Ebenezer** is a way of saying we are turning to God for help as we live through this life. We are acknowledging Him as our LORD and grateful for His deliverance and forgiveness.
- m. #445 - Jesus, Rose of Sharon. A song about how wonderful and spiritually attractive Jesus is. **Sharon** is a plane in the land of Israel that is fertile along the Mediterranean coast. There is a rose that grows there. Biblically, the expression is found in Song of Solomon 2:1 which also mentions the “**lily of the valley**”. This of course is a love poem (song). The verse is about the Shunamite woman who is being courted by her beloved.
- n. #500 – Give me the Bible – a song where we desire the Bible describes what it is and when we need it (always). Vs. 4 ends with, “show me the glory gilding Jordan’s wave”. Gilding is the process of apply a thin layer of gold or paint to enhance its appearance. Jordan is a river of great significance in

- scripture. It was the Jordan river that Israel crossed to inherit the Promised Land after 40 years in the wilderness. It was the Jordan that John baptized in. Often in songs, Jordan is a description of crossing over from this life to eternity in the “promised land”. I believe that to be the case here and the point of the phrase is in God’s word we are shown what heaven is going to be like which gives us our hope.
- o. NOTE: I found the answer to many of these words expressions by looking them up, either in a dictionary or doing some research about the songs. Do your homework.

Singing, like every other act of worship is important. God has given us a pattern and purpose in our singing. Let us resolve that as we sing, we will be teaching and admonishing one another as we sing “with the spirit and with the understanding”. God will accept nothing less. Think about it!

In part 2, we will examine the phrases of some songs and consider whether or not we can sing them. Scheduled for 5/21/23 pm lesson.