

Sunday, October 30, 2022 pm

SERMONS FROM SONGS
The Last Mile of the Way
Hymns for Worship, #457

Tonight, being the 5th Sunday, we want to continue our examination of songs we sing from time to time. Today, we examine the song, "The Last Mile of the Way". A song written by Johnson Oatman (1856-1922) was first published in 1908. He was a local preacher in the Methodist church who wrote some 3000 hymns. Some of his more familiar hymns to us include: Higher ground, Count Your Blessings, and No Not One. To my knowledge, there is no backstory to song, but it teaches a message of encouragement and endurance as long as we live on this earth.

I. Vs. 1 – If I walk in the pathway of duty – being faithful

- a. "If" – we begin a powerful little word. This song is an acknowledgment that I have my responsibilities to fulfill. An acknowledgment that salvation is conditional, based upon my compliance with his will. Galatians 6:9
- b. *If I walk in the pathway of duty –*
 - i. The way to heaven is described as a narrow and difficult road – Matthew 7:13-14.
 - ii. Furthermore, I am reminded of "duty" – that which I am expected to do. In fact, it is my responsibility to do it. Psalm 119:35 says, *Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it.*
 - iii. Luke 17:10, even when we have done all commanded, realize we have only done our duty.
- c. *If I work to the close of the day –*
 - i. I must stay busy. Here we are introduced to the theme of this song – I have to keep going.
 - ii. Be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10)
 - iii. John 9:4 finds this was Jesus. He worked while it is day, because the night is coming. Luke 12:35-40 – He taught a parable about working while waiting on the master – blessed are those watching when He comes.
- d. *I shall see the great King in His beauty –*
 - i. In each verse of this song, there is a phrase reminding us of our reward because of our faithfulness.
 - ii. When this life is over, I will be with Jesus, my King. And it will be in the midst of His glorious throne. In this phrase, I am reminded of Hebrews 12:1-2 – we look to Jesus. He has finished the race and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
 - iii. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 speaks of being caught up in the air to be with Him ALWAYS.
 - iv. 1 John 3:2 – with anticipation, we do not know everything, but when He is revealed we shall see Him as He is.
- e. *When I've gone the last mile of the way –*
 - i. The premise of this song is that we cannot quit as long as we are living on this earth. Luke 9:62 – if anyone looks back
 - ii. Hebrews 10:38-39 – the just live by faith, but if anyone draws back...
 - iii. Revelation 14:13 – blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.
 - iv. NOTE: The LAST mile – you cannot work hard for Him most of your life and then "retire" while on earth. You keep working until your time here ceases.

II. Vs. 2 – If for Christ I proclaim the glad story – thinking of others

- a. *If for Christ I proclaim the glad story –* I need to be thinking of others.

- i. Especially spiritually, I need to be concerned about the lost. Matthew 28:19-20
 - ii. The Bible is filled with examples of those who took the word with them wherever they went – cf. Acts 8:4, etc.
 - iii. Do not hide your light - Matthew 5:14-16, Philippians 2:15
 - b. *If I seek for His sheep gone astray* –
 - i. I should also be concerned about erring brethren who have wandered away
 - ii. Jesus taught a parable about this – Luke 15:4-7.
 - iii. It is something I should want to do - James 5:19-20, Galatians 6:1-2.
 - c. *I am sure He will show me His glory* –
 - i. He is living in glory now – Philippians 2:9ff – God has highly exalted Him; 1 Timothy 3:16 notes concerning Jesus that He was “received up in glory.” Hebrews 1:2-4 describes Jesus – how He is the brightness of the glory of God and is now seated at the right hand of God.
 - ii. Romans 2:7, 10 - Eternal life awaits those who seek for glory, honor and immortality; Romans 8:18 – our sufferings not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed; 2 Corinthians 4:17 – speaks of our far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.
 - d. *When I’ve gone the last mile of the way.*
- III. Vs. 3 – If here I have earnestly striven – doing my best till the end**
- a. *And if here I have earnestly striven* –
 - i. Striving implies intense and serious effort – Luke 13:24 - strive to enter through the narrow gate
 - ii. God expects our best in our efforts – Colossians 3:23, cf. Matthew 22:37
 - iii. Jude 3 calls for us to “contend earnestly for the faith...”
 - b. *And have tried all His will to obey* –
 - i. We MUST work to obey Him – Hebrews 5:9, 1 Peter 1:13-14 – as obedient children, Romans 6:16 – who are you obeying? Are you a slave of sin or righteousness?
 - ii. When I see the word, “tried” I see that from time to time we may fail. While that is a truth, we must NOT use it as an excuse to NOT try or dismiss our failures “That’s just the way I am”, “I can’t help it, but I know God understands” or “Oh well, at least I tried”. While God DOES understand, he is not going to accept the one who only offers Him half-hearted service.
 - c. *It will enhance all the rapture of heaven.*
 - i. The word “rapture” is not found in most English Bibles. In English, it means to be caught up in an euphoric state, an ecstatic feeling.
 - ii. This use in older songs does not necessarily imply the rapture of premillennialism. The point here is a reminder, that when we get to heaven, everything about it will be beyond anything we can comprehend, or even imagine. Revelation 21:10ff described “the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven” – descriptive of the characteristic of that which is in heaven (where it originated). Hebrews 11:16 describes a “better country.”
 - d. *When I’ve gone the last mile of the way.* Again, this will not occur until after this life.
- IV. Chorus – the last mile of the way**
- a. *When I’ve gone the last mile of the way* – over and over, we sing about persistently continuing.
 - b. *I will rest at the close of the day* – rest is a promise of eternity – Revelation 14:13, Hebrews 4:9, *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.*
 - c. *And I know there are joys that await me* –
 - i. Heaven will be a place of joy – first of all because of what will NOT be there – Revelation 21:4, 22:3-5, etc.
 - ii. But consider also our faith as we endure in this life. How convinced am I of the reality of heaven? 2 Timothy 1:12, 4:7-8 – the confidence that Paul shows in this.

- d. *When I've gone the last mile of the way.*
- V. **Addition: (Actually vs 3 in many books) – Sorrows in this life – Here the dearest of ties we must sever...**
- a. This verse is not in Hymns for Worship, though it was in Sacred Selections.
 - b. This verse says, *"Here the dearest of ties, we must sever. Tears of sorrow are seen every day; But no sickness, no dying forever, when I've gone the last mile of the way."*
 - c. It is a verse that reminds us that in this life we face sorrows and disappointment – death, tears, sickness and other challenges. But, when we have completed our journey here, we will rest from all such labors – Revelation 21:4 notes that in the "New Jerusalem", there will be no death, sorrow, tears or pain.

From time to time, we sing this song. It is a reminder that one day our time here will be over. But until that time, I am reminded of how I ought to live my life. I need to be faithfully serving God and thinking of others. AND, I cannot let the sorrows of this life get me down. The challenge of this song lies in the fact that I do not know WHEN my time will be up – Hebrews 9:27 tells us it is appointed for men to die and then face judgment; James 4:14 warns us that our life is a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

You do not know when your "last mile" will be. Are you living as if this is? That is the only way to ensure that you are prepared to stand before Him. Think about it!